



Speech by

Mr DOUG SLACK

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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WATER ALLOCATION AND MANAGEMENT PLANS

Mr SLACK (Burnett—NPA) (6.43 p.m.): This debate is about the development of an adjustment package for those irrigators who will have their entitlements withdrawn as a result of this Government's action. It is not about platitudes such as those contained in the amendment moved by the Minister. The amendment is rhetoric. There is no mention of compensation for people who are entitled to it. It is about time this Beattie Labor Government put its money where its mouth is, instead of going on with rhetoric and talking about incentives and about all the things it is going to do—things it has not done.

On quite a number of occasions I have had to sit in this House and listen to the Premier say that he will stick up for the farmers. The most recent occasion was yesterday morning when he asked the Chamber whether it was about time someone stood up for the farmers.

Earlier tonight we heard of Mr Welford's acknowledgment that for this water allocation management plan process "a decent incentives package is required" and that "our State will play its part". I ask Minister Welford to let the State play its part. Let the Government stand up for farmers and prove that its promises are no more than mealy-mouthed platitudes—a grab-bag of political expediency.

If farmers will not be adversely affected by these water resource issues, why is the Government utterly opposed to providing mechanisms for compensation over changes to existing water entitlements? There is only one answer to this question, and it is obvious. The Government has no intention of putting together any adjustment package in consultation with rural industries in Queensland or to support those irrigators who have invested heavily in their land, water infrastructure or existing water entitlements.

This Government is not prepared to contemplate the human side of its callous approach and the widespread implications of financial insecurity caused by its water and vegetation management policies. Financiers are getting nervous about advancing money to primary industry. This is already happening in many areas of Queensland. Not only farmers but also bank managers are getting very worried about the value of their future security in on-farm mortgages. This erodes confidence not only in the rural sector but also in the wider regional business sector. The tightening in spending leads to job losses in these regions—something they can ill afford. The name of the game is confidence, and the appalling handling of the Vegetation Management Bill and the Water Bill has eroded farmer confidence dramatically.

The Minister argues that he is working to provide greater security for water entitlements in the long term, but farmers already thought they had security of water resources until this Labor Government came along. In my own electorate farmers are getting increasingly confused and frustrated by this Government's manoeuvrings over its plans for the Burnett River catchment and the proposed major water storage. One minute the Government was arguing against an Opposition motion calling for a recommitment to Paradise dam within the promised five-year time frame and the next minute it was voting for it. No wonder the voters of the Burnett and Bundaberg regions do not know what is going on with water. I do not think this Government knows what is going on, and it changes its mind on a daily basis.

This also begs the question of just who is making the decisions about water resources. Is it the Minister for Natural Resources or is it the Deputy Premier, Minister Elder? Just last week the media of

the Burnett were treated to another politically inspired intrigue involving water. It involved Minister Elder and all sorts of conspiracy theories, and it certainly confused those members of the Burnett Water Development Group, not to mention many mayors and councillors from the region who were travelling to Bundaberg on the gazetted day to hand over their submission to the draft Burnett water allocation management plan.

Farmer representative groups had been asking Minister Welford for months to release a social and economic impact report of irrigation on the Burnett River which was prepared by the Centre for Agricultural Research Economics. I asked Minister Elder during the Estimates committee hearing to release this report or extend the deadline. These groups went so far as to send a delegation to the Minister asking for the WAMP submission deadline to be extended so that they could have access to this and another Government report before their submission was prepared. Even the executive chairman who compiled the CARE report said that he was disappointed the Government would not release the report's finding to the public—but to no avail. Minister Welford was still not prepared to extend the submission deadline for the Burnett WAMP.

Then a funny thing happened. Minister Elder, acting in the absence of Minister Welford, decided to extend the WAMP submission deadline—finally—but he did this just a few hours before submissions were due. This meant that all those people who had prepared their submissions in time and were invited to the planned handover had to turn around and go back home. Now Minister Elder has indicated that the economic and social impacts as detailed in this CARE report will be released in time for the revised deadline. Let us hope it is released more than a few hours before the deadline.

Of course, things got even more strange when Minister Elder claimed that the Burnett Water Development Group had set him up over invitations to the handover of its water submission, claiming that the Opposition had—

Time expired.
