




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 23 March 2017

AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE: REPORT, MOTION TO TAKE NOTE

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (11.58 am): It gives me great pleasure to rise to talk on this issue. Of course we are now in Autumn. Failing a late cyclonic rain depression, it is clear that Western Queensland has had a fifth consecutive failure in the wet season. Cruelly, the failure comes after unseasonal winter rains that falsely promised to break the drought.

The drought grinds on. Winter rains do not grow pasture; all they do is tempt people to restock. People have to pay money for agistment. People have been walking their cattle on the long paddock for years. These are the same people who have not had an income for years. It is understandable that many are eager to come home. It is understandable that some have borrowed money to restock. The plight of the people in Western Queensland would move a stone to tears, and now we are all doing it again. I encourage people to continue donating to the Western Queensland Drought Appeal. I commend those people who have continued their donations for fodder, and I certainly plead with this government to continue extending drought assistance to all our rural producers.

The drought does not just affect primary producers; small businesses have been devastated, with no money circulating throughout local economies. That is what I focused on with regard to this committee report with DRAS, because the money stops at the farm gate and it does not go into town. Small businesses right throughout Western Queensland have been in drought for five years as well. They become the major employer in these towns. They are the ones who pick up the slack. When people on the land cannot afford to keep staff on, those people move into town. If they are lucky enough, they will pick up a job with the local mechanic or motorbike dealership. Of course they have plenty of cattle experience, and they had probably come from the stock and station game before going onto the property so they may be able to pick up a job at the stock and station agent doing something.

Mr Rickuss: Their businesses are normally down too, aren't they?

Mr MILLAR: Absolutely, and I take that interjection from the member for Lockyer: their businesses are down. My submission to the committee was about making sure that small businesses are included in future recommendations when it comes to extending DRAS. It is the input costs which are the real killers for these small businesses. It is the cost of electricity, registration and the continuing costs of running a business where the state government can play an active role in reducing the burden on these small businesses. We need to have a serious look at how we can make sure that small businesses in towns from Longreach to Barcaldine, Jericho, Alpha, Tambo and Blackall all the way down to Junda and Quilpie and all throughout Western Queensland to Winton are able to continue to employ people. These businesses are the economic lifeblood of these towns and they play a significant role in employing people.

As I said, the current drought in Western Queensland is driving small businesses into closure and even some into bankruptcy. This leaves two toxic legacies: the ongoing viability of many historic western towns is being drastically eroded; and the population base for the delivery of government

services such as education, health, safety and so on simply disappears. When a family leaves a Western Queensland town it puts pressure on the school with regard to teacher numbers; it puts pressure on local health services with regard to nurses, doctors and clinical practitioners; and it also puts pressure on government jobs in those towns as well. We have to keep the populations in those towns and we have to look at assisting small business to employ people in those towns.

We hopefully look to the Coral Sea to see a low coming across, but we have been promised those lows before this season and nothing has eventuated. Let us hope that this low does come across Queensland without any damage to the coastal parts of Queensland and puts a big rain event right throughout Western Queensland so that we can see our agricultural industry thrive in this state. We need them, and we need them to continue to boost the Queensland government's coffers because they pay their GST and they pay their taxes, and they deserve to be looked after.