



Speech by
**Mrs NITA
CUNNINGHAM**

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

Hansard 11 March 1999

RURAL QUEENSLAND

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (6.44 p.m.): I rise to support the amendment and to oppose the motion put forward by the Opposition. On a regular basis since this Government gained office almost nine months ago, the Opposition has made outrageous claims in this House that almost every water infrastructure project throughout the State is either stopped, axed, stalled or slowed down—claims that are being made with no reference to facts. It is just cheap political point scoring under privilege in this House in a deliberate attempt to mislead the community and undermine industry, farmers and regional communities.

Mr Borbidge interjected.

Mr Welford interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister and the Leader of the Opposition! I would like to hear this speech.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: In my electorate of Bundaberg, those opposite have been as busy as little bees with a media campaign that continually forecasts doom for district water infrastructure development in general, on Walla Weir, on the proposed bags on that weir, on underground water supplies, on compensation and on Paradise dam.

I do not believe that Paradise dam has ever been heard of so much in this place as it has in this 49th Parliament. If those in the Opposition, and the member for Burnett in particular, had put as much effort into building the dam while they were in office as they have put into knocking it from the Opposition benches, then we might have it today. Instead, we have members in the Opposition who do not even know where it is. One member yesterday thought it was in Bundaberg! Those opposite obviously do not know that there are at least four different site options still being considered, and they obviously do not know that under the planning process that was put in place in 1997 they had no intention of even giving the final approval for this dam until the year 2001. So much for their wild claims!

In an effort to bring some facts to this debate, I draw to the attention of the House the appalling record of the coalition in the provision of water infrastructure in the Bundaberg district. The Bundaberg irrigation scheme took 25 years to complete, after years of bungling. Farms in some areas were allowed to stay off the scheme and stay on underground water—a bad decision that has led to severe saltwater intrusion in that area. Plans were changed and changed again, and we ended up with one dam instead of two—another bad decision that has left us with a dam that does not fill and a scheme that is struggling. It was only when the Goss Labor Government was elected that it was finished at all, at the instigation of the then Minister, Ed Casey. It was also Ed Casey who committed the Government to construction of the Walla Weir.

I do not believe that the Borbidge Government made any positive decisions on water infrastructure during its term in office. In fact, I believe the biggest decision it made on water was to stop the Comet dam.

Mr HOBBS: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. We had the biggest water program this State has ever seen. I object to those comments entirely.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM: In contrast, while the Opposition continues its whingeing, the Government is getting on with the job, with \$4.5m in the current Budget to finish the Walla Weir and with work valued at \$5.7m being undertaken, including the urban water study, the Burnett River catchment study, the Bundaberg ground water rescue project and the water allocation and management plan— planning work that has just been escalated by this Government.

With regard to Paradise dam, the Department of Natural Resources has recently completed the initial engineering appraisal of a storage of up to 750,000 megalitres at the Paradise site, as well as an initial evaluation of likely impacts. Evaluation of all possible options is being afforded a high priority and a report on the outcomes will be available by the end of this year. These projects are moving in a positive way and with the support of this Government.

In the interests of commonsense, I reiterate what I said to the regional community conference in Bundaberg two weeks ago, when I urged the crowd of almost 500 to work carefully through the necessary processes. As I said then, it is important that this major storage is built as quickly as possible, but it is imperative that we get it right. We cannot afford any more mistakes and we will not get another chance.

I repeat: it was a Labor Government that made the commitment to build Walla Weir and it was this Labor Government that provided money in the current Budget to finish that weir after almost five and a half years of the Opposition dragging its feet, as it did with the Bundaberg irrigation scheme until Labor finished that.

Time expired.
