



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard 16 September 1999

WATER RESOURCES, RURAL QUEENSLAND

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (6.50 p.m.): When the member for Keppel started this debate—and I jotted down a few of his actual words—he talked about an anti-development paralysis, that we have had the brakes put on, that there is no vision and that there is no support for rural communities. The member certainly was not talking about the part of Queensland that I come from, because I can tell him that in far-north Queensland we have a vision and very positive things are happening.

I want to tell this House why that is so. It has nothing to do with this Water Infrastructure Task Force that went around the State. As other members have said, that group did travel throughout the State. They came up with priorities and wish lists. However, the reality is that in far-north Queensland, under a Goss Government, we had started the planning that was necessary to bring to fruition a whole lot of things to meet the needs of our community, both our rural community and our urban community, in terms of a future water supply, and that was the FNQ 2010 process. It was a long process and it has come to an end.

In terms of actual planning, we know the direction in which we are going. As part of that, we had begun the work to know what we need to look at for the Barron River. We have those studies coming to fruition now, because they started under the Goss Labor Government. It was nothing to do with the coalition. In fact, they almost derailed the process that we had started. They were an irrelevance to what we were doing in the Barron catchment and in other areas in far-north Queensland to deal with our water issues. We now have a process that is very well established and coming to fruition. So we will know where the best place will be for future infrastructure on the Barron River. We will have our WAMP finished in reasonable time.

However, more importantly, we are tackling the issues that no members opposite seem to really understand, and that is that if we manage our water supplies wisely, we should not just go out and build dams. Instead, we should talk about how to conserve water and how to use it more efficiently. In far-north Queensland, the Cairns City Council has made the hard decision, and through user-pay charges for water we have reduced the amount of water that people are using. That council is going to be saving money, because it does not actually have to bring forward its plans for upgrading infrastructure. It is saving money.

This Government has allocated \$41m over four years to help rural producers use their water more efficiently. We have put money into the Mareeba-Dimbulah irrigation area—a \$20m project. It is now in its second year. That will assist those growers to use that irrigation system more effectively, to upgrade it and to raise the level of the Tinaroo Falls Dam—we are doing a whole range of things there. So we are on track towards solving these problems in a planned way. However, that has taken time. It has taken more than just flying around and coming up with a priority list. The planning has to be done.

So many members opposite are hypocrites, because they know that planning has to be done. The excellent officers who work in the Department of Natural Resources also know that that planning has to be done. These things cannot be done overnight.

This motion is really a con job. The members opposite are just trying to persuade the rural community that they have the answers and that they are going to get out there and solve all of their problems. However, these days the members opposite know that the community will simply not accept the building of dams without the work being done. These days, the community wants to be involved.

They want to have a say. They want sustainable development and good planning, which ensures that the infrastructure is built in the right place, in the right time sequence and with the right range of measures—the demand side measures, the water conservation methods as well as the dams.

That is the kind of commitment that this Government has. If the members opposite were honest, they would be telling people that that is what needs to be done, instead of making promises to people in those areas and berating us for not building dams here, there and everywhere. They really need to put in the hard work and be honest with people about the amount of planning that needs to go into these things.

Time expired.
