



Speech By  
**James Lister**


**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

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**ADJOURNMENT**

**Strawberry Industry**

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (6.12 pm): I rise in this place tonight to talk about the crisis affecting the strawberry industry. Those who are familiar with my electorate of Southern Downs will know that we are a very large producer of strawberries. Our climate enables us to produce strawberries at a time of year when others cannot. Many producers have operations not only in the Southern Downs around the Granite Belt but also near the coast in places like Caboolture and Bundaberg, as my honourable friend the member for Bundaberg would know.

I thank the government for the \$1 million that it has announced as industry support, but I am very concerned that there is no mechanism yet known for affected producers to avail themselves of that support. I do not care whether it is \$5 or \$500 or \$500,000: How do they get it? What is the phone number? I urge the minister responsible, the minister for agriculture, to expedite the arrangements for getting this support to the coalface and to the producers who need it.

In Southern Downs the horticultural industry is vital. It is the bedrock of our economy alongside tourism. There are thousands of people employed in the strawberry industry statewide. In peak season during the summer there would be 2,000 in my electorate of Southern Downs. In the Southern Downs we also have the largest strawberry runner producer in Australia, Sweet's Strawberry Runners. They have a shift there of upwards of 600 people. They do two crops a year. They are facing uncertainty about future orders, and those farmers who are producing fruit have ploughed an enormous amount of money into investing in their crops with no certain outcome. This disaster—this criminal act—is being perpetuated on their industry. They are entirely innocent and yet they have to pick their crop every three days, whether it is going to go to waste or whether they can sell it. At the moment in most cases after the cost of production, shipping and packaging it is far less than what they would get.

I was talking to one particular producer—George Him from Oasis Berries—who told me a very alarming story. The New South Wales police incorrectly named his business as one of the ones affected by the contamination scare. Concerningly, he also told me that media personality Alan Jones today publicly reiterated that his business was one of the ones responsible for the contamination scare. I am advised that this is not the case and I urge the media to take this up. I urge Mr Jones to check his facts and make sure that if it is not the case he makes a retraction. I have also spoken to Jon Carmichael from Ashbern Farms and Nathan Baronio from Eastern Colour. They are worried about the summer crop. We need to ensure that government support is real and here and now.