

Bendemeer.

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BENDEMEER

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Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [6.11 p.m.]: I inform the House of the Carr Government's complete disregard for the small country community of Bendemeer, which is a picturesque village of 200 residents set on top of the Moonbi Ranges, 40 kilometres north of Tamworth. Although it is only 40 kilometres from Tamworth and it is in the electorate of Tamworth, Bendemeer may as well not exist so far as the Government is concerned. Bendemeer is in a different rural lands protection board area to Tamworth. The faceless bureaucrats have informed the Minister for Education and Training that the drought in Bendemeer has been ended. Apparently, therefore, the school at Bendemeer will not be considered for drought exemptions and its teaching staff will be halved.

As a direct result of the drought the school will lose three children and one of its two teachers will be forced to move. What happened to the Labor Government's pre-election promise to review the staffing formula for small schools? If the department had tried to run down the school deliberately it could not have been more effective than to take away half of the teaching staff. Despite repeated representations to the Department of Education and Training, the needs of the community have been ignored. A representative from the school informed me that the decision had been made to take the teacher, and the new school to which the teacher had been allocated was decided two days before I was advised of this fact by the department. The situation is made even more galling for parents and other community members because a number of other small schools around the district that have fallen below the magical number of students have received special circumstances drought exemption to retain their extra teacher. The people of Bendemeer rightly feel that the Government is discriminating against its community. As parent Jo Osborne said in an email to Minister Refshauge:

How do you suggest we explain to the parents and students of Bendemeer Public School that the Department and the Government do not recognise we have been affected by drought? Sir, let me tell you, that all through the winter for the past two years, I have stood out in the cold and mixed molasses to feed our stock and keep them alive. Up until January this year my husband and I have hand fed stock every second day for two years. Do you know how much it costs us to buy hay? We did not put our hands up for government relief; we spent our savings to get us through. And now you and the Government have the hide to tell us we are not drought affected. And to add insult to injury, you want us to stand aside and accept the decline of our school, our most valuable possession, while you sit in your cosy little office and ignore rural education. Why don't you invite yourself to Frank Sartor's office and make a cup of tea from the water sample we sent him? Ask Frank how dirty the water is, and what sort of nasty bacteria are floating around in it. We are forced to drink this, bath in it and wash in it.

The Government is not only taking the teacher, but it appears to be making it almost impossible for the community to attract more residents to build up the school numbers. What incentive is there to move to a community in which every drop of water has to be boiled? Mothers in Bendemeer are forced to put Dettol in

their children's bathwater because of the smell and the risk of disease. It is impossible to get clothes clean in Bendemeer because of the appalling water quality. Community members sent the Minister for Energy and Utilities a sample bottle of water from a typical Bendemeer tap to highlight the disgraceful state of the water supply. I presume that it is still sitting on his desk together with a request for assistance to fix the water supply that Parry Shire Council sent to Minister Sartor in June last year. How long do these people have to wait for clean water? Is this the Carr Government's vision for country New South Wales in the twenty-first century?

The financial sector is also contributing to the problem. People who want to buy in Bendemeer cannot get finance without a very high mortgage insurance component. I have received a number of complaints from people wanting to purchase property in Bendemeer, but both the banks and the Government are putting too many barriers in their way. Bendemeer is a proactive and responsive community. They held the Grey Fergie Tractor muster last year, which attracted more than 4,000 visitors and many Ferguson tractors. The local drama group, the Hourglass Players, holds regular performances. The community started a co-operative to market local goods and services. Their football club has been successful in recent years. Despite the best efforts of the community, I am at a loss as to how they can get the attention of this Government. They look around at other small communities in a similar situation and see that they are being treated favourably by the Department of Education and Training, yet Bendemeer loses a teacher.

They look at other communities in which the Government has assisted with water quality, yet the needs of Bendemeer are being ignored. Their water is not fit for consumption. Ministers Refshauge and Sartor are helping to destroy this small rural community. It is about time they realised the impact of their decisions or, in Mr Sartor's case, lack of decisions. This Government should have the decency to give Bendemeer a fighting chance to recover from the drought. As a matter of urgency, funds should be allocated to fix the Bendemeer water supply, and the difficulties experienced by the community due to the drought should be recognised. The people of Bendemeer want a decent water supply and they want the Government to give them back their teacher. I sincerely hope that the Government will listen to the community, which is planning a rally this week in Tamworth to try to inform the community of its plight. I hope the Ministers will listen to the community's plea and respond.

Private members' statements noted.

[The Acting-Speaker (Mr Paul Lynch) left the chair at 6.16 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.]

Subjects: [Schools](#); [Drought](#); [Rural Education](#); [Water](#).

Speakers: [Draper, Mr Peter](#).

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