



Speech by

Mr TIM MULHERIN

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard 16 September 1999

WATER RESOURCES, RURAL QUEENSLAND

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (6.41 p.m.): Talk about political doublespeak: those opposite are past masters at it. It is a bit rich having the coalition talking about this Government's efforts on water infrastructure when those opposite failed dismally during two and a half years in Government. They had their chance to get on with it and they failed. They trumpeted the water infrastructure task force around the State with evangelical zeal. However, the problem with this report was that it was flawed. It was never based on any scientific fact and never had funding allocation. It was a wish list where everyone received a prize. It was like the Fred Haigh Dam—there was nothing in it—no planning, no funding, just wishing and hoping. It was a bit like whistling in the wind to console oneself.

Let us face it, when it had the chance the Opposition failed to take on the real challenges of regional and rural Queensland. It failed to go the hard yards. It failed on water infrastructure and it failed on the RFA. It took this Government to deliver an historic RFA that protects jobs, regional communities and our native forests. As with water infrastructure, the coalition found the RFA too hard. It could not deliver on that one, either.

This can-do Government is facing up to those challenges, working with regional and rural communities to provide a prosperous future for mums and dads and their children. We do not need joy flights to pick dam sites. We are doing the hard work and the proper planning studies to set up Queensland for the long term for when our kids grow up. Not only are we delivering the infrastructure, but we are working with rural industry and regional communities on other water solutions.

It was this can-do Government that 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 was introduced by a Labor Government—a Government looking to the future for all Queenslanders and not just a few mates. This initiative has the potential to increase agricultural production by \$280m annually over the next four years and create another 1,600 jobs in regional Queensland. We are working with primary producers to improve the way in which irrigation water is used.

In my region of Mackay, we are working with the sugar industry. In fact, next week the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources will be handing over a cheque to the local Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations to kick off its adoption programs. Last week, I handed over a cheque to the Mayor of Mackay, Councillor Julie Boyd, on behalf of the Beattie Government to fund a study into the re-use of wastewater from two Mackay sewerage treatment plants to irrigate local sugarcane crops. This involves Mackay City Council and Mackay Canegrowers and offers great potential for both communities and the environment.

The volume of wastewater available from these treatment plants at Mount Bassett and Bucasia treatment plants is the equivalent of a small weir on the Pioneer River, making it an extremely valuable resource. If this recycling initiative project proves to be feasible, there could be benefits for the entire Mackay community. There is no doubt that local canegrowers would benefit from this additional supply of water for irrigation. This particularly applies in the Sandy Creek area where there is salt water intrusion. This project would go a long way towards solving those problems.

Queensland currently recycles only about 10% of the 305,000 megalitres of wastewater produced each year. This is a resource that offers great opportunities to benefit Queensland, its people

and our environment. The water efficiency initiative and our studies into re-use of wastewater are smart ways to go. They are initiatives of the Beattie Government.

We are also working with canegrowers in Mackay on the feasibility of raising the Kinchant Dam. I have taken the Minister to the dam and he has taken a personal interest in this project. He will be speeding up existing studies. Water is one of our most valuable and scarce resources and I strongly support this initiative by council to make efficient use of wastewater.

This Government is taking a responsible approach to water resources—an approach for future generations. The Opposition has spent the past 12 months misinforming regional Queensland communities, and this debate is yet another attempt to play politics. This Government will meet the challenge of supporting regional water needs in an environmentally and economically sustainable way. In partnership with our rural industries, we will continue to take on challenges in resource management—challenges which the previous Borbidge Government could not meet.