



Speech by

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RURAL QUEENSLAND

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (6.19 p.m.): Confidence is the backbone of countries, currencies, economies, businesses and athletes. Banks need confidence to lend, businesses need confidence to invest, and the same applies to irrigators. Irrigators have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in a variety of industries, creating major export income for Queensland. For instance, the horticulture industry is nearing \$1 billion in annual turnover, closely flanking that of sugar and beef. The irrigators in those industries require a reliable supply of water for their confidence to be maintained and continued.

When irrigators decide to invest, they need to have a waterworks licence with security of tenure. A condition of waterworks licences is that irrigators must have installed works within two years from the date of entitlement to divert. Irrigators undertake to meet those types of conditions and subsequently risk millions of dollars worth of private funds in investing in the relevant industry. Private investment creates growth. That costs the community little, but it reaps the benefits.

The investments of irrigators have created an inland growth second to none. Their investment has created jobs for on-farm positions such as farmhands, bookkeepers, cotton chippers, mechanics, builders, agronomists, heavy machine operators and surveyors. Many other positions are created in towns supporting the on-farm employees with associated services and infrastructure. Examples in Queensland are St George, Dirranbandi, Emerald, Goondiwindi, Gayndah, Bundaberg, Ayr, Home Hill and many others.

Throughout Queensland water allocation management plans—WAMPs—are being implemented in major catchments. A WAMP is a catchment by catchment based planning approach that seeks input from the community and stakeholders, and considers the environmental, economic and social factors. The WAMP is the planning tool which will be the basis for allocating the natural resource in a sustainable manner to stakeholders and in turn providing security for entitlement holders. I support the intent of the WAMP, provided the information is not corrupted in the formula determining the model and will give genuine security. The beneficiaries will be the stakeholders, the community, the conservationists and the environment generally.

The looming problem is that the irrigators and farmers are being expected to stand the full financial and social ramifications of water reforms in catchments for the benefit of the entire community—which is not paying. The Australian colloquialism "fair go, mate" is appropriate in this case. If the community requires a natural resource for community purposes, the community should pay. The same applies to the environment. If the Government of the day wants a greater share of a natural resource for the environment, the Government should pay.

Compensation of some description must be provided to irrigators who experience a reduction in their waterworks licences. What is the difference between irrigators, who are generally located along the State's waterways, receiving compensation for an asset lost and home owners living along a highway receiving compensation for resumption? Compensation of some description is the safety net for the irrigation industry, which creates the growth and jobs in this State with its own investment.

The community reference groups who are representative of the catchment stakeholders, including the conservationists, have all agreed that compensation is fundamental to WAMP reform. Irrigators are not asking for a trust fund subsidised by the State Government like that of the Gordonstone picketers. Any cash compensation is only to be utilised as a last resort. They are asking only for a fair go—access to alternative water or water efficiencies that will assist in achieving the same level of production. If all of these avenues are exhausted, monetary compensation is then required.

The former coalition Government viewed compensation as a fundamental principle. If the community requires a natural resource for community purposes, the community must pay. We acknowledge and recognise the established rights of land-holders and resource users. Those established rights include legally defined rights and rights established by commonly accepted principles.

A further guide concerning the application for compensation should be: "Where a legally defined right in existence at the time is taken away or transferred, compensation will be granted", or "Where the intervention clearly results in a significant impact on an individual or individual's established rights, compensation will be granted", or "Where the intervention clearly results in significant inequity in its impact on the established rights of different users in the group, compensation will be granted."

Labor's slash-and-burn policy on property ownership use is outdated and socialistic. I want the people of Queensland to know how vastly different the coalition is from the Labor Party. We believe that, if we want security and growth in rural and regional communities and we want private enterprise to flourish, the Government of the day must provide a suitable and secure environment in which that can occur. Financiers require security to lend money for development. That security will be undermined if the full use of the resource cannot be utilised or its value diminished in any way. There are only so many Government-generated jobs that can be sustained by the taxpayer. Private enterprise growth does not cost the taxpayer a single cent, and private enterprise growth will provide more jobs than even the most proactive Government jobs package.

Time expired.
