



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard 16 September 1999

WATER RESOURCES, RURAL QUEENSLAND

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (6.35 p.m.): I am pleased to lend my support to this motion, moved by the member for Keppel, condemning the can't do Beattie Labor Government for its total failure to deliver anything in the way of irrigation infrastructure. This is one area of this Government's performance where no amount of political doublespeak can hide the facts.

When this Government was elected 15 months ago, Queensland was on the threshold of a massive water infrastructure building program which would have established the economic base for many rural communities and many industries throughout the State. There had been already a properly planned and exhaustively researched program to identify the priority projects from all the possibilities that were available in regional Queensland.

In the 15 months since last June, all of those projects have effectively been either stopped or delayed interminably. Many of those water infrastructure projects are in my electorate, and I know well the opportunity and the hope that they offer to so many communities. I know the optimism that they engendered. I know the hope that those projects offered to so many people—people and communities that are doing it tough in the face of the changing terms of trade of agriculture worldwide; people and communities that quite rightly saw that irrigation as an effective answer to the declining economic conditions and a necessary prerequisite to move into new, intensive, high-value industries. Irrigation water was their hope for a better future. Where there is water now there is prosperity. Where there is water there is growth and jobs and hopes for the future. The tragedy of the performance of this doing-nothing Government is that it has destroyed that hope. It has destroyed the hope that so many people had for a better future. It has taken away the opportunity that a whole range of regional and small communities had for a future. The future of those people has been denied to placate an anti-everything ideology that uses emotive fear campaigns and misinformation to promote its narrow and negative agenda.

I have said many times in this House that we all acknowledge the need for environmental care in the construction of water infrastructure. We all acknowledge that. We must ensure that the environmental impact is minimised, but we must also accept that this infrastructure needs to be built to provide a future for our agricultural industries and a future for our regional communities. There are plenty of examples of tremendously successful irrigation areas across the State which make an enormous contribution to the State's economy, but they hardly ever get mentioned when the debate turns to new infrastructure.

The member for Bundaberg talks about rivers that have been ruined. I challenge her to find some rivers in Queensland that have been ruined by irrigation infrastructure. We never hear the good stories. We just hear inflated versions of examples of things that have gone wrong in other places. The anti-everything brigade are all too quick to repeatedly point to the mistakes of the Murray-Darling scheme. There were some regrettable mistakes made there in the early years of development. But we in Queensland need to learn from that history, to develop much better irrigation schemes and to manage those schemes to ensure that there is no repetition of those mistakes—not use those mistakes as a convenient excuse never to do anything again.

This Government stands condemned for not continuing with the water infrastructure scheme planned so comprehensively by the coalition in Government. This State could have been well on its way to seeing more success stories like Emerald in central Queensland, the Burdekin in north Queensland,

St George or Dirranbandi in the south-west or Mundubbera in the central Burnett. Instead, nothing has happened. The Nathan dam project is apparently permanently stalled. The Fitzroy River WAMP was due for finalisation last November, but now no-one will say when it is likely to be released. It is noticeable that, tonight, the Minister did not give us any indication of when it will be released.

No-one will give us any idea when the study is going to be released. The Burnett River WAMP has only just begun and it will effectively delay any project on the river system for many years to come. These studies have become convenient excuses for the Minister to do nothing. The repeated extension of these studies has become a convenient excuse for a do-nothing Government to do nothing.

Rural Queensland needs a fair dinkum commitment from this State Government in relation to the development of this infrastructure. We want some realistic starting dates for some of these projects. There is a growing level of frustration at the deliberate delay and the ongoing procrastination. Rural Queensland has had enough of the political doublespeak and the cynical manipulation of this Labor Government. It is time for the Beattie Labor Government to get real and to make some decisions to proceed forthwith with a program to provide some water infrastructure for rural and regional Queensland.

This House should join with the people of regional Queensland and condemn in no uncertain terms the total inaction of this Government to date. This House should join with the people of regional Queensland and condemn the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources.

Time expired.
