



Speech by

Hon. Tim Mulherin

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard Thursday, 12 February 2009

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

North Queensland Floods, Cattle Industry

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (10.25 am): Yesterday I flew to Cloncurry and Burketown to meet with mayors and beef producers to discuss the flood situation. I was accompanied by the member for Mount Isa, Betty Kiernan, AgForce President, John Cotter, and my director-general, Rob Setter. Unfortunately, cloud cover made it difficult to see the extent of the flooding from the air. In fact, after flying through heavy rain there was an electrical fault with the aircraft and we did not travel to Normanton as originally planned.

In Burketown, a lot of concern centred around the problems that arise after being cut off for more than a month. I know that the member for Mount Isa is working with this community on those issues. In Cloncurry I met with McKinlay Mayor Paul Woodhouse, Richmond Mayor John Wharton, Cloncurry Mayor Andrew Daniels and about a dozen graziers. One beef producer said, 'We understand there are going to be stock losses in a flood.' Another commented on the sheer size of the flooded area in relation to fodder drops. He said, 'You could have all the helicopters from the Air Force and all the hay and you still couldn't get it out there.' In a nutshell, these beef producers said that trying to drop fodder to all stranded cattle is just not practical. Officers from my department are in contact with producers every day. The message they are getting is the message I received yesterday.

Graziers, for the most part, are managing the situation. They are feeding edible scrub to stranded cattle and in some instances dropping hay or, where possible, pushing herds to higher ground. I want to place on record my admiration for the enormous effort of the men and women across the cattle industry who are working day and night in the current circumstances. Beef producers we spoke to yesterday are looking forward to the recovery period when the waters recede. Initially we will provide technical advice on how to treat weakened stock. Longer term, there are low-interest loans available of up to \$250,000 to help with restocking of the area, which is sometimes labelled Queensland's calf factory.