



Speech by

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CONDAMINE-BALONNE WAMP

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (12.02 p.m.): Today I would like to talk about the Condamine-Balonne water allocation and management plan and the ongoing problems it seems to have caused. This issue has been going on for a number of years without a satisfactory outcome. It has created uncertainty in the rural communities along the whole segment of that catchment. The process has been flawed, there has been no acknowledgment of stakeholder concerns, there has been no consideration of social and economic factors, there has been no recognition of property rights and there is no hope of a satisfactory outcome if only environmental considerations are used as a basis for extractions of water in that system.

The previous process brought towns to their knees, pitted neighbour against neighbour and caused uncertainty throughout the whole community. There is a lack of confidence out there in many of those towns and communities, in small business, with bankers and with farmers. You do not have to be Einstein to work out that, if the banking industry is unsure of the future for that particular region, there will be a lot of nervous people worried about their assets, particularly the farmers and small business operators in those towns.

In places like St George, Dirranbandi and further up into Surat and Chinchilla as well, but particularly in Dirranbandi, an enormous amount of expansion took place and a lot of small businesses were started up. It is the same in St George, where building sheds were constructed and a lot of expansion took place. Then suddenly they found that the ground was pulled out from under them. That has certainly had a serious impact on their confidence.

It has been four months now since the original water allocation and management plan was announced, and we need to have some answers. I call on the government to announce when the social and economic assessment will be announced and to advise if it has reassessed the flawed findings of that previous WAMP. I also ask: does it expect cutbacks in the present extraction allocations?

Mixed messages are being delivered at present. One is that a cap will be in place by June this year. This is the result of the minister's ministerial council meeting recently down south. Then there was a news broadcast that no decision would be made for a further six months. So there is some uncertainty out there as to what is happening, as to what the future holds. But lives are on hold. We need to get some decisions and we need to get those decisions fairly quickly.

The Condamine-Balonne has one of the highest end-of-valley flows in the whole Murray-Darling basement catchment of eastern Australia, and people need to remember that. There seems to be a perception out there that water extraction is bad and that if we are going to allow even further extractions it will be worse. But the reality is that further extractions can be allowed and the Condamine-Balonne in Queensland will still have one of the highest end-of-valley flows in the whole of the Murray-Darling system. What must be remembered also is that, if the government cuts back on existing licences and sends the water over the border, it will only go to the irrigators in New South Wales. So all it would be doing is taking water off our farmers and giving it to New South Wales farmers for them to use—and they will use the water because New South Wales and Victoria have no mechanisms in place to cap the use of water. That is what will happen. I say: look after Queensland first.

I also ask the minister and any other government members who wish to do so to go out there to have a look at what has happened in that region. It is really quite exciting to see that an area can

develop so well in a lot of ways with very little government funding. It is private enterprise that is putting the money up and creating all that work and activity. There is certainly a lot of excitement there.

One of the schemes that was started back in our time in government—and the previous government continued it to a certain degree with limited funding—was the Development Incentive Scheme. It was a great scheme which allowed a certain amount of assistance to be put together to assist in the building of water storages. That meant that if three, four, five or 10 people wanted to band together they could get enough water storage put together to create the production that would maybe sustain a cotton gin or some other sort of factory. It was related to regional development because that sort of activity leads to further development in any region. That scheme certainly has put families back on the land. This is what we are aiming for: we are trying to keep people together; we are trying to create economic activity, and this is one way it can be done.

Time expired.
