



Speech by

Hon. RUSSELL COOPER

MEMBER FOR CROWS NEST

Hansard 12 April 2000

WATER STORAGE, BURNETT RIVER

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (6.36 p.m.): I commend the coalition for once again raising this issue of Paradise dam on the Burnett River, because—

Mr Welford: You only raised it because you know we are about to finalise the WAMP.

Mr COOPER: Not only has the Minister had his go; he is constantly showing his ignorance. The fact is that, once again, the Minister has been shown up because he still has not delivered on this dam and other water infrastructure around the State which is so badly needed. As I said, I commend the coalition for continuing to raise this issue—and it will continue to raise it—until such time as the Government starts to make some decisions. That is the Government's problem. This has been only a political and cynical exercise in delay. The Government is setting the scene for more delay. That is so cruel for the farmers of that area. It is about time the Government started to make decisions. Then it would not have to have these debates.

I must admit that I enjoy those tete-a-tetes between the member for Burnett and the member for Bundaberg very much indeed. I know that the member for Burnett has a habit of getting under the skin of the member for Bundaberg.

Mr Littleproud interjected.

Mr COOPER: As the member for Western Downs said, maybe they can sort it out with pistols at dawn. However, the member for Burnett is fairly quick on the draw. The Opposition would like to see the member for Bundaberg out of the way so that we can get on with the job, instead of trying to be obstructive and stop this thing from happening.

The issue of water supply and security of supply is paramount for water irrigation systems. At present a reasonable system exists, but there must be security of supply and there must be continuity of supply. The Government should ask the irrigators—but, of course, it does not know any of these people—about their water needs and wants. This issue does not just relate to the Paradise dam in the Burnett. In a number of other areas people have to have security of supply so that they can maintain their productivity. That is absolutely vital. It is the sort of thing that the member could well learn. These things must be delivered. The Government cannot delay continually.

Another example of the need for a water supply and continuity of supply is the Dirranbandi area. If the Minister cares to visit that area he will find out what water can do. Dirranbandi was mainly just a wool-producing area. As we know, the wool industry has collapsed, and it has been collapsed for some time. The advent of a water supply at Dirranbandi has made that place blossom. Now people can go out there and see cotton growing where it has never grown before—and grapes, melons and every other type of fruit and vegetable that one could think of. The productivity in that area now is second to none. That demonstrates clearly that such things can be done and they should be done. I mention also the proposed dam on the Flinders River in the Richmond area. That is another area that is desperately in need of development through the provision of water infrastructure. It can be done. It should be done.

The Government has continually backed off from making decisions. I have had talks with the Deputy Premier about a pipeline from Wivenhoe Dam to Atkinsons Dam. Again, the people in the Buaraba area—150 irrigators—desperately need that continuity of supply, because Atkinsons Dam is not a reliable supply. We have to work out ways and means of getting that water across from Wivenhoe

Dam to Atkinsons Dam so that those people can have continuity of supply. That does not necessarily mean that the number of irrigators has to be increased; it means that those irrigators should be given enough water to be able to do the job and to be able to maintain their productivity. That applies in St George and other areas as well.

It is all very well to have these irrigation systems; we need them desperately, but the apathy towards water storages and the smart use of water that we have seen in this country for 210 years is pathetic. We can improve; we must improve. It is one thing to have slanging matches across the Chamber all night about it, but the important thing is to start actually getting in and doing some of these things and doing them in a smart way.

Yes, of course we all recognise that science needs to be used. but we are sick and tired of the cynical excuses for not proceeding with these things. Once the decisions have been made and some of these things actually start rolling out—from the pipeline to Paradise dam and others—one thing will flow from another. It is not all that difficult then; they do not have to be paid off overnight at all. Often the payments can be made over a 50-year period.

Time expired.
