



Speech by

VAUGHAN JOHNSON

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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WATER RESOURCES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (11.35 p.m.): It is coincidental that I was having a drink of water and I am about to talk about water. I join in this debate tonight on the Water Resources Amendment Bill. In doing so, I would just like to put on record my support for the efforts and the work that has been put into this debate by the shadow Minister for Natural Resources, Vince Lester, the member for Keppel.

Mr Hayward: It completely exhausted him.

Mr JOHNSON: No, he is not completely exhausted. He is a very intelligent man and understands fully, exactly and precisely what goes on in the irrigation areas of central Queensland. It was people like Vince Lester and members of the Bjelke-Petersen Government who put in place one of the most magnificent water infrastructure programs that we have ever seen in Queensland, let alone any other part of the nation or the world.

I have heard the contributions here this evening made by many speakers from the Opposition side. I also heard some of the contribution of the member for Logan. The water resources amendment legislation is a very, very important issue. It is very pleasing to also see the Honourable Minister for Primary Industries in the House tonight, because I know of his commitment towards these programs and I know of his understanding of the industry and what he has learned in the 18 months that he has been Minister. There are a few points I do want to raise tonight and I hope he takes them on board.

The Fairbairn Dam is a classic example of a Government's commitment along with the community to putting in place infrastructure—a Government with vision, a Government with direction—as the Government did in those years when that dam was built. When we look at the flow-on benefits from that dam, it certainly is a real example of how we can progress this State. We talk about the south-eastern corner of Queensland all the time. There is a lot of emphasis on the south-eastern corner, and many of us know that the majority of Queenslanders live in the south-eastern corner—from Noosa to the border and west to Toowoomba. The point I make here is that it is about relocating population. If we are going to relocate population, we have to have water to sustain that population.

The most important factor here is to recognise the importance of water wherever we are. When we look at the south-eastern corner, we see all that beautiful area in the Redlands—and I see my colleague the honourable member for Redlands in the Chamber here. We see that that electorate probably contained some of the most magnificent vegetable growing areas in Australia until such time as we saw real estate developments overtaking that prime agricultural land. Therefore, we have a situation in which we have to find other agricultural lands to grow vegetables, fruit, crops or whatever.

Mr Palaszczuk: And the Fairbairn Dam is doing just that.

Mr JOHNSON: I thank the Honourable Minister for the interjection. As the Minister has rightfully said, Emerald is doing precisely that. The one thing we have to remember is that to sustain population we have to have that water. Because of the Fairbairn Dam at Emerald, we have seen massive growth there in recent times.

I know that the Minister is referring to a venture put in place by Darwin King, a Filipino family who has just purchased Carl Morowitz's property at Emerald. Carl Morowitz is an American and is one of the pioneers in irrigation in that part of Queensland. He is a very successful businessman and farmer in his

own right and was one of the pioneers in irrigation in that part of Queensland. It is people like Carl Morowitz, Steve Brimblecombe, Charlie Wilson, Cameron Miller and Jim Fleurity—and the names go on and on—who have been the pioneers in irrigation in that part of Queensland.

We have seen substantial growth in that area. Not only have we seen that growth as a result of that water infrastructure, but we have seen growth in the mining industry, too. Again, the mining industry was put in place by a visionary Government of the day. It has to have a certain amount of water to be able to carry on its business operations on a daily basis. Again, we have a situation in which water is the essence of the relocation of population and the essence of regeneration of development, whether it be farming, agriculture, mining or sustaining the population itself.

The point I make is that places such as Emerald—I have said it before and I will say it again—are the Dubbos and Waggas of Queensland; they are the wealth generators of this State and, ultimately, this nation because of good planning and good development, whether it be environmental management or infrastructure management through good engineering. Again it comes back to Governments working with local councils and communities in general to make this become reality.

We talk about food production, mining, cotton and cattle. The other thing is the potential for tourism. As my colleague the honourable member for Callide said tonight, one of the most important things here is the Nathan dam project—and I know the Minister for Primary Industries is listening to what I have to say. It is a grand opportunity for Queensland to be able to put in place another Fairbairn Dam type operation to once again grow a population in that area. We all support the Government's 5% jobs target and I hope that in time it does become a reality. Again, that dam would create jobs, development and growth, but the most important factor is that it creates a quality of life. That is the most important thing. I think we are all about quality of life not only for ourselves, but for our kids and the future generations of this State.

Mr Pearce: What do you reckon it cost to build that dam?

Mr JOHNSON: I cannot tell the honourable member for Fitzroy off the top of my head. It was not a lot of money in those days compared to what it would be now. Mr Lester, how much did it cost to build the Fairbairn Dam?

Mr Lester: \$23m.

Mr JOHNSON: \$23m was a sizeable sum in those times.

Mr Seeney: Repaid many times.

Mr JOHNSON: As the honourable member for Callide said, it has been repaid many times.

Mr Palaszczuk: We were very fortunate that it was completed in '74, just in time for the heavy rains.

Mr JOHNSON: That is right. In 1974 my second daughter was born. That was the year of the Brisbane floods and the big floods in the west. That was a great year. Nineteen seventy-two was a great year, too.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: My eldest daughter was born in '72. That was the one thing that scarred '72!

Mr Palaszczuk: My second daughter was born in 1974 as well.

Mr JOHNSON: We have something in common.

We speak about planning, the environment and so on. However, it all comes back to one thing—the people factor. The Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources is not in the Chamber tonight. However, this Government seems to place a lot of emphasis on environmental issues. We are all environmentalists. Those who have lived in the far west of the State, such as my colleagues the honourable members for Warrego, Keppel and others and I know what the western areas are all about. Some honourable members have been farmers in different areas of the State. They know that, unless they carry out their management programs in a professional and businesslike manner and look after their properties, they will perish. It is important to recognise their professionalism and ability to manage their properties.

Four or five years ago, when the Central Highlands was gripped by drought, the Fairbairn Dam was down to about 17% capacity. Tonight the member for Western Downs referred to water allocations and the transfer of allocations. I know that farmers on the end of some of the channels could not get water, because the big operators had the water tied up. The little fellows at the end of the line were perishing. My reference to the big fellas tying up the water was not meant to be derogatory. They were smart enough to look after their operations and I applaud them for that. However, if the water cannot be used in that year, I think a program has to be put in place so that it can be transferred in a reliable manner so as to help people to grow their crops successfully. At the end of the day, none of us wants

to see the bloke next door perish because somebody further up the channel has all of the allocation. That has to be looked at.

Mr Pearce: That's a good point.

Mr JOHNSON: The honourable member for Fitzroy is a neighbour of mine on the eastern side. He understands what some of those people have been subjected to over the past few years because of the problems associated with the transfer of allocations.

The Water Resources Amendment Bill covers boards, transfers, allocations and the continued existence of areas. Existence is the prime reason for our talking about this subject. I mentioned the success of the Fairbairn Dam. We know how successful the Burdekin Falls Dam, to the north, has been. I urge Government members to make certain that we get these dams built. It is absolutely paramount that we get the Nathan dam built so that future generations in this State can take advantage of it.

While on the subject of water, I wish to raise a subject affecting my area of western Queensland. I refer to the Cooper Creek issue. The Minister for Primary Industries is in the Chamber. I applaud the stand he has taken in Opposition and in Government of opposing irrigation in that pristine area. It is one of the most magnificent natural beef producing areas of Australia, if not the world. It is a natural delta area. Millions of dollars of cattle have been produced there over the past 100-odd years. Again, it all comes back to environmental management. The people born and bred in that environment know how best to manage it and how to put in place management practices that will deliver that asset to the future generations of this State and nation in the pristine condition it is in today. As I said, it is a natural delta. Thousands of cattle are trucked out of there every year, for example, from places owned by Stanbroke, the AA Company, Kidman Holdings and private operators such as David Brook and Mortons at Birdsville. The list goes on and on.

My point is that these people are the best managers of the environment. They understand it fully and they have been taught how to manage it over time. Last week I met with officers from the Premier's Department and the Departments of Environment and Heritage and Natural Resources in relation to the irrigation concepts being proposed for the Cooper. The Barcoo Shire has been fighting this cause for a long time—under the former Goss Government, the former Borbidge/Sheldon Government and now under the Beattie Government. I will be looking very closely at the amendments to the legislation that will be debated in this House in March next year. I urge all honourable members to familiarise themselves with this issue. The Minister for Primary Industries and the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing have been strong opponents of irrigation on the Cooper, as have members on this side of the House and also the Premier.

This is something that we cannot interfere with. It is an environmental issue of monumental proportions. It is sacred not only to the people from that part of Queensland but from the entire State and nation who want to see it preserved indefinitely. At the moment, those in the south-west corner have in place what they call the Opal beef program, which is resulting in clean beef—beef free of chemicals and pesticides—now being exported straight to Japan. That market is taking off. The Minister is nodding his head in agreement. These people have done a lot of the groundwork themselves. I know that they have had cooperation, assistance and support from both the State and Federal Governments. This area has been proven in beef, mutton and wool production over many years. We must preserve it in its natural, clean state. Areas around Emerald, Goondiwindi and Dirranbandi have been subjected to chemicals. Departmental officers and farmers are working in cooperation to make sure that we eliminate some of these problems. This is an issue that we have to work through together to make certain that we get the best deal for all of these areas. Water will be the governing factor.

The great American industrialist Harvey Firestone—the man who invented the inner pneumatic tube for modern-day motor car tyres; and I note that most modern-day car tyres are now tubeless—said at the time he invented that tube, "You don't fix things or create things by throwing money at them. You've got to throw brains at them first." It is important that we acknowledge that principle of Harvey Firestone in respect of the future development of water infrastructure in this State.

We want to be a progressive State and develop this State in a pristine way whilst at the same time developing those food growing areas and repopulate them by redirecting the populations from the south-east corner and away from other over populated areas. Emerald, Biloela, Goondiwindi, Dirranbandi, the Burdekin area in north Queensland or the tablelands in north Queensland are great places to live. They are all fantastic places to live. Many people in this House have lived in parts of Queensland other than the south-east corner. That is something that we have to do. When I was Minister for Transport we launched the Integrated Regional Transport Plan, better known as the IRTP. I know that the Government is further embracing and further improving that. That is how we can develop and build better communities, better transport corridors, water infrastructure, communication corridors and the whole bit so that planning and development of living infrastructure can be put in place without too much dislocation of families and dislocation of assets, etc.

As Governments, as Oppositions and as legislators we have to make absolutely certain that we put in place the necessary infrastructure—especially water—and the necessary public utilities, to be able to sustain that population. The Central Highlands area, the Callide area, the Surat Basin area, the area further north around Moranbah and the area at the top end are rich with mining developments and natural resources. Those go hand in hand with increasing the population of those areas. That goes hand in hand with farming and hand in hand with mining.

We can make this State the greatest State in the world by making sure that we get the planning and development right, but at the same time that WAMP process has to be worked through properly and precisely so that communities everywhere can take advantage of it. I say to the Minister—I see he is back in the Chamber now—we should not err on this. This is something that is very important to future generations. We have to get this absolutely right now so the generations of tomorrow and years after can take advantage of something that we got right. We should do that.

Time expired.
