



Speech by

Hon. V. LESTER

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

Hansard 7 September 2000

MACKAY; SUGAR INDUSTRY

Hon. V. P. LESTER (Keppel—NPA) (6.32 p.m.): The refusal of this do-nothing Beattie Labor Government to undertake any new water infrastructure projects in this State will, by the time the next State election rolls around—whether it is sooner or whether it is later—have set Queensland back by two or three years. This is a blinkered and illogical refusal that is costing this State opportunities to create jobs, diversify into new industries and support the continued development of existing industries.

The Beattie Government went to the election on a jobs, jobs, jobs platform. The Premier said he wanted his Ministers to wake up every morning thinking about jobs, jobs, jobs. But the Minister for Natural Resources must wake up every morning thinking how best he can destroy jobs, jobs, jobs, because this Minister and his Labor Government have presided over a freeze on water infrastructure development that would embarrass the ice age. With the passage of the new Water Bill just this afternoon, the Beattie Government has embarked upon another campaign to stymie investment and job creation in the industries and the regions of this State that depend so heavily on water.

No area in this State has felt the Beattie Government's dead hand on water development more than the Mackay and Whitsunday regions. This area is a jewel in the primary industries crown of this State. It is renowned for its sugar production, its mining industry, its beef industry and its horticultural industries. This area contributes so much to the State already but has the potential to contribute so much more. It has the natural resources, it has the climate, it has the expertise and it has the work force. But what the Mackay and Whitsundays regions need to unleash their true potential is water, a precious resource that the Beattie Labor Government will deny the area.

The former coalition Government recognised the potential of the Mackay and Whitsundays regions, and we recognised the need for more water in those regions. In the \$1 billion water infrastructure implementation plan, a raft of projects, large and small, featured as Category 1 priorities. There was the 200,000 megalitre St Helen's Creek dam at Mackay. It was cancelled even before a feasibility study had been completed and the WAMP process had commenced. The 36,000 megalitre Finch Hatton dam at Mackay was also cancelled before any feasibility studies had been completed. The 1.5 million megalitre Urannah dam was stalled. The extension of the long-awaited Elliot main channel was dumped. I simply say: properly constructed, dams mean more jobs and primary and second industry expansion. Nothing much happens if there are no dams. One needs only to look at the Fairbairn Dam and other dams to see evidence of that claim.

These were all big projects. What about the smaller but no less valuable projects? We have the story of the O'Connell River weir. That was a proposal to provide 6,000 megalitres for irrigation for the local sugar industry. It would not have even cost the Government \$1m to build the thing and start supplying much-needed water for local farmers. It was a project that local canegrowers could not get the Goss Government interested in either, so they put up their own hard-earned money to investigate its feasibility. But this job-destroying Minister, with one stroke of his pen, killed off the O'Connell River weir. He wrote back to those farmers with a list of reasons why it could not be done, reasons that his own department had not even identified as problems.

Since the election of the Beattie Government, every single one of these projects has either been axed, deferred or disappeared. The member for Mackay and his Government should hang their heads in shame, because they have done nothing to provide the water that the people so desperately need to develop their industries and to create jobs. The Beattie Government is a do-nothing

Government for Mackay and the Whitsundays. It does not care about the district. It thinks it can win the seat of Mackay again. I have news for the Labor Party: it will not win the seat of Mackay again. It is a fact that this Government does not understand the needs of country people. If country people are not making a profit, if regional people are not making a profit—

Time expired.
