




Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (12.47 pm): I rise to speak to report No. 29 of the Agriculture and Environment Committee tabled on 3 January 2017. There is probably no more serious issue than the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme, particularly for those areas of Western Queensland still experiencing drought. I have certainly covered some miles in recent months, witnessing and viewing firsthand the impact that drought is having on some of those western communities. We flew from Augathella in the electorate of the member for Warrego across to Charleville and Wyandra, and up to Thargomindah and Cunnamulla. We saw firsthand what is going on out in that country. We spoke to quite a number of landholders to gauge how this scheme is working and what assistance they might need.

A couple of weeks ago I did a run out to Cloncurry and then back down through Longreach, which is in the area of the member for Gregory, and Barcaldine and across. There are certainly some drought impacts throughout that country. If we do not get some rain shortly there is no question that a lot of those properties in Western Queensland will be facing yet another year of drought. It is certainly having a significant impact not only on the property owners and their families but also on those businesses and the communities that really only have those localities to rely on for their businesses.

I want to touch on a couple of points. One is the need to ensure the drought support provided by the Queensland government is consistent with the national drought policy. The last thing we need is inconsistencies or confusion. Certainly the last thing we need is red tape or anything that is going to slow down or hinder the process of providing drought relief assistance.

I note the comment from AgForce in the report that the real value to producers of DRAS assistance has failed to keep pace with rising input costs and that the initial \$20,000 cap should be reviewed. I certainly support calls to increase the cap progressively from \$20,000 to \$30,000 with a plan to increase it to \$40,000 and to \$50,000 in subsequent years of drought as a staged response as conditions deteriorate. Producers should be made aware when increases in the payment caps will occur to assist in their planning.

We know that the DRAS covers freight subsidies, fodder, emergency water infrastructure rebates and costs associated with transporting livestock purchased for restocking and returning from agistment. Given the rising transport costs we need to review those transport subsidies, particularly when you look at the distances that a lot of these livestock are being transported at the present time. I have spoken to graziers who are transporting livestock many hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometres to source feed because it is becoming increasingly difficult to find properties with feed in some of those western areas.

I say to the minister that drought preparedness programs are absolutely imperative and something that I have been very passionate about in terms of giving our graziers the skills and the support they need to prepare for drought, because in those western areas of Queensland it is part of life. The more preparedness and willingness there is to undertake programs aimed at assisting them to prepare for droughts, the better off they will be.

I welcome the report of the committee. I look forward to updated recommendations and the report's implementation, particularly in consultation with industry. I think it is imperative that we consult with the right people when we update the model and bring it back before this parliament.