



Speech by

GORDON NUTTALL

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

Hansard 27 May 1999

STATE DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS ORGANISATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (5.08 p.m.): It was pleasing to listen to the contribution of the honourable member for Toowoomba South. The projects that he is hoping will benefit Toowoomba provide the precise reasons why he and the member for Toowoomba North should support the legislation before the House.

This is the sort of legislation that we need if we are going to have a vision for the future of the State. If we are going to talk about the big picture and big projects, this is the sort of legislation that will help to drive them. I believe that what has been wrong with this State for far too long is that we have not looked at the big picture and the big infrastructure programs that we need. Throughout the 1990s we have developed projects such as the tilt train, which hopefully will run all the way to Cairns one day.

Mr Reynolds: And to Townsville as well.

Mr NUTTALL: It is those types of infrastructure projects that will help to drive regional Queensland. One of the problems that we have had in the past is that we have not been visionary. As a nation we have been all too prepared to find reasons for not doing things rather than doing them. Time and time again when people come up with visions and ideas for projects they are told, "It's too hard, there are too many problems and it is too expensive." For example, let us consider the plan to construct a train line from Melbourne to Darwin. We know that would cost billions of dollars. However, the proponents of that project are visionaries. If private enterprise is prepared to put money into such a project, as a Government we should try to facilitate it, because at the end of the day that will be of benefit to not only our State but all States. We need to be more visionary when it comes to those types of projects.

I have written to the Minister for Mines and Energy and the Primary Industries Minister regarding projects that I think the Cabinet and the Government need to be considering. I am hopeful that, when I receive a response to those letters, we will be able to consider those projects, which I think are important for this State in terms of job creation and other long-term benefits. We know that there are difficulties in relation to the Surat/Dawson project. However, we need to be able to overcome those problems. Honourable members who live west of the Great Divide know even better than I do that more water is needed out there. When I attended a Community Cabinet meeting in Toowoomba, we met with delegations from the community who believed that waste water needed to be pumped over the range. In my view, such a project is worth while and visionary. However, we cannot expect the State to pick up the entire cost of such projects. It is incumbent on the honourable members who represent those areas to convince our Federal colleagues that those projects are worth while. Once we get water inland over the Great Divide, that will open up a whole new range of opportunities for the State to take advantage of in the future.

We are all aware of the poisoning of the Murray/Darling basin. The same thing will happen to our river systems unless we address those issues. I know that the Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources is trying to address those awkward issues. Time and time again in this House we hear about water allocations and the other difficulties associated with providing water to people on the land west of the Great Divide. That problem will not be solved by relying solely on the elements and on rivers sustaining themselves. At the end of the day, if we keep tapping into

those rivers, the same thing will happen to them as has happened to the Murray/Darling catchment area.

That water is needed inland. For the good of Australia, we need to be visionary. It saddens me to say that I do not believe that our Prime Minister and the Federal Government have that vision. If they were visionaries, if they had ideas and if they were prepared to listen to the Federal members who represent those areas, they would see the worth of this project. I do not want to hear that this is too hard to do or that it costs too much. I am tired of the old argument that it costs too much and it will not lead to any benefits. Anyone who has been overseas and studied what can be done when water is diverted inland will know of the enormous benefits that can flow from this project not only for the people who live in those towns but for the economy of the State as a whole. Those towns would be revitalised.

I know how difficult it is for the people out there. I feel for them. Time and time again we hear of people moving from those areas to the coast simply because they cannot keep going on without water. We as Governments have a responsibility to those people. This legislation gives us a tool to start accepting that responsibility. However, more importantly, the Federal National Party representatives in this State need to pursue these issues with all of their might. If the National Party wants to retain its constituency, it needs to drive home this issue to the Federal Government—to John Howard, Peter Costello, the other Liberals and the Treasury—and say, "You need to commit billions of dollars over the long term to develop the vast inland areas of this State." It is a sad state of affairs when we have a Prime Minister who is not prepared to be visionary.

I have views about how regional Queensland can be developed such that we can remain a decentralised State. One of Queensland's strengths is that the majority of Queenslanders do not live in Brisbane. I have had the fortune to live in Mackay, one of the major regional centres in this State, and also in Toowoomba. I know how passionately those people feel about the regions and towns in which they live. I can understand that, because the quality of life outside the capital city in regional Queensland is second to none. It is a great place to bring up families and, for example, to engage in small business. However, we need to support those regional centres. We cannot do that unless at the Federal level the Government is prepared to be visionary and commit money, alongside the private sector, to develop regional Queensland.

Again, this legislation should not be opposed by the Opposition. I fail to understand why it is so stridently opposed to this legislation. In the long term, it will benefit their constituency. Some honourable members on this side of the Chamber represent regional Queensland, yet they are not opposed to this legislation. Indeed, they see the benefits of it. Today in this debate we are seeing people simply siding against us for the sake of voting against the Labor Party. They are not looking at the bigger picture and saying, "This is legislation that we need to have." I want to know what honourable members opposite would do if they were in Government. Each time a project comes forward, would they introduce a new piece of legislation—

Mr Slack: We made that decision when we were in Government.

Mr NUTTALL: To introduce pieces of legislation for each project?

Mr Slack: With the Surat/Dawson development there would have been specific legislation.

Mr NUTTALL: In my view, that is the problem. It is a piecemeal approach. Every time there is a major project, we have to draft some new legislation. Why not have one piece of legislation such as that which the Deputy Premier has introduced so that we can deal with everything in one go? Why did we need one piece of legislation for each project?

Mrs Lavarch interjected

Mr NUTTALL: Exactly; the honourable member for Kurwongbah is correct. At the end of the day, even when we do introduce that legislation we still have to acquire from third parties. Why is the Opposition so stridently opposed to this legislation?

Mr Slack: You should have been able to express the exact views that you have just expressed.

Mr NUTTALL: I say to the honourable member that I am sorry; I have sat here and I have listened to this debate, but I cannot for the life of me see the logic in the member's argument. At the end of the day this is not about benefiting any one constituency in particular; this is about the betterment of this State, and that is why this legislation, in my view, should be supported.
