



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 9 June 1999

BURNETT WATER STORAGE

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (6.17 p.m.): I second the amendment. Is this not typical? The can't-do Opposition is complaining about what the Government is doing. Let us make it clear what the Opposition achieved when it was in Government for some two and a half years. It made one decision about a dam. Do members know what it was? It decided that the Comet dam would not go ahead. The one decision that it made about whether a dam would be built was that none would be built. That was about as far as they got.

We see the phantom member for Burnett trying to whip up some steam about the Burnett. Let me tell him about the Burnett. In the Burnett, a catchment planning study was started when the Opposition was in Government. It had basically done nothing else. The WAMP was nowhere near being started. If I had not started it, to this day it would not have started. I brought forward the WAMP for the Burnett so that it would run simultaneously with the other catchment planning studies. I am the one who has taken the initiative to bring forward the WAMPs for the Pioneer and Barron Rivers. Members opposite did nothing.

Five minutes before the election the former Premier ran around saying, "You'll have a dam in five years." The current Premier was not silly enough to make false promises similar to those that the now Opposition Leader made. He said that he was not going to make any silly commitments before the election, because he recognised that planning properly for water in the Burnett was what the Government had to do for the long-term security of water supplies in the Burnett.

Simply building dams without any regard for their capacity to service the needs of people who need water would not be a responsible approach to take. Yes, the member for Burnett can wave around the press statement that has a headline that misleads and misrepresents what the now Premier said. He knows well what the Premier said; he said that we would do what is needed to provide water for the people of the Burnett region, but that we would do it in a responsible way. We are not going to make silly election commitments on the eve of an election in the way that members opposite did.

The reality is that members opposite were in no position to determine any time span within which they were going to deliver on the Burnett, because they had not even started the WAMP—unless what they are now disclosing is that they never intended to do a proper assessment of the water resources and allocation in the Burnett before they built a storage. That is what they are confessing tonight. What they are confessing is that they were planning to build a dam without any assessment of the resource, the capacity for allocations or how they would be allocated, and without any regard to environmental flows to maintain the health of the catchment in the Burnett on which so many of the farming industries of the Burnett depend. That is what they are saying tonight.

Talk about fraud! The member for Burnett is a beauty talking about fraud. The first statement that he ever made about a dam in the Burnett was that it was going to be ready in three years. Then his leader turns around five minutes before the election and says that it is going to be ready in five years. Now they have the hide, having not even started the WAMP, to come in here and complain that our Government has not moved things forward in the Burnett. We have done more in the Burnett in nine months than they did in two and a half years.

Mr Reynolds: They are a bit embarrassed.

Mr WELFORD: They are very embarrassed. We have already got the initial engineering appraisal for the lower Burnett River dam sites out there in the public domain. We have already got the initial environmental evaluation for the lower Burnett River dam sites out there in the public domain. We have got the catchment planning study going. We have got the urban water strategy operating. We have got the ground water rescue project well and truly down the track and are linking it in to the assessment of the river resources in the WAMP.

We have so much happening now in the Burnett that people in the Burnett realise that we are now doing a great deal to progress the issue of water resources in the Burnett—not because the Johnny-come-lately member for Burnett suddenly turns up on his electorate doorstep once every six months, but because the member for Bundaberg has genuine concerns about her community and has got a Government that is responding, unlike the previous Government. Its members could not care less about the member for Burnett because they know that he does not care about his electorate. He is retiring at the end of this term, anyhow, and for the last term he was never in the country. So why would anyone ever worry about him?

Time expired.
