1. The Government is committed to assisting rural producers and communities across the State that are affected by debt and unprecedented drought conditions. With 83.92% of the State drought-declared, the additional $77.9 million in funding over five years for the Rural Assistance and Drought Package provided in the 2016-17 Budget comes at a crucial time for rural and regional Queensland.
2. The $36 million Rural Assistance Package is aimed at reducing financial stress and improving the financial sustainability of the rural sector. The Package provided for a number of initiatives including:
* introduction of compulsory farm debt mediation legislation that provides a process for the efficient and equitable resolution of farm debt disputes between creditors and farmers. It will require a mortgagee to offer a farmer an opportunity for mediated resolution of matters in relation to their farm business debt before the mortgagee could take action to enforce a mortgage over farm land; and
* replacing QRAA (formerly the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority) with the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority and expanding its activities and functions under the *Rural and Regional Adjustment Act 1994*.
1. The Bill will also make unrelated amendments to:
* the *Biological Control Act 1987* to provide more appropriately for use of viruses as control agents;
* the *Biosecurity Act 2014* to provide for an industry-led assurance certification system as an alternative to government accreditation of certifiers or government certification; and
* the *Drugs Misuse Act 1986* to enable lawful growers of industrial cannabis in Queensland to supply seed to be used for growing medicinal cannabis under a Commonwealth licencing system.
1. Cabinet approved the introduction of the Farm Business Debt Mediation Bill 2016 into the Legislative Assembly.
2. *Attachments*
* [Farm Business Debt Mediation Bill 2016](Attachments/Bill.PDF)
* [Explanatory Notes](Attachments/ExNotes.PDF)