



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard 11 March 1999

RURAL QUEENSLAND

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (6.29 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by the shadow Minister for Primary Industries. I say at the outset that it addresses four points which are very pressing issues in rural Queensland at present. I do not believe that this Government or the Minister for Natural Resources, in particular, can even begin to understand the significance of these issues to the future of rural Queensland and the people who live and work there. No greater example can be found of that than the pathetic amendment that the member opposite moved in this House tonight. It indicates clearly just how far out of touch he is and how little appreciation of these issues he has.

Much has been said about compensation for lost property rights and the injustice of taking away those property rights without compensation. Let me make it very clear that no land-holder wants compensation as a first choice. Land-holders want the rights that they paid for. They want those rights to be recognised, whether they be water rights or whether they be rights in freehold land. If they are to be restricted or taken away to appease some minority group, then the people who paid for those rights need to be compensated. They need to be compensated for the money that they invested in those rights.

Compensation principles for water resources that were compiled by the so-called Minister for Natural Resources have been roundly condemned as totally unjust by everybody to whom I have spoken in my electorate, and my electorate includes most of the Burnett and Dawson Valley irrigation schemes. I invite the Minister, who likes to sit in this Parliament, make lots of noise and put out fancy press releases, to come up to the irrigation areas and debate the issue there. It would be a very different story. He will find the going a lot harder than sitting over there making inane and stupid interjections.

The point that needs to be emphasised again and again is that no farmer wants compensation as a first choice. They want the water rights that they paid for. They want the rights that form the basis of their business to be recognised and protected, and expanded where possible. The compensation principles developed by the Minister to address the losses that will inevitably occur are totally unfair and unjust. They are just not acceptable to the people who have built their businesses around the irrigation entitlements. These people face the possibility of reduced earning capacity and a reduction in capital values, and that reduction in capital values is happening already. The possibility of compensation has been specifically excluded by the Minister.

Mr Welford: Why don't you tell the truth for a change?

Mr SEENEY: It is. That reduction in capital value is happening already. It is happening in Gayndah, and I can show the Minister specific examples. To suggest that those entitlements can be taken away without compensation as part of the WAMP process is totally unjust and just not acceptable. Equally unacceptable is the suggestion that mandatory land-use controls, such as land-clearing guidelines, are to be reviewed and extended to cover freehold land. Equally unacceptable is the assertion that the Minister made here tonight that there is no difference between freehold and leasehold land when it comes to these types of mandatory land-use controls. Once again, there is no doubt that there will be no compensation for loss of income-earning capacity and the loss in capital value that would inevitably flow.

Again, it is fair to say that the land-holders do not want compensation. They want the right to work their land, unhindered by the bureaucrats and the Minister's green police. That is the right for

which they paid dearly when they purchased freehold land and that is the right which the Big Brother approach of this Government and this stupid approach of the Minister for Natural Resources will inevitably take away. Rather than taking this Big Brother approach, the Government should continue the work that was done by the coalition in Government, when we worked with land-holders in organisations such as Landcare and Integrated Catchment Management to encourage development of sustainable land management practice. How successful those two initiatives have been!

This Government should be working in cooperation with the people who have been custodians of the land for generations, rather than imposing mandatory controls on them from on high. The Government's record indicates that those controls will be designed to appease the extreme conservation groups for whom the whole exercise is academic. Once again, the so-called consultation with the genuine stakeholders will prove to be a farce.

The Minister has taken no notice of the community reference panel set up to provide community input and consultation on the WAMP process. No rural groups were properly consulted during this process and no other groups support the Minister's disgraceful decision not to pay compensation to farmers who lose entitlements. Yet again, the rhetoric of this Government is far removed from the reality. Yet again, the decisions of this Government are far removed from the reality of rural Queensland.

Time expired.
