




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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ADJOURNMENT

Drought Assistance

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (7.24 pm): Recently the Premier, as I understand it, was talking to Alan Jones about the drought and discussing the effect of the federal government and the Premier made the assertion, 'I'd look at anything I could to help people in drought.' I want to offer the parliament and the Premier some suggestions of what we should be doing, and I think I can say this with some authority. I chaired the Rural Debt and Drought Taskforce in the last parliament and have made a personal study of it for a number of years, so it is something pretty close to me. The government quite generously gave close to an \$80 million package towards that and some things were done in that period, but I want to put on record what could be done right now to help these people in drought. It is a massive issue and I think there has been some complacency by the federal MPs who represent those areas because there seems to be an attitude that keeps coming up that perhaps these people just need to learn to move on.

I do not care how good a producer you are: if you are hit with seven or eight years of no rain, you deserve to be there but you cannot. That is exactly what governments are for—that is, to iron out the bumps for those people to keep them there. It is not a fluid industry where they will move out and another good producer with equal experience will just move in. Communities are very fragile in those areas and so we need to be careful how we manage this issue. We need to look at this industry as a very precious resource, as are the participants in it. If we let them fall over, that is a big problem for everyone. I do not think this parliament and successive governments have really given enough weight and consideration to what happens if we do not nurture or look after these industries and iron out those bumps.

I have a few ideas on what needs to be done and what can be done. Firstly, we need a reconstruction board, and we have done a bill on this issue before in Queensland. The loan facilities that are there at the moment are of no value. They are not much beyond what the normal banks can provide, but with a reconstruction board it would be different. We sold the last one in Queensland for something like \$1.5 billion. It was a benefit to the taxpayers. At the moment there are still people in south-west Queensland paying eight per cent or nine per cent. They are decent producers. The government can put them on four per cent or five per cent and still make a profit for the taxpayer but get these people out of trouble and carry them through this tough time.

Governments cannot access cheap molasses, tyres or diesel; they can access cheap money and provide that to those people. That is a cost-effective way for the taxpayer to help those people in trouble right now. If they are not paying a big debt, they can go into debt to try to get themselves out of trouble. That is something that can be done. The mulga lands can also be addressed. There is a resource there sitting dormant. Let them access these. There needs to be greater flexibility around the use of that mulga. The Premier alluded to that. If we do that, that is a free resource for the taxpayer and those producers that is sitting there right now. It is something that can be done immediately. I urge the Premier to take that matter into her hands to help save some of these people.