




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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ADJOURNMENT

Bundaberg and Burnett, Drought

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (7.06 pm): I rise to bring to the attention of the House the increasingly dire plight of farmers and growers in the Bundaberg and Burnett regions. While many regions out west and in New South Wales are doing it much tougher than we are, conditions in the Bundaberg region have deteriorated significantly in the past few months. With the lack of any rainfall since October 2017 we are facing our own crisis. Farmers are looking to replant cane or rotational crops at present. Small crop growers are under serious pressure as they make decisions about what crops they plant.

The last of our drought-declared growers saw their electricity tariff relief finish last Thursday with the conclusion of the district's drought declaration. Right now they cannot make economic investment or planning decisions on rotational and small crops because they cannot afford to pump the water. Yes, we had considerable rain last October and over the summer, but we are now in the middle of a very long dry period. Rainfall over the 2018 autumn and winter period has been less than 50 per cent of the average at Bundaberg district monitoring sites. With an El Nino pattern declared, the remainder of winter and the beginning of spring do not appear to show much promise of substantial relief rain.

Growers in the Burnett urgently need an extension of the drought declaration for Bundaberg to support electricity tariff relief. Ergon stands ready to continue the relief, but it cannot act without a drought declaration from the minister. I call on the minister for agriculture to hear growers in the Bundaberg region loud and clear. He should not stand on bureaucracy. He can reactivate the drought committee, he can act immediately and he can look at the rainfall situation in the region.

Without electricity tariff relief, small crop growers cannot make decisions about planning the crops that are daily staples in the market. Without electricity price relief, crops like tomatoes, watermelons, zucchinis and capsicums will cost more and will be harder to grow. Without electricity tariff relief, canegrowers cannot make decisions about replanting sugar or investing in rotational crops that are the lifeblood of their viability. Sugar prices are badly affected already in this region. Canegrowers need the urgent help of the minister.

On behalf of growers in the Bundaberg and Isis districts I call on the minister to reactivate the drought committee as a matter of urgency. These are extraordinary circumstances in the region and exceptions need to be made. The minister should show his support for local families and businesses. We desperately need a four- to six-month extension of the drought declaration to get us through to the summer rains.

Calls this week have been arrogantly responded to by even the Premier, saying that farmers know what to do. Farmers do know what to do. They are looking for leadership. They are looking for the Premier to show real leadership and do what can be done for farmers. We should not forget that electricity tariff reform will mean sustainability into the future and will mean that farmers will be there at

the end of the season. The minister's response was that, yes, he can do the drought declaration. Tonight I again call on the minister to stand up, get on with the job and put the drought declaration committees back in place and review the rainfall for the Burnett area. The department's response was also insulting. If the policy people do not know what is going on, I would suggest that they get out of the road and get the bureaucracy out of the road as well.