



Speech by

Mr TIM MULHERIN

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard 9 June 1999

BURNETT WATER STORAGE

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (6.37 p.m.): What a load of claptrap we have heard from the member for Warrego. He is flashing around the Water Infrastructure Task Force report. What a flawed document! It was a wish list in which every kid got a prize. It never had any scientific basis. It never had any funding allocation.

Mr HOBBS: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I take exception to the statements made by the member. That document was a professional document, backed up by all the consultants that we could find in this State and applauded from the top of this State to the bottom of this State.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr HOBBS: If the member for Mackay says that it was not, then he is a fraud.

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

Mr MULHERIN: What we should be talking about in this debate is the Opposition's failure in Government to take on the real challenges for regional and rural Queensland. Unlike the coalition, this Government is facing up to those challenges, working with regional and rural communities in close consultation to provide a prosperous future for the many families who choose to live outside the south-east corner.

This Government has consistently reaffirmed its commitment to assist the communities of Bundaberg and the Burnett solve their long-term water needs. We have accelerated planning studies in the region and promoted measures to help primary producers improve their agricultural production. Recently this Government introduced the rural water use efficiency initiative, providing \$41m to our primary producers over four years to help them become more profitable. This visionary initiative has been introduced by a Labor Government—a Government looking to the future for all Queenslanders and not just a few mates. It has the potential to increase agricultural production by \$280m annually over the next four years and to create another 1,600 jobs in regional Queensland.

We will be working with primary producers to improve the way in which irrigation water is used. We can, through better water efficiency, save the equivalent of 180,000 megalitres of water. This amount of water could irrigate about 49,000 hectares of agricultural land. If this can be achieved, we are looking at 1,600 new jobs—a great result for Queensland. In the Bundaberg region, the most significant agricultural crops are sugar and fruit and vegetables. These will benefit significantly from the Government's water use efficiency initiative. Both canegrowers and the Queensland fruit and vegetable growers have welcomed this initiative—a genuine partnership between Government and rural industry. Queensland fruit and vegetable growers said 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, Mr 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."

That is the type of visionary initiative the Beattie Government is introducing for rural and regional Queensland. If we are to supply community water needs into the next century, it is important that we make efficient and effective use of existing infrastructure before new water developments are considered. This includes making the best use of available waste water and recycling opportunities. In my electorate of Mackay—another strong sugar growing area—the Government is working with council and rural industry to look at the feasibility of using waste water.

Mr Littleproud: What about the Finch Hatton dam?

Mr MULHERIN: That was a flawed process. A consultation committee was set up, and people said that it was a con job. That was confirmed when the member for Toowoomba South announced on 8 August last year that Labor had stopped the Finch Hatton dam. People were telling me that members opposite were never committed to the consultation process. That was confirmed by the member for Toowoomba South, when he said on the front page of the Courier-Mail on 8 August last year that we had stopped it. So he just perpetrated a fraud on those people and paid lip-service to the consultation process.

The Mackay City Council has expressed an interest in reusing waste water from the Mount Bassett and Bucasia sewerage treatment plant. If it is feasible, such a recycling initiative could have benefits for the entire Mackay community, both residential and rural water users, such as the growers at Farleigh on the north coast area of Mackay. Water is one of our most valuable and scarce resources, and I strongly support this initiative by council to make efficient use of waste water.

This Government is taking a responsible approach to water resources—an approach for future generations. The Opposition has spent 12 months misinforming regional communities, and this debate is yet another attempt to play politics with people's lives, to cause unnecessary anxiety. Over the past 12 months, the Opposition told regional Queensland——

Time expired.
