



Speech by

Mr DOUG SLACK

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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WATER RESOURCES, RURAL QUEENSLAND

Mr SLACK (Burnett—NPA) (6.25 p.m.): We do not get any joy out of condemning the Government for its lack of commitment to water conservation and we do not treat it as a joke, as does the Minister, because it is terribly important to our farmers and our industry and it is terribly important to us. We recognise that we desperately need water. That is particularly so in an area such as the Bundaberg/Burnett region, which currently has a 20% allocation on the Burnett River and a 40% allocation on the Kolan River. That situation has existed for years. We are also experiencing a major salt intrusion into our underground supplies. This matter is serious. It is not the joke that the Minister treats it as.

I do not need to remind the House that this issue is having a big impact on the production of the area and on the security of people's incomes—particularly those on farms and in industry. This in turn affects the economy of the whole area. It restricts growth and prosperity and does not promote jobs, which this Government claims to aim to encourage.

The coalition in power was addressing this. We had approved the raising of the Bucca, Jones and Walla Weirs. The Minister cannot deny that. We had initiated ground water studies and modelling to address problems associated with ground water salt intrusion. The area was classified as priority 1 by the coalition. Prior to the election—

Mr Welford interjected.

Mr SLACK: Yes, that was identified by the task force, which was established by the coalition, and accepted by the coalition.

Prior to the election, then Premier Rob Borbidge promised a major dam within five years, provided the necessary studies were favourable—and we were fast-tracking those studies. In other words, we were addressing the problems. But what has happened under this Government? There has been plenty of rhetoric, talk and side-stepping, but to date we do not have a commitment to provide for the raising of the Bucca Weir. This is from a Government that claims to be a can-do Government. In the Bundaberg/Burnett region, this Government is seen as a can't do Government. The reality is that the really urgent ground water studies appear to be on hold. In other words, there is little but talk, and in the meantime farmers are scared stiff, to quote an industry leader, that they will lose what little they have, because further salt intrusion would be absolutely disastrous.

Will the Minister answer some serious questions as to the situation with those studies and the raising of the Bucca Weir? The Minister should give straight answers, as they do not depend on WAMP or environmental studies. He needs to do this quickly, as the area is losing patience and the Minister's credibility is approaching zero.

During the last debate on this issue I claimed that prior to the last election the current Premier gave a commitment to match Rob Borbidge's commitment for a major storage within five years—again, provided that the studies were favourable. This has been disputed by the Government. Following that debate I asked members of the media and industry leaders whether I may have been mistaken. I was emphatically assured that what I said was correct. We are still waiting on this Government to acknowledge the commitment and to give an indication that it is serious about water conservation. To date, all the signs have been negative.

I can assure the Government that the patience of the people of my area is quickly running out. They need a clear indication of when the WAMP will be completed and the timetable for the impact assessment studies. The reality is that the area is desperately short of water. People in the area feel that they have been let down by this Government and they are looking for urgent action to overcome their problems—not rhetoric. If we look at the Government's commitment to date we see that it is more rhetoric and less action. I repeat that the raising of the Bucca and Walla Weirs is urgent, as is the completion of the studies on ground water. And it was not unreasonable to have expected something more definite from the Minister than we have received so far.

At the beginning of the Minister's submission to this Parliament, he made reference to a visit that the shadow Minister made to the area, an inspection that we conducted of the river system and the proposals that were being put forward for storage on that particular river. I particularly raise this issue because prior to that inspection I asked for assistance, a briefing and for an officer from the department to accompany us to give us an overview of where the department was at at that particular time. I rang the Minister's office and spoke to the Minister's policy adviser. The Minister's policy adviser went to the Minister, and the Minister denied that assistance to a member of this Parliament.

Time expired.
