




Speech By  
**Julianne Gilbert**

**MEMBER FOR MACKAY**

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Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2017

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

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (11.53 am): I would like to thank my fellow committee members who worked on this report. It was a varying committee because there were lots of changes throughout the life of this review. I would also like to thank the parliamentary committee staff. They worked very hard on this report given the fact that there were so many changes and the amount of travel and organisation that it took to get this report together. I thank Rob Hansen and Paul Douglas.

The primary purpose of DRAS has always been, and remains, animal welfare. Eligible graziers receive assistance in meeting the costs of feeding and watering stock. As a committee we travelled to some of the drought-affected areas of the state including Cunnamulla, Tambo and Roma. We engaged in feedback sessions in each of these centres.

The communities were visibly wracked by drought and were doing it tough. The community members were forthright in their comments and expressed concern for all of their community. They were not just concerned about their properties and livestock; they expressed concern for the others living in their communities: the others who ran businesses who were not covered by DRAS. The people we meet must be commended for their community care and concern for everybody living within their communities. Many wanted to extend the scheme beyond its primary purpose of animal welfare, as the previous speaker alluded to.

The DRAS was established in 1969 and it is administered by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. It is Queensland's largest drought assistance program. Combined with the federal government funding, it totalled \$65.217 million over 2014-15 and 2015-16. Other drought assistance available includes land rent rebates and water licence waivers, electricity charge relief for water supply, transport concessions, the community assessment package, mental health programs, wild dogs and feral cat destruction initiatives and funding for additional rural financial counsellors.

The review of DRAS covered its design, whether the drought assistance is well designed and meeting the needs of drought-affected communities, landholders and families; its delivery, whether the measures are being administered effectively and efficiently by those departments and other entities to meet their stated objectives while satisfying all legislative requirements and to provide value for money for the Queensland taxpayers; and also opportunities for improvements, whether the assistance measures can be enhanced to provide improved outcomes or efficiencies at no additional cost to the government.

The committee is satisfied that the delivery of DRAS is well managed by DAF and is responsive to claimants' requests for assistance. Because of the stressful time of drought with high levels of workload for farmers, AgForce expressed its concern that the six-month cut-off date after expenditure is incurred can conflict with the additional workloads on affected primary producers. They explain that obtaining statutory declarations from feed suppliers can be difficult, particularly when suppliers are faced with providing multiple declarations. The committee found that the rate of claims assistance

rejected by the department is low. Half of the rejected claims were claims that were received after the specified six-month lodgement deadline from the date of transaction. We have noted that the minister, at their discretion, can intervene in matters regarding rejected claims. DAF reported that there were very few requests made through the minister to intervene. As a committee we recommended that the six-month window for lodgement remain.

Over the past 20 years the department has processed 57,494 claims for assistance and they have processed 95 per cent and 94 per cent of claims within 21 days of receipt. The committee heard from stakeholders requests for improvement to the scheme. The value of the transport subsidies has not changed in the last 27 years. As a committee we have recommended that this rate be looked at and considered for improvement. I commend the report.