



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

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BURNETT WATER STORAGE

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (6.22 p.m.): As usual we hear from members on the other side of the House this endless rhetoric about how much they have done and are going to. Of course, the reality is that we do not see any results. Again, they have listed a whole heap of things that they reckon they are going to do. There is nothing concrete at all. Why is it that all the people of Bundaberg are still complaining? Why is it that the Bundaberg media and the people of Bundaberg are still complaining that nothing has been done? It is because they, the people, have got it right and members opposite have got it wrong—as usual. So we have to sit and listen to this rhetoric.

I know that the member for Bundaberg is embarrassed. Of course she would be. She would have to be embarrassed because she knows that they are not doing anything. She knows darned well that they are not doing anything and that, even in the future—up until the time of the next election—nothing will be done. However, we will continue to keep them honest in relation to development in the Bundaberg region.

We know that the Bundaberg region is one of the most renowned, one of the most successful and probably the premier horticultural and sugar growing district in the State. We know that and we also know that the fruit and vegetable industry and the sugar industry are now worth about \$160m and \$139m respectively. Those industries provide thousands of jobs for the people of the Burnett. What those on the other side have done is spent most of their time talking about RFAs. Then they went into personal denigration of the member for Burnett. That is all they had; there was no substance in their addresses—none at all. Members opposite know as well as we on this side of the House and the people of Burnett and Bundaberg do that they are failing because they are not delivering. People want to see something. They want to see something that is genuine and real, and they are not seeing it.

But underlying the considerable statistics on the industries of that area is a glaring and very serious problem, and that problem is that the Beattie Government refuses to fix these things despite having been given the tools to do it by the Borbidge Government. Both these industries rely on irrigation water. We talk about irrigation water and the smart practice of using irrigation water, which we agree with absolutely. But there cannot be the smart practice of using irrigation water if there is not the water in the first place. We have to make sure that we have water supply security for the future. If we do not have that, then the rest falls to the ground. Members opposite know that themselves.

The main irrigation supply—the Bundaberg irrigation scheme—which some 70% of growers access, cannot meet the demands placed on it. Underground aquifers are being severely affected by salt water intrusion, which is affecting production levels, water use and soil structure. The Fred Haigh Dam at Gin Gin reached the record low of 3% capacity in 1998. Under this scenario and with successive years of below nominal irrigation allocation levels, horticulture and particularly sugar production has been severely restricted.

Mrs Edmond: You are the ones who promised more water than there ever was. It is my family up there who are affected by this. Then you refused to put in piping for the Monduran Dam.

Mr COOPER: I know that the member is the Minister for Health, but the debate that we are trying to discuss tonight is far, far more important because the people of Bundaberg and Burnett are a darned sight more concerned—and we are concerned for them— than she is. Quite obviously the

Minister for Health is not. Her performance and record up there is no good either, because the people continually criticise her as well.

Water, as we have said, is a scarce commodity. We know that. When water is scarce, growers are faced with the dilemma of whether to water small crops or sugarcane. Sugar is generally the loser in favour of the high return of fruit and vegetables. Tree crop farmers have to decide whether to conserve their allocation and use only sufficient water to keep their trees alive and then use the balance of the allocation later in the hope of getting the trees into production or, alternatively, keep the trees healthy and hope for the best. Under both practices, production is restricted.

Just as we have found with the future of other areas, be it the Lockyer Valley, the Brisbane Valley or the Darling Downs, this area will not have a future unless there is a secure water supply. Members opposite know that. The difficulty they have is actually doing something about it. The difficulty they have is making decisions to actually make things happen. That is why their Government has been such a failure in these past 12 months. It has not delivered on a single thing, except the things that we started. We have done it for them. We are quite happy to continue to show them how.

Time expired.
