



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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Hansard 3 March 1999

**ADDRESS IN REPLY**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (2.39 p.m.): I appreciate the opportunity to take part in this debate. It is a little hard to hear the sort of rubbish some members contribute, but I hope I can make a more reasonable contribution than the one we have just heard.

At the outset, I must restate the concerns of some of my colleagues. It is eight months since this Parliament was opened by the Governor and members are still replying to the Governor's address. Understandably, to the casual observer of Parliament it would seem a little absurd that such a situation has been allowed to develop. It is, I would suggest, a true indication of the competency of the Labor Government. It cannot even run this Parliament in a reasonable manner. It cannot even get the procedural measures of this place completed in a reasonable time. What chance is there for the rest of the State under the management of this can't do Government?

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! I remind members who interject to do so from their correct seats.

**Mr SEENEY:** We have just experienced eight months in which this Government has proven itself to be all talk, all about media management and all about image management. This Government has proven itself to be all about manipulation of information rather than about achieving anything of substance for Queenslanders in the Callide electorate and across the State. In short, we have seen eight months of talk and no action. I made my first speech here in this Parliament on 30 July 1998—

**Mr Schwarten:** A bloody beauty!

**Mr SEENEY:** The member for Rockhampton is right: it was a bloody beauty. I made my first speech on 30 July, the day after the Governor's address, as part of the debate on a motion of confidence in the minority Labor Government, a motion eventually supported by the so-called Independent member for Nicklin. What a fraud the Independent member for Nicklin has turned out to be.

In that first speech to this Parliament I reflected on the enormous achievements of the previous coalition Government, a Government that was in power for just two and a half short years. I reflected on the achievements that Government made in addressing the years of neglect that the Callide electorate, along with the rest of rural and regional Queensland, had suffered. I also spoke about our hopes for the future—hopes that have been dashed in the past eight months—and about the enormous efforts made by many people to ensure a sound future for our communities and a better future for our children.

I said on that night last July that the people of Callide had absolutely no confidence that the task they faced would be made any easier by the election of a Labor Government. How well founded those fears have proven to be. It is appropriate today, eight months later, to look at what has happened on the ground, what has happened for real in the electorate of Callide in the term of this Labor Government.

**Mr Musgrove:** Haven't you already spoken?

**Mr SEENEY:** No. No better example could be found than the Callide C power station at Biloela. The new Government demonstrated complete contempt for regional Queensland and the people of Callide by repeatedly trying to kill the Callide C power project for its own ends. After intensive

questioning at the parliamentary Budget Estimates committee it emerged that Ministers McGrady and Hamill had broken the law in a second desperate bid to kill the \$800m power generating project at Biloela. The two Ministers had given a directive in writing to public——

**Mr Hayward** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** The Ministers have never denied it, despite the fact that I have said it here a number of times, and I will continue to say it.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the member for Callide to speak through the Chair.

**Mr SEENEY:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I reserve the right to respond to interjectors.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member may respond to interjectors, but he should do so through the Chair.

**Mr SEENEY:** Thank you for your direction, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Callide C project has the potential to provide a much-needed boost to the economies of Biloela and the whole central Queensland region, and the member for Rockhampton should be aware of that. It also will provide a very economical source of power for many years to come.

Ministers McGrady and Hamill were prepared to abandon those benefits. They were prepared to abandon our communities in a desperate bid to help the Chevron gas importation project. It finally transpired that the Government could not stop Callide C, no matter how hard it tried. The Ministers reluctantly conceded to the Budget Estimates committee that the project would proceed in line with the original timetable set out by the coalition Government, which will see the first unit on line in May 2001.

The people of Biloela were then treated to the ultimate display in hypocrisy when in January the Acting Premier turned up on 12 hours' notice to plant a tree to signify the start of the project. He wanted to get himself on the front page of the local paper and claim credit for the economic benefits that are now starting to flow to the whole region.

The issue which has been identified as critical to the long-term economic growth and survival of the communities of the Callide electorate, and which I referred to extensively in my first speech to this House last July, is the provision of water infrastructure. It is in this area that this Labor Government has done most to destroy the hopes and the aspirations of so many of my constituents and so many of the communities in which they live.

There has been a cleverly orchestrated attack on water infrastructure generally by the current Minister for Natural Resources and his Socialist Left faction within the Labor Government. Among the main targets has been the proposed Nathan dam in the Dawson Valley. In their effort to discredit the project and the thorough investigation and planning work done by the previous Government, once again in two and a half short years, they have——

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The honourable member is misleading the House. The terms of reference of the previous Government's investigation into water infrastructure excluded the downstream users. I ask that the record be corrected accordingly.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Mr SEENEY:** Of course there is no point of order. The member for Rockhampton is wrong. If he cared to read the original environmental report that was done by Hyder Consulting he would realise the error of his ways. He is repeating parrot fashion a lie that has been perpetrated by the Socialist Left faction of the Labor Party in cahoots with the——

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I am not a member of the Socialist Left of the Labor Party. I am a member of the Old Guard.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Mr SEENEY:** Of course there is no point of order. I never said that he was a member of the Socialist Left. I will repeat what I said so that he can understand it this time. I said that he is repeating parrot fashion a lie that has been perpetrated by the Socialist Left faction of the Labor Party, in cahoots with the anti-everything conservation groups——

**Mr MICKEL:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. There has been a long tradition that the word "lie" has been ruled unparliamentary. I ask you to rule in that way against the member for Callide.

**Mr SEENEY:** That is absolute rubbish, Mr Deputy Speaker. I did not call anyone a liar. I said that there had been a lie perpetrated.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr SEENEY:** Of course there is no point of order. If the members opposite would like to make a speech——

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the member for Callide to speak through the Chair and get on with the speech.

**Mr SEENEY:** I suggest through the Chair that if the members opposite would like to make a speech, they will have a chance when I am finished.

The dubious anti-everything coalition that was put together to attack this project enthusiastically embraced a leaked draft report from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority that nobody has yet seen. No-one has been able to read or validate this report, but they claimed it as validation for their emotive, negative fear campaign to stop the development of the Dawson Valley. In doing so they have surely destroyed whatever credibility they may have had to date.

I suggest further that members of the Government such as the member for Rockhampton have completely destroyed any credibility they may have had to date by their continued silence on this issue and by their continued lack of support for a project that will provide enormous benefits to the people the member for Rockhampton represents.

It stretches the limits of creditable belief that this report, apparently commissioned by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, supposedly reaches the unlikely conclusion—the member for Rockhampton should listen to this—that a dam on the Dawson River at Nathan Gorge, 300 kilometres upstream from where it joins the Fitzroy and 500 kilometres from the ocean, will somehow destroy the Great Barrier Reef.

As I said, this report is not yet available for public scrutiny. That has not stopped these groups from hysterically claiming it as reason enough to stop this \$150m infrastructure project, which will secure the economic future of the Dawson Valley and the regional centres which it serves, as well as provide permanent jobs and secure futures for thousands of people.

Initiatives like the whole of catchment Water Allocation Management Plan that the coalition Government developed and individual water users' own land and water management plans will ensure that any negative impacts can be identified and monitored and their effects minimised and mitigated, yet they are given no credit.

We need a Government that will take a sensible, rational approach to achieve sustainable economic growth and development in my electorate. The Minister for Natural Resources should be working with all genuine interest groups to ensure that any problems from projects such as these can be overcome to the benefit of the whole community, rather than using every single imaginable problem—real or otherwise—as an excuse for every project to be abandoned. The people of the Dawson Valley and central Queensland deserve every opportunity to build a sound economic future for themselves and their communities, and the key to that development in the Dawson and Burnett Valleys is a secure, safe, sustainable water supply.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I rise to a point of order. I ask the member for Callide to stop yelling.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! There is no point of order. However, the member should calm down a little.

**Mr SEENEY:** I have to speak loudly so that I can be heard over the meaningless, inane interjections of the member for Rockhampton.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Callide will continue his speech.

**Mr SEENEY:** As I said, the key to the development in the Dawson and Burnett Valleys is a secure, safe, sustainable water supply. To achieve that, projects like the Nathan Gorge dam must proceed to fruition and not be held up by noisy minorities staging meaningless media events, or a Labor Government keen to appease factional interests and looking desperately for excuses not to invest in rural Queensland. Any fair evaluation of the environmental impact studies done to date will recognise their thoroughness and the detail they contain. But for some interest groups and the politicians who are all too keen to pander to them, no amount of study will ever be enough. I welcome the Minister for Natural Resources to the House.

Continuing meaningless calls for more studies have become an excuse not to do anything. Any fair evaluation of the Water Allocation Management Plan document, which sets environmental flow objectives as the first priority, will recognise the degree of environmental protection built into this project from day one. The WAMP document also requires water users, as a condition of their licence, to develop a land and water management plan that will restrict water use to suitable soil types only and achieve a zero discharge of tail water.

It should be recognised that the WAMP document also requires a river management plan to be implemented as a safeguard to monitor water quality and the river environment to ensure environmental flow objectives are being met by the system. As I said before—and I will repeat it again for the benefit of the Minister, who has been kind enough to turn up—absolutely no credit has been given to the fact that those initiatives, developed by the coalition Government, are world-first, groundbreaking initiatives that will ensure that irrigation projects such as the one in the Dawson Valley

do not repeat the mistakes that have been made in other areas in the past. These management systems should be given credit for the fact that they will ensure that those mistakes are not repeated, rather than pointing to those mistakes as an excuse not to do anything.

There are some problems with the draft document for the Fitzroy River WAMP, which has been available for comment for some time. I particularly support the Taroom Shire Council's contention that the outcome of the WAMP process has failed to recognise the very legitimate claims of the land-holders in the upper reaches of the Dawson catchment. Equity for these land-holders has always been an important consideration in the planning of this scheme. It is difficult to understand why land-holders above the dam site have been allocated such a small amount of water in the draft WAMP. Any fair evaluation of the situation should recognise the inequity of the proposal to allocate 11,500 megalitres to the region, which provides the catchment for the Nathan storage, while 150,000 megalitres is allocated for downstream use. This allocation would provide water for only 7,000 hectares of the identified 48,000 hectares available for cropping in the shire but would provide a very significant economic boost for the Taroom area if it were increased to 30,000 megalitres, which is the figure that the Taroom Shire Council included in its submission to the department.

While development in this upstream area may take longer than in areas downstream where the irrigation industry is already established, it is critically important for sufficient allocation to be reserved in the WAMP process for the potential of the Taroom Shire to be realised in the future. It is only fair that the people of the Taroom Shire share in the economic benefits that will flow from the construction of the Nathan Gorge dam. All local stakeholders recognise the fairness of this issue as a once-only opportunity to achieve equity for the people of the Taroom Shire. The Minister must ensure that this issue is addressed in the final draft of the WAMP document.

It has become obvious that the present Government has absolutely no commitment to the implementation of the report of the Water Infrastructure Task Force, set up by the coalition Government, and the Nathan Gorge dam is only one example. It became obvious from the Estimates committee hearing that the funding for the construction of Category 1 projects identified in this report has been slashed from the \$21m proposed by the coalition to a disturbingly low figure of \$7m. \$7m will not build many projects or provide much in the way of badly needed infrastructure in regional Queensland. As I pointed out in my response to those hearings, that infrastructure is badly needed. It is badly needed to provide the jobs and the economic opportunities that come with irrigated agriculture.

A great example of how important the provision of irrigation infrastructure is can be seen in the community of Mundubbera in the central Burnett. Mundubbera, unlike so many other rural centres, is a growing town with many new houses, urban land development, new caravan parks and even a backpackers hostel, which is currently being constructed. It is all derived from irrigated agriculture.

It is particularly disappointing to see the extension of the Jones Weir at Mundubbera still being deliberately delayed awaiting the result of yet another study. The Minister advised the Estimates committee that no projects in the Burnett catchment will proceed until the catchment study and the WAMP study are completed. This was the complete opposite of the coalition's position, which excluded the Mundubbera Weir from these studies.

As well as these two major catchment-wide studies under way at the moment, each project in the Burnett Valley has been studied individually. While nobody disputes the need for proper planning and studies, I believe there is a widely felt and growing frustration throughout my electorate that these studies have become an ongoing excuse to further delay these projects. No-one disputes the need for studies and public consultation to minimise the costs both in economic and environmental terms. But we as a community need to decide that the development, the jobs and the opportunities that flow from these projects are worth the costs incurred, and we must accept that there always will be costs—both economic costs and environmental costs. We need to do all that we can to reduce those costs, but eventually they will have to be incurred to provide a future for people—real people, who have been totally neglected in the decision-making process or, more correctly, the decision-making manipulation process of this can't do Government.

**Mr Welford:** How do you do that without any studies?

**Mr SEENEY:** I take that interjection from the Minister for Natural Resources. On a number of occasions during this address and in the public arena, I have said that nobody disputes the need for studies. Nobody disputes the need for these things to be done properly. What is happening at the moment, in this Government's attempts to appease factional groups and anti-everything groups, is that studies are being used as an ongoing excuse to do nothing. There will always be groups who will call for more studies.

As I said in my first speech in this place—and I now reiterate it—we in the Callide electorate believe that, in this world of economic rationalism, people matter, too. We do not believe, and we will not accept, that our families and our communities are expendable in the big-picture politics of globalisation. We will not accept that our future should be forfeited to powerful corporate giants and the law-of-the-jungle economic policies, and we will not accept that our future should be sacrificed on the

mythical level playing field. We do not believe it is fair and just for our efforts to build a better future to be continually frustrated by single-issue minority groups. We do not believe it is fair and just for our future in rural Queensland to be denied by yet another Labor Government that is more interested in pandering to single-issue minority groups and appeasing interfactional ideological debate.

In the eight months since the Governor addressed this Parliament, there has been a realisation that the answer to the problems we face in rural and regional Queensland does not lie and never has lain in some sort of regression to the past. The oversimplistic solutions and shallow wish list type policy positions of the Far Right, which would have seen us much worse off in a very short space of time, have been shown to be the false promise they always were. The people of the Callide electorate, like others in rural and regional Queensland, still face the challenge of building a better future for ourselves in today's world, and that challenge has been made incredibly more difficult by the first eight months of this Labor Government. Unfortunately, the all-talk, no-action, can't do Beattie Government is making this task more difficult. Their meaningless rhetoric is delivering nothing to the people of Callide and nothing to the people of Queensland.

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