



Speech by

JACK PAFF

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST

Hansard 11 November 1999

ST GEORGE IRRIGATION AREA

Mr PAFF (Ipswich West—ONP) (6.21 p.m.): I rise to support the motion. I have listened to the Minister and he made some interesting points that I probably agree with. However, under the stewardship of the Beattie Labor Government, more great Aussie battlers will bite the dust. I refer to the case of Rose and John Hill of Mugangulla Station, near Dirranbandi. They have been fighting a David and Goliath battle with Cubbie Station and the Department of Natural Resources. I am advised that on Monday night this week, the Hills finally succumbed to the pressure and let go of the property that has been in their family for three generations.

The owner of Cubbie Station, Mr Des Stevenson, has coveted the Mugangulla property for the last decade because of its close proximity to the huge storage dam on Cubbie Station. As shown in a plan that I will table tonight, Mugangulla effectively cut Cubbie Station in two, which stopped Mr Stevenson from utilising the water that he was storing in his dam. What is interesting about this case is not so much the fact that Mr Stevenson coveted Mr Hill's property, but the role that the Department of Natural Resources appears to have played in putting pressure on the Hills.

The carrying capacity of Mugangulla has been going backward for the last decade as a consequence of the development of Cubbie Station and the subsequent loss of flood flows from the flood plain. Mr Hill has battled with the department since the late 1980s to acquire a licence to irrigate a small area of fodder to compensate for this. He has been unable to secure such a licence. On the other hand, Cubbie Station has been able to acquire some 51 licences.

Additionally, due to the loss of water from the flood plain, Mr Hill found it necessary to construct a small dam to reticulate water to his cattle. However, the department told Mr Hill that he needed a licence for his small dam. Ultimately, the department gave Mr Hill a licence. However, conditions were placed on that licence which Mr Hill considered were unreasonable under the circumstances. After years of delay, the matter was ultimately resolved by the court in favour of Mr Hill. Clearly, the court also drew the conclusion that the department was being unreasonable.

These circumstances contrast with the treatment received by the owners of Cubbie Station. In spite of the fact that Mr Stevenson is constructing, in close proximity to Mugangulla homestead, storages with an aggregate capacity that will exceed the capacity of Sydney Harbour, he has not been required to obtain a licence for many of the structures. Under the provisions of the Water Resources Act, the department is required to gazette dams that are a risk to life and property and ensure that such structures are duly licensed. However, in this particular case, while deeming the structure to be a risk to life and property, no such action has been taken by the department. The circumstances beg the question: why was Mr Stevenson let off so lightly when Mr Hill was given such a hard time?

Additionally, on the eve of the last election the then shadow Minister for Natural Resources and now Minister for Public Works and Minister Housing sat in the shade of the veranda of the Mugangulla homestead enjoying the hospitality of the Hills and their friends. On hearing their grievances against the department, Mr Schwarten promised the people of the area a parliamentary inquiry into the department's administration of the water resources of the region.

The Government has not delivered on this commitment in nearly half a term in office. In the interim, Mr Hill has had virtually no income from his Mugangulla property and he has conceded that the

property is worthless to anyone but Mr Stevenson. Ultimately, Mr Stevenson won because time and the Government were on his side. The Beattie Government should hang its head in shame. Had it kept Mr Schwarten's commitment, it may have allowed Mr Hill to get out with a little dignity rather than being virtually forced from his land.
