



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

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ST GEORGE IRRIGATION AREA

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—ONP) (6.40 p.m.): It is true that the people out at St George do know what is going on. They know what is up. They do not have to taste clay to know that that is not what is being shovelled down their throats. Just as the member for Kallangur said, they know what is going on.

I have here a press release from the Honourable Minister, Mr Welford. It says that he has given the immediate go-ahead for the new \$15m water storage at St George in south-east Queensland. When was the immediate go-ahead given? 27 October 1998! That is the sort of respect that these people out there have been given. Over 12 months and nothing! That is what they received from both sides of this House: nothing.

The Minister should contemplate this: it is mid summer at St George, it is 40 degrees in the shade, the sun is blazing down, there is not a cloud in the sky and you have half a million dollars worth of cotton in the ground desperately requiring water. Beardmore Dam has plenty of water in it because the majority of that water is an unused allocation parked in the dam by water harvesters outside the irrigation area. No water is available to irrigate your cotton. This is despite the fact that you have paid big money for your farm because you could have reasonably expected to be guaranteed that water supply. A farmer outside the irrigation area is now offering to sell you some of his water that he has parked in the dam which he does not require.

I ask the Minister: what price would he pay to save half a million dollars worth of cotton? What price per megalitre would he pay for that water? What price would he pay to save his crop? He should just consider the plight and the incredible vulnerability of this farmer, who is wide open to exploitation by a water harvester whose on-farm storage is such that he does not require the water in the dam. Certainly this farmer has had the added expense of building his on-farm storage and buying his flood lifter pumps, but bear in mind he has only had to pay \$3.70 per megalitre for the first 500 megalitres and all the rest is free.

Why should somebody outside the scheme be able to profit from the misfortune of a farmer who is prepared to take the risk to pioneer the scheme—a risk that should have been tempered by a guaranteed supply of water? This is the immoral aspect of this. It is obscene, and successive Governments have either instigated or condoned that massive injustice. Would it surprise anybody to know that a water extortionist received somewhere in the vicinity of \$300,000 last year for his parked allocation from the dam? Bear in mind that the taxpayers who built this dam and the farmers who paid extra—and a good deal extra—for their land and water rights were helpless bystanders. None of them received any benefit from this sale. A water harvester from below the dam, granted an allocation out of the goodness of the previous Government's heart or in return for the favours, has profited massively from a dam built with the money paid for by you and me. This is obscene and amounts to sheer extortion.

The shadow Minister calls for an inquiry. I have a copy here of the Balonne Beacon. The report says that it was good pre-election propaganda, but what happened to the report of this inquiry? All we got was a Claytons report, obviously compiled at great expense but carefully avoiding all the important issues. But what of the real inquiry? What was promised? Has it been undertaken or will it be instigated? We should ask the previous shadow Minister, the "Minister for Backwash": has a full and

proper report been compiled and will it be released? With this Government, probably not on your nelly—not with its track record! The report, if indeed it will be done, may even be shredded or may be in the bowels of the Premier. Either way, it will never see the light of day. Why? Because maybe it would be detrimental to the new-found Labor mate who may be profiteering from this very scheme.

If an accountant from Mars landed in St George and had to look over this incredible water system and have it explained to him, he would not be able to believe his antennae. There is no basis or logic in it at all, neither is there any integrity or justice in the allocation process. It had its genesis in the National Party cronyism—favours for their mates. I have yet to work out the motivation of the Labor Party for continuing this idiocy, but it can only be driven by corruption or gross incompetence; there is no other plausible explanation.

A fair and equitable allocation formula would be of great assistance to the embattled channel farmers, but it would not be sufficient. The Government must immediately commence work on Beardmore west. The funding has already been budgeted for several times. In fact, the member for Bundamba proudly proclaimed that it had already been built. Following my trip out to St George, I can tell him that it has not. Why will this Government not proceed? It cannot be the funding; that is already in place. It cannot be due to the unusual reason of pressure from the Minister's environmental activist mates; they are in favour of it because half the proposed capacity is allocated to maintenance of the environmental flows.