



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

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DARLING DOWNS VISION 2000; WATER SUPPLY

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.30 a.m.): A wonderful window of opportunity exists for this State to put in place an immediate boost to the Queensland economy and to the creation of more secure and permanent jobs and to solve a looming environmental crisis for south-east Queensland and Brisbane. I refer to the visionary and practical opportunity that is before this State, which has been proposed by Darling Downs Vision 2000, for the piping of water that is surplus to Brisbane's requirements from Luggage Point to the Lockyer Valley to provide secure irrigation and then over the range to the Darling Downs.

The Darling Downs and the Lockyer Valley are some of the most productive farming areas in the world. They have some of the best soil in the world. They have some of the best farmers and farming technology in the world. The results of various crop competitions will attest to that. The one problem that is holding back both the Darling Downs and the Lockyer is the lack of availability of adequate, secure water supply. The water supply in the Lockyer comes from a system of creeks, weirs and shallow bores. The water supply in the downs is a combination of water taken from bores—which, in many cases, are now very deep bores—from the collection of overland flow into ring tanks that are pushed up onto the blacksoil plain—there is now a network of those major blacksoil ring tanks in place—and from the collection of water from water allocations on the Condamine system fed by the Leslie Dam.

The water supply is grossly inadequate. As I said at the outset, in those areas we have some of the best farming infrastructure, some of best farming families, some of the best soil and some of the best climate in the world. Those areas produce hundreds of millions of dollars in summer and winter crops in grain, cotton and horticulture. The opportunity to expand that production is absolutely enormous. The opportunity for that expansion is sitting right underneath our windowsills if only we could do something about the provision of water supply.

Darling Downs Vision 2000 was formed in 1994 and now has about 200 members. Its aim is to bring to public attention the need for an adequate, secure water supply for those areas, to promote farming business, to promote the associated value adding and to promote light manufacturing and other industries, such as transport, which go with successful farming that is backed up by irrigation systems. Darling Downs Vision 2000 is not only doing that but it has also moved into two major studies. The first study, called a conjunctive water use study, is being done in conjunction with a number of other bodies, including such bodies as the Murray/Darling Basin Commission, the Condamine River Basin Irrigators Association and the Department of Natural Resources. That study is looking at making the very best use of the available water supply, looking at the strata of underground water that is available, the reliability of that supply, what is happening to the depth of the bores, what is happening to the overland flow that comes across the Condamine Plain and is collected and pumped into the ring tanks and how that water can be used as efficiently as possible by the farmers. We already have some of the most efficient farming systems on the Darling Downs and in the Lockyer currently, with farms laser levelled so that all surplus tail water is collected and recycled into the ring tank to be used again. The most efficient systems involve using water probes, measuring the amount of water and timing the water programming so it is used to its absolute best advantage.

The other study that the Darling Downs Vision 2000 is involved in is a study funded by the previous Minister for Natural Resources, Mr Lawrence Springborg, who provided funding for a study examining the prospects of new water. We are very pleased to see that that study is continuing to receive the support of Honourable Minister Welford. That report is expected to be completed by some

time in February or March next year. That report examines the options for new water, particularly for the downs and the Lockyer area. In the past, options have been suggested, such as the Clarence River system option. It had been suggested that some 2% to 4% of the floodwater of the upper Clarence be diverted through a 30-kilometre tunnel to dam systems on the New South Wales/Queensland border to augment the Condamine flow. Other aspects have been considered, such as the fact that currently the Wivenhoe Dam has considerable surplus of water that will not be required for many years. In the interim, that water could be pumped by a simple pipeline to Atkinson Dam to provide water to the area of the Lockyer Valley that needs water desperately.

The proposal arousing most interest is the proposal to pump surplus treated sewage water from Luggage Point in Brisbane and from other outlets in the greater Brisbane and south-east Queensland area through the Lockyer Valley and over the range to the Darling Downs. That water will be an enormous problem in the future for south-east Queensland, with its rapidly growing population. It is estimated by Vision 2000 that some 150,000 to 160,000 megalitres of water are pumped into Moreton Bay annually. That is having an effect on the seagrass in the bay and holds serious environmental concerns for the future. According to the Minister's press release, all councils in south-east Queensland are facing the immediate upgrade of sewerage plants in the order of \$130m in the next three years and more thereafter. They are also considering an upgrade of the waterway systems of south-east Queensland, which will cost something in the order of \$2 billion. There is a huge problem and a need to take that water and put it somewhere where it is required. That water is needed in the Lockyer; it is needed on the Darling Downs. That water is not wanted in Moreton Bay and it is not wanted in many of the systems of discharge in the south-east corner of Queensland. It makes enormous sense to consider proposals to pipe that water to the Darling Downs and the Lockyer.

That is really an engineering proposal that could be described as a very mini Snowy Mountains Scheme. There are pipelines now across the length and breadth of Queensland. There are gas pipelines from the south west of the State to the north-west, which are thousands of kilometres long. There are water pipelines in central Queensland that are associated with the mining projects. Recently a water pipeline was constructed by the coalition Government from the Wivenhoe Dam to Tarong over the medium-height range that intersected that pipeline. The Toowoomba City Council, which is servicing a city some 2,000 feet above sea level on top of the Great Dividing Range, lifts the water for Toowoomba and some of the surrounding shires 400 metres from the Cressbrook Dam to the top of the Great Dividing Range and then pumps it along that range to Mount Lofty on the northern side of Toowoomba. The proposal is an engineering exercise that is readily achievable, with equivalent projects already in place throughout the rest of the State. Adequate corridors are available to bring the water supply to the Lockyer and the Darling Downs. Existing service corridors could be used or a pipeline made of the special polypipe that is manufactured for this sort of use could be laid in the centre of the river so it would settle into the mud and silt at the bottom of the river until it exited that area and followed service lines to the Lockyer and the Darling Downs.

Everybody would benefit from that project. I call on the Minister for State Development to have his department, which has been charged with that sort of major project through its project development and facilitation unit and its infrastructure unit—which has been brought across from the Co-ordinator General's office—to look seriously at providing further support to this proposal. It is a win-win situation for south-east Queensland, for the Lockyer and for the Darling Downs. It has the potential to provide immediately over 1,000 jobs. 100,000 megalitres of additional water will provide over 1,000 additional on-farm jobs. In addition, it would provide the transport, export, light engineering and manufacturing jobs that go with production such as that. It will bring certainty to contracts, so that farmers could secure overseas contracts for their produce. It would bring about jobs and economic growth. The 100,000 megalitres of extra water on the downs would also provide another \$400m of additional economic growth and development for that region above \$100m of direct farm income increase.

I call on this Government for some action. We are prepared to work on this very important issue in a bipartisan way with local government and with the State Government through the current Minister for Natural Resources and through the Minister for State Development. This is a very exciting proposal. It is logical and practical. It would be a win for south-east Queensland, the Lockyer and the Darling Downs. Most importantly, it would secure well over 1,000 jobs. It would increase our exports. That exciting proposal sits right before our eyes, right under our windowsills, just waiting for some action and drive to make it happen. I strongly recommend, particularly to the Minister for State Development, that that department gets involved with the project to make it a reality.
