



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 9 June 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
Rural Water Use Initiative

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (10 a.m.), by leave: The mark of a good Government is its sense of vision for the future—to be able to understand the big picture. One of the Beattie Government's main priorities is a prosperous future for all Queenslanders and their children, the growth of our industries and job opportunities in both our cities and our regional centres. An initiative of the Beattie Government which contributes to these aims is the rural water use efficiency initiative, which I announced in Rockhampton last Sunday.

This initiative has been welcomed by Queensland's rural industries. The Government will spend \$41m in a true partnership with rural industry over the next four years. We will be working with producers to improve the way in which irrigation water is used—accounting for 80% of the State's water use. The major benefits of this initiative are: by 2003, an estimated annual increase in agricultural production of \$280m, equivalent to what would be obtained by supplying an additional 180,000 megalitres of irrigation water; 1,600 new jobs for regional Queensland; improved farm profitability and viability of Queensland's rural industries; and reduced run-off of pesticides and nutrients into rivers and streams.

The rural sector uses 80% to 85% of the State's water, and any long-term efficiencies can have considerable benefits for rural communities. This initiative has four major programs based on sugarcane, cotton and grain, dairy and pasture and the major horticultural crops. In the first program, our focus is to improve irrigation water management on farms through adoption or extension programs. In line with our partnership approach, this program will be managed by rural industry organisations. By July 2000, in conjunction with rural industry, we will develop strategies to reduce water losses from storages on farms. These strategies will include revised guidelines for the design, construction, operation and maintenance of farm water storages. We will be encouraging farmers to build these storages to their economically optimum height. There will also be a financial incentive program to assist farmers to achieve best practice in irrigation water management. These will be developed in conjunction with rural industry by July 2000. Finally, cost-effective ways of reducing water losses from water storages and distribution systems, as well as those systems provided by irrigation water providers, such as the Department of Natural Resources, will be examined.

Rural industry has recognised the vision shown by the Beattie Government in introducing this scheme. In media statements, Cotton Australia said it would bring valuable gains to rural communities and the environment. Their deputy chairman, Charlie Wilson, described the consultation between Government and industry as the best for a decade. The Queensland dairy industry commended the Government's foresight and commitment to partnership with industry. Queensland's fruit and vegetable growers said that the initiative was an excellent example of how industry and Government could work together to provide significant economic and environmental benefits for growers and regional and State economies. Canegrowers chairman, Harry Bonanno, said the sugar industry, which is the largest user of irrigation water in Queensland, welcomed the move. He said the widespread adoption of best practice water use methods throughout the canegrowing industry would contribute greatly to improved productivity, sustainability and international competitiveness.

This initiative is important for Queensland's future. Not only does it look at conserving one of our most precious resources, it provides opportunities for farmers to improve their profitability by producing more with each megalitre of water. It opens the way to increase agricultural production by \$280m a year, and it provides opportunities to create jobs for another 1,600 Queenslanders, especially in rural and regional areas. This is the type of visionary initiative that the Beattie Government is introducing for rural and regional Queensland. And in partnership with our rural industries, we will continue to take on challenges in resource management— challenges which the previous Borbidge Government found too hard.
