




Speech By  
**Ann Leahy**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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## **AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE: REPORT, MOTION TO TAKE NOTE**

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (12.04 pm): I rise to speak on the Agriculture and Environment Committee report No. 29—*Review of the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme*. All of my electorate is drought declared. My constituents were hopeful that this would be a genuine review to address some of the long-term issues that are evident with the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme. Here was a great opportunity to genuinely improve the profitability of producers across Queensland. When agricultural industries are profitable they are more resilient and they are able to deal better with the future seasonal variations which will inevitably come. In some cases they have managed for generations.

I provided an extensive submission to the committee and I invited them out to my electorate. I thank the committee members for visiting Cunnamulla and Roma. The Cunnamulla district has been in severe and prolonged drought for several consecutive years, and it is very trying on those people in that district. I hoped the committee would take on board genuine solutions about how DRAS could be improved administratively and ensure that it was well targeted and effectively deals with drought-related animal welfare matters. I outlined a list of genuine solutions which constituents had put forward to the committee, and these were contained in my submission. I am very interested in what the report says about some of these genuine suggestions. The assistance for small business in drought-declared regions is noted in the opposition members' statement of reservations. I thank the member for Gympie for significantly highlighting this where he states—

I regret the committee did not consider this issue more thoroughly in our review report, and I call on the Palaszczuk Government to consider the Member for Warrego's proposal to support drought-affected small businesses.

Again we see another failure to address a genuine issue when given a solution that has a proven track record.

I now turn to Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate assistance for primary producers who agist breeding stock. This report is very disappointing for my constituents. Robert and Jenny Crichton met with the committee in Roma and made a submission specifically on this matter. Robert and Jenny have been to the minister, and I have a copy here of the response from the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, Bill Byrne, who said that he was unable to support their suggestion. For the report to then encourage Robert and Jenny to write to the minister requesting a review is incredibly disappointing. Again, here we have a workable, genuine solution handed on a platter from landholders, who have much more experience with managing drought and animal welfare than the government, and they are again disappointed with the response, 'Write to the minister.' It is a brush-off. Writing to the minister was something they did months and months ago, hence they made a submission to the committee because they genuinely wanted to get a good outcome. They are disappointed—and rightly so—with this Labor government.

I turn now to the desilting of dams under the Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate scheme. Under the current Queensland DRAS guidelines there is no permission for the desilting of dams. In January 2015 the New South Wales government announced an additional \$20 million under the

Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate scheme for the purpose of the removal of silt from dry dams as well as other emergency infrastructure works for drought-affected landholders who provide farm water when they are in a one-in-50-year drought. What a ludicrous situation we have along the border between Queensland and New South Wales: a farmer can desilt his dam in New South Wales, but he cannot do that in Queensland under the same scheme. This is another lost opportunity to help Queensland landholders during drought.

It is disappointing that the report did not make a recommendation for additional education assistance for those who are affected. Drought-affected landholders were hoping for a genuine review. This report does not deliver genuine outcomes for those drought-affected landholders. It puts it onto another review. How many more reviews do we need to have?