




Speech By
Jennifer Howard

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Record of Proceedings, 27 October 2015

MOTION: AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (6.16 pm): I welcome the opportunity to speak about drought and in particular what the Palaszczuk government is doing to reduce the impact on the agriculture industry. The House is well aware that over 80 per cent of the state is currently impacted by drought. The Queensland government gave an election commitment to continue existing drought relief arrangements until 2018. Acknowledging the severity of the drought, the Queensland government approved an increase to the ceiling of assistance available under the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme for those in prolonged drought. With an approved drought management plan in place, the cap lifts from \$30,000 to \$40,000 per financial year in those locations in their third or subsequent year of drought.

While it is essential that those across the state impacted by the ongoing drought have support from all levels of government, it is important that we acknowledge the number of charities that are assisting those doing it tough in regional Queensland. This includes a number of charities that are assisting in fodder cartage. Currently, registered charities can obtain freight subsidies for fodder cartage to drought impacted producers of up to 100 per cent. Previously these subsidies were capped at \$30,000 a year and could be increased by the minister on a case-by-case basis. I am pleased to note that the minister has determined that the government will increase the annual cap for fodder freight subsidies to charities in the third and subsequent year of a drought from \$30,000 to \$100,000, with further adjustments to the cap on a case-by-case basis.

I am informed that six charities have obtained subsidies this drought, with two charities receiving more than the \$30,000 cap at least once. One charity, Aussie Helpers, has had its cap increased several times each year of this drought, to a maximum of \$150,000 per annum. By increasing the cap, government reduces the paperwork burden for these charities, which previously had to apply for a cap increase each time the applicable cap was reached. This means a reduction in red tape and therefore a faster turnaround in the charities being able to assist those in need.

While the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Nanango run around the state making false statements about this government and our support to drought stricken areas, the Palaszczuk government is getting on with the job. This government is continually looking at ways we can support our farmers and their communities, both directly and indirectly. As part of our 2015-16 budget the government announced our \$52.1 million drought assistance package, including \$5 million over three years to control wild dogs and feral cats, with \$1 million in 2015-16; relief on electricity charges for irrigators, \$2.5 million; a waiver of annual water licence fees and land rent rebates for producers in drought declared areas, \$4 million; primary mental health support through the Royal Flying Doctor Service, \$1.5 million; and social and community support to assist community wellbeing, \$4 million.

On top of this, earlier this month the Treasurer also announced the establishment of the rural debt task force, with the initial meeting group set down for this week. The Palaszczuk government is committed to looking at all avenues that will assist our farmers and communities living in drought impacted areas across Queensland.