



Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.55 pm): I rise to make a short contribution in relation to the committee report into DRAS, the review of the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme. I understand that my contribution may be cut short today, but I will return to this House to make a more lengthy contribution to what I see as one of the most vitally important areas of policy for the agricultural industry in Queensland.

I would like to congratulate and thank the member for Burnett, who was partly responsible for the instigation of this vitally important policy review. I also acknowledge the contribution of the member for Hervey Bay and the former deputy chair, the member for Gympie. These are members who actually understand the dire circumstances in regional Queensland. I would also like to mention the point that the member for Ipswich West just addressed. Whilst the review of DRAS essentially relates to animal welfare, it is vitally important that those in this House understand that, when you are in a drought situation, animal welfare is the No. 1 concern of any landholder across this great state. I also agree with the member for Gympie's statement of reservation in the report where he says that, whilst this review into the DRAS scheme was much needed, there were issues outside the scope of the review which did not receive the attention they potentially deserved. One issue that does require attention is the revocation of drought declarations and the role of local drought committees.

Much of what DRAS is based on is whether a region is drought declared or not. While I understand that individual properties can be drought declared, there can be some concern locally about how and why drought declarations and revocations are made. This is currently a very topical issue across both the Burnett and the South Burnett. For example, I was out at the Ironpot Reef 'n' Beef the other night in my area of Burnett, and every person who spoke to me, every landholder, brought this issue up because they are in an area which has not had overland flow for years, yet the South Burnett has been lifted from the drought declaration. It was revoked on 15 April. People are concerned about that and have a right to understand why it was revoked but, more importantly, how it occurred. That is why in this House on 15 September 2016 I asked a question on notice to the then minister for agriculture about the South Burnett drought committee and how it worked. I asked—

Will the Minister provide details of the South Burnett Drought Committee, including (a) how many meetings have been held throughout 2015 and 2016, (b) how many members are on the committee, (c) how are the committee members chosen and (d) are minutes of the committee meetings available to the public?

The response noted that the details of the membership and the minutes of the meetings were confidential to protect the identities of the members, given the sensitive nature of their tasks and decisions. I can tell you right now that there were people who thought they were on that committee, but this Labor government now will not listen to their voices and will not hear from them. It is a disgusting way to run a drought committee. It does leave a lot of my primary producers in the dark about how those decisions around drought are made. These decisions impact many, many people. They affect their daily operations, their future business decisions and, of course, their bottom line. To wake up one morning

and hear that your area is no longer drought declared, or that the drought declaration has been revoked when you still have no water, is obviously frustrating, concerning and simply bewildering to many primary producers. I believe the issue of drought committees in relation to their membership, decision-making capabilities and confidentiality needs to be examined further and addressed in recommendation No. 1. There must be more transparency in this area. Most importantly, I advocate that we listen to the local producers and the people on the ground who understand. They do not live in an ivory tower in Brisbane; they are dealing with this on a daily basis.