




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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MOTION: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF RURAL WOMEN

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (4.34 pm): Today is the United Nations International Day of Rural Women—a very important day to recognise the critical role women play in rural communities. It is wonderful we can recognise this today in this House. One of my first events as Queensland's Minister for Women here at Parliament House was to present Sherrill Stivano with her Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation Rural Women's Award. It is regional women like Sherrill who demonstrate the important role women play across our rural and regional communities, industry and agricultural sector. As the Minister for Women, I recognise the important role that women's organisations—such as the Country Women's Association, the Queensland Rural, Regional and Remote Women's Network and many others—play in Queensland's regional communities.

I recently travelled to Biloela for the annual conference of the Queensland Rural, Regional and Remote Women's Network, along with the member for Nanango, and I have to say that it was absolutely fantastic to be in a roomful of women leaders from across Queensland who are making such a difference in their local communities. It was also great to meet inspirational young rural women who have taken up leadership positions in their local communities—young women like Madeline Brewer from Burnett who raised issues facing young people and young women during a panel discussion held at the conference. When Cyclone Marcia caused devastation across Central Queensland communities, it was regional women's organisations like QRRRWN who in the face of adversity teamed up with Baked Relief to provide food and care packages to residents hit hard by the floods and the cyclone and of course to support our emergency workers and volunteers.

I also recently had the opportunity to meet with the Queensland Country Women's Association and hear firsthand the struggles their members in drought-affected areas are having. The things they needed were often not just the events that would lift people's spirits; they needed more practical, hands-on support as well. An example they raised with me was a woman on a farm who was too embarrassed to ask for help to replace her dentures, so she wrote a letter to the organisation that she trusted and she connects with, the CWA, to ask them to help her out and of course they did.

The current widespread drought has hit our western and northern communities very hard, and women are central to holding these communities together. The drought has the potential to rip communities apart and grind the resilience of rural Queenslanders to dust. The effect that drought has on the emotional strength of rural people will linger on well past those magical days when the drought-breaking rains return.

In the past, governments have provided funding for community-building events in order to counter the effects of drought and have funded support services, but it was never clear whether that funding for these events was really hitting the mark. As a result, my department has conducted an internal review of this funding, and the findings prove to be very interesting. After face-to-face workshops, teleconferences and a survey of community members in affected regions, the review confirmed the

success of, and ongoing support for, community events but identified the need for more practical support for community members. Therefore, I am pleased to announce that the allocation of the government's \$4 million community drought support package will be taking a different approach to ensure that help is being provided exactly where it is needed.

The funding will be split into four main areas. Financial hardship funding is to be distributed by emergency relief providers or neighbourhood centres where they operate in drought-affected areas. In areas without those services, local councils will be asked to coordinate the distribution of funds through local community groups who have those established relationships, such as Lions or Zonta. Further one-off funding will be provided to local councils to undertake drought-related resilience planning and conduct community events. In addition, a grant of \$250,000 will be made to the CWA's public crisis fund to provide financial hardship assistance for families in drought affected communities. That is a significant increase from the \$100,000 they received last financial year.

Finally, \$250,000 will be given to AgForce to organise and deliver small-scale, on-farm practical skills development activities which incorporate a connectedness and support element for farmers, graziers and other participants. We are going to continue to monitor the effectiveness of these measures to help our struggling communities and only hope that there is a change in the weather sooner rather than later so everyone can get back on their feet. I am so happy to be supporting this motion to recognise the International Day of Rural Women.