




Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Drought

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (2.53 pm): As we stand here today, 80 per cent of this great state remains drought declared. Drought is declared across the majority of Western Queensland. My thoughts and those of the opposition go out to the people in the hardest hit regions such as the areas around Longreach, Stonehenge, Jundah and all the way up the north-west. The vast outback is almost devoid of stock at a time when prices are actually at a decent level. The loss of revenue to these areas is mounting up in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

This is a human catastrophe. There has been no drought-breaking rain over the winter and we are now heading into another long, hot, dry summer. For many rural businesses, this is their fourth year of drought. These farming families face desperation, loss and a landscape which is forcing them to make extreme decisions, such as packing up and leaving their family home, complete destocking and separating the family unit for the benefit of the children. This drought is affecting not just our producers but also the communities in the rural townships which support them; the small businesses such as the coffee shops, the grocery stores, the shearing teams; and the community groups such as the local football teams.

This drought has now grown to be considered amongst the worst of the historic Queensland droughts such as the Federation drought of 1895 to 1902, the droughts in the early eighties and the droughts of the nineties. In 1901, during the Federation drought of 1895 to 1902, the then member for Capricornia, Mr James Forsyth said—

I think it would be to the advantage of many members if, instead of staying in Brisbane, they travelled over the country and found out what is the condition of the country and people. I saw and heard some things there which I was very grieved to hear.

The drought has now raged for four years and I am hearing stories of families who cannot pay their electricity bills that are sitting on the kitchen table, who cannot pay the food bill and who certainly cannot pay the rates, and of children who are now being taken out of boarding schools because they simply cannot afford to stay there. It is taking its toll on people's mental health and many people are only just hanging on.

When I visit these regions, however, I continue to be amazed by their fighting spirit, their determination to hang in there until it does finally rain, to see it through and to do their best. There is no denying farmers and their communities are bound together in this shared disaster, but they will show us all how resilient they are and how proud they are of their livelihoods and what they must suffer to continue to stay on the land. I say to Queenslanders who are living with drought in our modern times: you are not forgotten. Just like in 1901, the LNP opposition will continue to do all we can to support you, highlight your plight and give you hope that times will get better.

(Time expired)