



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Hansard 16 September 1999

WATER RESOURCES, RURAL QUEENSLAND

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (6.10 p.m.): It is my pleasure to second this motion before the House tonight. In 1996 I was given the privilege of introducing a blueprint for Queensland's largest ever sustainable water development program. That scheme, which equated to two Snowy Mountain schemes, was sustainable and achievable and the finance was available to build it. To make sure those developments were sustainable, I put enormous financial and departmental resources into water allocation management plans and catchment assessment in seven catchments and water management plans in a further four river basins in Queensland.

In the 1996-97 year, \$9m was allocated to research and development on land and water issues, including downstream impacts of agriculture practices, salinity, compaction, fertility, erosion and acidity, ground and water resource management, blue-green algae management, chemical contamination, irrigation efficiency methods and hydrology modelling to test water use scenarios. We were sensitive to environmental and sustainability requirements. We would not have sanctioned any proposal that was outside of those parameters and we proved our credentials by not proceeding with the Comet dam.

The Water Infrastructure Task Force prioritised the projects and timetables for implementation. We put in place the process for water development in Queensland. All the Government had to do was follow it through. All the hard work had been done. We started pouring concrete on the smaller projects while the studies were under way on the bigger ones. The Government has even stopped development on the small projects, such as the Namgram weir and the weirs on the Condamine River. These weirs were pre-Murray-Darling Basin cap arrangements and all approvals were finalised, but they have been stopped.

When I went to a ministerial council meeting, it was quite clear that there were a few jobs to be done first before we agreed to the cap and the Murray-Darling Basin commission agreed with that. The New South Wales Government agreed as well. All those weirs did not need to have any further approvals to be built.

Mr Welford: The impact assessments.

Mr HOBBS: The impact assessments were done individually and they could not have taken so long. They just could not possibly have taken that long.

What about the extension to the Elliott main channel? That study was brought forward to progress development with the irrigation of up to 20,000 hectares in the Inkerman and Bowen areas. It has all ground to a halt. There were plans to build a 1.5 million megalitre Urannah dam near Collinsville on the Broken River, a similar sized dam at Hells Gate or the raising of the Burdekin Falls Dam to a total capacity of 8.5 million megalitres, also providing hydroelectric power to that particular region. That seems to have all just disappeared into a great hole. Nothing has happened. Nothing has been spoken about. The Government has not been able to progress the St George off-stream storage, and I fully appreciate the difficulties with the different parties involved with the scheme. However, that is still not an excuse for not building it.

Mr Welford: What would you do?

Mr HOBBS: The process is already there.

The Government has everything right, yet the Premier came out the other day and said that he could not build it because of NCP, but that is not correct. He made statements to the effect that the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, should step in and help. He said he cannot build the St George off-stream storage because the NCP was going to hold the \$15m, which is the approximate cost of the project. Is the member opposite nodding? Once again, the Premier was loose with the truth. The National Competition Council report did not withhold the funding for the St George off-stream storage alone. It held back 25% of the compensation payments to the State until December 1999 until matters in relation to a number of water developments around Queensland were resolved.

Mr Welford: St George was the main one.

Mr HOBBS: St George was one of the bigger ones, but there were other ones, such as the Moura off-stream storage, the Walla Weir, the Dumbleton Weir Stage 3, the Bedford Weir Stage 2, the Bingegang Weir Stage 2, the Warrill Creek diversion weir, the Mareeba-Dimbulah irrigation area and, to a lesser extent, the Teemburra Creek and the Borumba dam storages.

So they were all in it. The Premier came out and said that he could not build an off-stream storage at St George because NCP took the \$15m. What he was saying is not correct. The matters of concern to the NCC in relation to these water developments are principally administrative and I do not see any great problem in resolving the outstanding issues. All he has to do is go through the report and find out what they are saying. They are talking about generally administrative issues that can be resolved.

I do not agree with the way the NCC operates in relation to water development, but it is a matter for the Federal Government to resolve. Measures have been put in place for a review of NCP and its impact, particularly on rural Australia. Hopefully some changes may take place in the future.

Time expired..
