QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 329
Asked on Wednesday, 7 March 2007

MRS ATTWOOD asked the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries (MR MULHERIN)-

QUESTION:

How has Queensland positioned and led the way in relation to drought preparedness and the National Agricultural Monitoring System?

ANSWER:

Queensland has demonstrated significant innovation and leadership and invested more than any other State or Territory to help producers be better prepared for drought.

An estimated $47.58 million has been spent on drought preparedness programs, including information services and adoption of risk management strategies, since the start of the current drought in 2001 to the end of 2005-06. In particular, Queensland has invested heavily in improving climate forecasting and climate management decision tools relevant to primary producers in their risk management and production planning. These services are now being coordinated through the new Climate Change Centre of Excellence, an election commitment of the Queensland Government.

Scientists from the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F), often in joint ventures with colleagues from other agencies such as the Department of Natural Resources and Water (NRW), have produced a range of drought software packages to help primary producers develop their own profitable and sustainable businesses. These forecasting and farm planning tools include the Australian Rainman, DroughtPlan, Whopper Cropper and AussieGRASS packages. DPI&F also developed the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) Phase System which is used, for example, in the climate forecast aired every Wednesday night on the ABC.

The Long Paddock website is a collaborative arrangement between NRW, DPI&F and the national AussieGRASS project and provides climate management information and services for rural Australia. Queensland's NRW also developed the SILO website in collaboration with the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, to provide meteorological data for biophysical and landscape modelling.

The National Agricultural Monitoring System (NAMS) is a collaborative project between Australian, State and Territory Governments developed to assist in streamlining the application and review process for Exceptional Circumstance drought assistance. The operational version of the NAMS was officially launched by the Australian Government Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Queensland Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries on 23 July 2006.

NAMS provides governments and industry groups with the ability to monitor dry conditions as they develop and provide further information to support decision making. Users who regularly monitor NAMS output can quickly and clearly see which

areas have improved according to rainfall and production data. NAMS can already generate almost all of the information required to support Exceptional Circumstances applications and has assisted significantly in streamlining the application process.

Queensland instigated leadership and governance of the NAMS project by establishing a steering committee consisting of members from all jurisdictions. The steering committee is chaired by the Director-General of the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries. The steering committee has two sub-committees: an advisory reference group to provide an avenue for continuous industry input and feedback; and a scientific advisory group to ensure the highest quality science is utilised in NAMS.

In 2006 the NAMS Steering Committee commissioned PriceWaterhouseCoopers to review the governance structures of NAMS. The review found that NAMS had met expectations in respect of outcomes and features and the governance arrangements significantly contributed to this favourable outcome. PriceWaterhouseCoopers was of the view that the governance approach instigated by Queensland for NAMS is a model that should be considered for other cross jurisdictional projects.

Work has begun with stakeholders to identify the data and tools needed to extend NAMS to cover irrigated agricultural industries. Another project underway involves broadening the use of NAMS to provide decision support and strategic planning tools for individual primary producers (MyNAMS). There is real potential to use the NAMS concept and engine for other national and internationally based resource tools and projects.

Queensland has thus demonstrated leadership and assisted to position primary producers for drought preparedness by development and delivery of the best available climate information and drought management systems.