



Speech by

Hon. Tim Mulherin

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard Tuesday, 22 May 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Drought Assistance

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (10.21 am): This state's primary producers are receiving unparalleled assistance from the Queensland government during this extremely difficult time—and so they should. Primary industries and fisheries contribute nearly \$11 billion to the gross value of production of this state annually—this despite 62.2 per cent of the land area of the state being drought declared. Eighty-three shires, one part shire and 39 properties in a further 10 shires have been drought declared based on the recommendations of local drought committees. As well as state drought declarations, which qualify commercial primary producers for a raft of assistance, producers in areas deemed exceptional circumstances may also qualify for state and/or federal government assistance.

Since January 2002, nearly \$40 million in assistance has been paid for 21,542 claims through the state funded Drought Relief Assistance Scheme. From July last year to date, just under \$10 million has been paid for 4,890 claims. Under DRAS, primary producers qualify for freight subsidies on the transport of fodder and water during times of drought and restocking and returning from agistment in the recovery period. Through the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority, producers in drought-declared areas also may qualify for drought recovery loans, drought carry-on loans and interest-only payments on existing loans. Other assistance for which primary producers may qualify through exceptional circumstances include interim income support for six months, land rent deferrals, electricity cost concessions, subsidies of up to 50 per cent of annual interest rate costs and a 50 per cent rebate on local government rates.

In the period from 1 July last year to 31 March this year, QRAA has provided record levels of assistance for those affected by events, including the drought and cyclones Larry and Monica. In the financial year to date, QRAA approved \$305.3 million in assistance to 5,203 producer applicants across state and federal programs. This government values its primary producers. They are hard working, resilient and adaptive to change. The vast majority of our primary producers have tackled head-on the challenges provided by drought, biosecurity risks and increasing overseas competition. But on occasions they can use a helping hand. The Beattie Labor government will continue to provide that help.