



Speech by

**Hon. R. SCHWARTEN**

**MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON**

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Hansard 11 November 1999

### **ST GEORGE IRRIGATION AREA**

**Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (6.16 p.m.): I rise to second the amendment moved by the Minister. In so doing, I want to acknowledge that this is a very complex issue. If we like, we can sit here and throw stones at it all night. However, it is good to see the Police Minister in the Chamber. I also notice Mr Ken Pearce in the gallery. He accompanied us on that airlight that day to try to resolve the issue. In fact, I think that it was Mr Pearce who said, "It ain't easy to resolve this. It is not that simple." As the day wore on, I am sure that the Honourable the Minister for Police will remember that it was like talking to a group of people who, in the first instance, spoke Vietnamese; when we moved on to the next group, they were speaking Italian; the third group we met was speaking Urdu; and the next group we met was speaking Chinese. Right down the line, nobody had any agreement whatsoever.

It is very difficult to resolve such an issue. The Honourable the Minister who I then shadowed, Mr Springborg, had a go at the problem and so did his predecessor. As I said on that occasion, I have to acknowledge that it was much harder for them than it is for us to resolve the issue. Labor will never win that seat in a million years. There is no easy solution. If by some quirk of nature the member who moved this motion sits on this side, he would realise that he would not have the solution, either. The fact is that, somewhere in the system, there are winners and losers. We will never get a general agreement. That does not stop one trying, but when some people miss out on water and some people gain water, there will never be general agreement. That is what the dispute is all about: some people are seen to be better off, such as the channel farmers, or Cubbie Station.

**An honourable member:** Water harvesters.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** Water harvesters— whoever it is. On that day, I learned that there will always be somebody who wants to point the finger at somebody else and say that they are better off. It did not matter who we spoke to, there was no general agreement between any of those people as to how to solve the problem.

However, I did say that if Labor won Government we should get Public Works Committee to look at the issue. That happened. As I said at the time, I had no power to direct that to occur, but I said that, if I became the Minister, I would refer the issue to that committee. Although I did not refer the issue to the committee, it happened, anyway. I see the Chairman of the Public Works Committee in the Chamber. I think that he can speak for himself in that regard.

It is a bit like being a bad driver. I have never met a bad driver yet. I have never met anybody who would put their hand up and say, "I'm a bad driver." I have met a lot of people who have said that others are bad drivers. People on that river system will say, "They are wrong and they are wrong and they are wrong, but I'm all right. I'm doing the right thing." I do not know how one ever resolves that issue.

This Minister is taking a fair shot at trying to resolve the issue. There is no lack of political will and there is no lack of reality. The Minister is sincere in his objective of trying to resolve this issue. It is all very well for the honourable member to sit back in the splendid isolation and irrelevancy of a minority and say that this should happen and that should happen. I can tell him that if he goes up there and

resolves the issue tomorrow, he will be a very unique human being. Many people have put a lot of sincere effort into trying to resolve it.

One thing that a lot of the people who live in that part of the world do not want to consider is this: what is the health of the river worth? They do not want to ask who should get the environmental flow. Everybody wants to have a slice of the action of the river, and they are not too worried about what happens downstream. The Honourable Minister for Police and I visited the property at the end of the river system. The owner of that property said to us, "Don't take any notice of the people up there. We are at the other end of it here and look at the trickle of water that comes through here now. When it rushes through, it causes erosion."

Time expired.

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