Extract from Hansard

Wednesday, 5th February 2025

HAY DONATIONS TO FARMERS

The Hon. A. PICCOLO (Light) (15:35): Farmers across the Adelaide Plains and the Mid North recently received much-needed hay, donated by farming communities from other states, as part of a 100-truck convoy. This was as a result of financial support provided by the Malinauskas Labor government. The delivery commenced over the Australia Day long weekend and assisted our primary producers through some of the driest conditions on record.

With hay prices continuing to soar and good-quality fodder becoming harder to find, some of the country's top-quality hay has been delivered to farmers like Mr Paul Doering of Dutton. Mr Doering said that while the hay received would only feed his 6,500 breeding ewes for one week, knowing that there are people across the country who care about him and his neighbours makes a big difference to our ability to survive through this drought. Mr Doering said:
The rural community has been devastated by this drought—the third worst on record, with crop return not even covering production costs.

He goes on to say:
It goes a little bit against the grain to receive this hay, as normally we are supporting other farmers across the country.

While the drought is having a devastating effect on farmers finances, I am really concerned about their health and wellbeing, and in particular, their mental health.

This is an issue that I will come back to in a moment. In Mr Doering's view:
We need to do more to support our farmers' mental health.

The hay run was supported by the charitable organisation Aussie Hay Runners. The delivery has been made possible in part by the state government's $18 million drought support package, which the member for MacKillop referred to a little earlier. Some of the concerns the member for MacKillop has raised have also been raised with me by farmers in the region. The

primary industries minister, Clare Scriven, said:
…we really appreciate these organisations helping South Australian farmers and are pleased to be able to support the delivery of much needed fodder to drought affected farming communities across the state.

She went on to say:
These truckloads of hay will provide some immediate relief, and we encourage farmers to explore the assistance available in the drought support package to help upgrade infrastructure and strengthen the ability to tackle the challenges of drought.

We are having tough times at the moment, but it is interesting to note that our strong sense of community shines through. This hay run, for example, is about Australians looking after each other. It was no accident that, on the Australia Day weekend, farmers from other parts of Australia were working with other charity groups like Hay Runners to support farmers in our state doing it tough at the moment.

When our farmers are hurting, so are people in our small townships, and vice versa. It is important to understand that it is not just the farmers on the land who are impacted by the drought but a whole range of communities. It is great to see our farmers in the Adelaide Plains and the Mid North being supported by the broader community.

I also had the opportunity to meet Linda Widdup, the founder of Aussie Hay Runners. She said that she was very proud to be working alongside the South Australian government and wished to acknowledge and thank everybody who has been involved in making the run happen. She said that a lot of people had been involved. She goes on to say:
As always, our reputation is of utmost importance to us and every single bale is top quality oaten or wheaten hay with the highest nutritional value possible [for stock].

I mentioned mental health a little earlier, and one of the areas I would like to particularly focus on is the mental health of men and young men. What I am hearing from the farmers is that, yes, there are a whole range of physical difficulties on farms from the drought but it is actually the concerns they have about the ability of men and young men to actually deal with these pressures. Often, they do not communicate in terms of the pressure they are under and often we actually only hear about what pressure they are under and also the state of their mental health when it is too late.

Mr Whetstone interjecting:

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Brown): Order!

The Hon. A. PICCOLO: It is important that, firstly, as a government but also, secondly, as a community, we make sure that we have necessary mental health resources and supports in these communities to ensure that we do not add to this tragedy of the drought by having the tragedy of men taking their own lives. It is one area that I know farmers are concerned about. There is some good work being done by a number of groups like Gavin Schuster's group in Freeling, and there are a number of men's sheds throughout

the communities which all offer, if you like, opportunities for men to discuss and talk about the issues and hopefully help them with their mental resilience.

TIME EXPIRED