



Speech by

Mr TIM MULHERIN

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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WATER STORAGE, BURNETT RIVER

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (6.42 p.m.): What we should be talking about in this debate is the Opposition's failure to take on real challenges for regional and rural Queensland when they were in Government. 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 chose 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. It is naive at best to think that dams or weirs can be built without proper planning, but we continue to hear those trying to do cheap point scoring saying, "Build, build, build."

Only last week in my seat of Mackay the regional manager of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Craig Joy, was doing a Doug Slack and saying we should build Urannah dam, which was another one of the coalition's magic tricks: pick a site on a river and wave the magic wand for a dam to appear. Do not worry about whether it is sustainable, do not worry about whether it will impact on the health of the river system, and do not worry about the effects on the community; don't you worry about any of that.

What the member for Burnett and his mates on the other side of the Chamber did when they created their wish list just before the last election was try to manipulate the electorate. The proposed Urannah dam is in the Burdekin catchment; a WAMP is under way in that catchment and the planning process will provide the long-term answers about whether it is viable.

I should also mention that a WAMP process has been under way in the Pioneer catchment in my area of Mackay and will be completed later this year. Apart from a WAMP process giving us the right answers, there are other aspects of water use we never hear the coalition mention. This includes water efficiency and reuse of waste water. In Mackay, another strong sugar growing area, the Government is working with council and rural industries to look at the feasibility of using waste water. The Mackay City Council has expressed an interest in reusing water from the Mount Bassett and Bucasia sewerage treatment plants. If it is feasible, such recycling initiatives could have huge benefit for the entire community of Mackay. Unfortunately, all we hear from members like the member for Burnett and his colleague the member for Warwick is that we should be out there building infrastructure. Why? Because they are still trying to gain credibility over their wish list conveniently drawn up just before the election! Everyone knows they did not do their homework then and they are still not doing their homework now.

The other problem members on the other side of the Chamber are facing is their mates in Canberra. What they should be doing is trying this argument on Senator Hill. I hear he is pretty interested in Queensland politics. Senator Hill seems to be having a say on every Queensland issue at the moment. So why do coalition members not try to get his support? The answer is simple: they know that Senator Hill and the Federal coalition would laugh to hear their version of managing our rivers: throw in concrete, do not worry about the impact on fish habitats or the environment, just build a dam and look after their mates.

Do Opposition members ever stop to think about the cost of water from these dams they want to build? How about this scenario: let us forget the studies and build a dam and recover the cost of that by selling the water. What if the water is so expensive that no-one, including our farmers, could afford to buy it? Opposition members would probably cut health services, reduce police numbers, close schools and make sure farmers got the water at the subsidised price. Before they do that, they should give Senator Hill a ring. I hear he is pretty interested in National Competition Policy—making sure that if a dam is going to be built it is economically and environmentally viable. If they would like to call him, I will provide his number. It is (02) 6277 7111; just ask for Senator Hill.

The logic members on the other side apply is just as outstanding. The member for Burnett suggested the Government voted to break the Premier's election promise to construct a major water storage on the Burnett River within five years. I have checked through Hansard. I cannot see any votes like that. It is more of the same. They do not like to let the facts get in the way.

It is the same story we are hearing over and over again about water infrastructure. The member for Burnett must have relatives in the concrete industry. In the year 2000 the community expects more of Government. They expect decisions to be based on good science and to be in the best interests of the entire community, not just the ever-diminishing mates of the National Party.

We will look after the people of Bundaberg and Burnett. We have a member in Nita Cunningham prepared to do the hard work and who does not waste her time with half-truths and cheap point scoring. At least she spends some real time in her electorate.
