



Speech By  
**James Lister**


**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

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Record of Proceedings, 16 May 2019

**PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT**

**Southern Downs Electorate, Drought**

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (2.31 pm): I rise to speak in the House about an important issue in my electorate of Southern Downs—and that is the drought. We have experienced an extreme drought for some time now. There has been very little meaningful rain throughout Southern Downs over the last few years and it is really starting to bite now. It is particularly so in the Granite Belt and Warwick parts of my electorate where an absence of rain has led to an absence of inflows into the water storage dams which provide drinking water for Warwick and Stanthorpe. There are three dams of concern—the Leslie Dam, the Connolly Dam and the Storm King Dam. They are at 6.8 per cent, 43 per cent and 33 per cent capacity respectively, but the last two dams are quite small.

We are facing in effect the possibility that we will run out of drinking water in the next 12 months. To put that into context, it is not just about the inconvenience suffered by householders in not having a water supply to their houses; it is also the small businesses and the industry throughout Southern Downs that depend on a town supply to be able to work—the hospitality businesses, the accommodation and, importantly, the big industrial players like meatworks and so forth that need town water in order to process their meat. There are hundreds or perhaps thousands of jobs at stake so it is of great concern to me.

I have written to the Premier and asked her to take on board the concerns felt by me and the Southern Downs Regional Council. I know they have been in contact with the Minister for Local Government and the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy asking them for every possible assistance to solve the problem. I have also asked for a briefing on how the government might be able to supplement the water supply for these towns and, if worse comes to worst and we run out, some sort of emergency measures—whether it be sending water up in trains in bladders or some other mechanism. I am hoping that the Premier will respond positively to that.

The drought has impacted us economically already. On the Granite Belt in particular, there is a lot of irrigated, high-value agriculture and the absence of rain means a direct reduction in the output. Last year we only had about half the number of itinerant workers come through town for the summer season, and that has really hurt the main street in terms of a lack of people in town and in the businesses. The irrigators who rely on water are actually having to truck water around the electorate to their farms, which is an extraordinarily expensive thing to do.

I ask that the state government be as flexible and as understanding as possible in handling the applications for state government based drought assistance packages. I get a lot of concerned constituents saying that they feel their applications for emergency water infrastructure grants and so forth appear to be denied on specious grounds. I would ask the minister and his department to please take that on board and offer every support and understanding to my constituents as they deal with this extremely difficult drought.