



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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WATER INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT (BURNETT BASIN) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (3.18 p.m.): The opposition will be supporting this bill. It is debatable whether this bill should have been brought to the parliament by the Minister for State Development or the Minister for Natural Resources. However, there is little point dwelling on that argument at this stage. The fact is that this bill amends the Water Infrastructure Development (Burnett Basin) Act 2001 to include in that act an amendment to the Water Resource (Burnett Basin) Plan 2000, which is part of the Water Act. Irrespective of the reasons for this bill's introduction by the Minister for State Development rather than the Minister for Natural Resources, I am pleased to see it before the House, because this legislation is but the first step in a long process that will be necessary to correct the Beattie government's failed water reform process. More correctly, this legislation is the first step in a long process that will be necessary to correct the failed water reform process of the former Minister for Natural Resources, Mr Welford.

I am pleased to see this legislation before the House because it does three things. Firstly, it allows the construction of the Paradise Dam on the Burnett River to proceed. It also allows the Barlil Weir and the Eidsvold Weir and the raising of the Jones Weir infrastructure developments to proceed. Secondly, even though it is not by stated intent, this bill clarifies some arguments that have raged for some time about the purpose and meaning of water resource plans, environmental flow limits and environmental flow objectives in particular. Thirdly, I am particularly pleased that this bill has been introduced because it provides confirmation that the arguments that I and other members of the opposition have made in relation to Mr Welford's water reform process have been exactly right. This bill proves that we have been right all along. I will deal with those three things individually and in some detail because even though the opposition will be supporting this legislation, it is critically important that every member of this House understands the full implications of this bill. More importantly perhaps, it is critically important that everyone with an interest in the water industry in Queensland understands very well the full implications of this legislation.

As I said, the first thing that this legislation does—and its stated intent—is to allow the planned water storage infrastructure in the Burnett Valley to proceed. This bill seeks to amend the environmental flow objectives in the water resource plan for the Burnett River to accommodate that proposed water storage infrastructure. I am pleased about that because that infrastructure development is long awaited, it is long overdue, and it is badly needed in the Burnett region. I have been a long-time supporter of that infrastructure and have worked for many years—even before I was a member of this parliament—to see that infrastructure become a reality.

The major part of that planned infrastructure is the Paradise Dam project on the Burnett River about mid-way between Gayndah and Bundaberg. This legislation will also allow the other smaller upstream infrastructure developments to proceed. Some of those jobs, like the raising of the Jones Weir at Mundubbera, have been delayed and delayed and postponed and put off for an exceptionally long and totally unacceptable time. With the passage of this legislation those jobs can finally proceed and solve some of the critical water storage problems in those particular areas of the catchment.

The opposition has always supported the responsible and sustainable development of water infrastructure on the Burnett River, and we will continue to do so by supporting this legislation in the House today. We have always supported the Paradise Dam, which is the major project in this

development, as it will provide enormous economic benefits to the lower end of the Burnett catchment, to the central Queensland region and to Queensland as a whole. In fact, we committed to the building of that dam in 1995, and it was only our commitment that forced the Premier to make a similar commitment on behalf of the Labor Party to protect the Labor Party's interests in the seats of Bundaberg and Burnett. It is also worth noting again that the Premier's commitment was to commence a dam in the Burnett within his first term. He has clearly failed to do that despite the fact that the government has had our support all the way on this issue. The Premier has failed to meet his commitment to the people of the Burnett region and there is no escaping that reality.

The construction of this dam will allow the development of some major industrial spin-offs as well as ensuring better water supplies for existing industries that have struggled with ongoing water shortages to date. It will also consolidate supplies in the central Burnett area around Gayndah and Mundubbera. Until now water has been released from that area through the Claude Wharton Weir at Gayndah to supply the Bundaberg irrigation area. With the construction of the Paradise Dam to supply water to the Bundaberg irrigation area, the need to release water from these upstream structures for that purpose will cease to exist and that water will be able to be used in the central Burnett.

The opposition also strongly supports the other infrastructure which this bill facilitates. That is the raising of the Walla Weir, which seems to have been forgotten by the current government or pushed to one side. But let me make it very clear again that our support for that project remains strong. We also strongly support the construction of new weirs at Barlil near Murgon and at Eidsvold and the raising of the Jones Weir at Mundubbera. Those projects, although relatively small, will bring major benefits for the communities of the Burnett Valley. The Burnett River Dam, the major infrastructure, is proposed to be located 80 kilometres south of Bundaberg and about 131 kilometres from the river mouth. The proposed major dam is expected to yield about 130,000 megalitres per annum. The Coordinator General has required the proponent to prepare an environmental impact statement pursuant to part 4 of the State Development and Public Works Organization Act 1971. The EIS has been prepared, and it addresses those aspects of the terms of reference for the Burnett River project that relate to significant new and upgraded water storage and distribution infrastructure for irrigation in the Burnett Basin.

Under the provisions of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999—the federal act—the Minister for the Environment and Heritage has decided that the action is a controlled action. The protected matters, that is, those of national environmental significance for this project, have been identified as listed threatened species, listed threatened communities and listed migratory species. I understand that the state government is awaiting approval from the federal government under the terms of that Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. I want to take this opportunity in this parliament to urge my federal government colleagues to expedite that process. This proposal is important to the region as a major dam will support agriculture and industrial expansion in the lower Burnett River area.

Some of the estimated economic impacts associated with the Burnett water infrastructure projects include almost 1,200 full-time construction jobs and the creation of up to 7,500 new jobs associated with the increased agricultural production that this project will bring. The development will produce increased agricultural production of more than \$1 billion a year in direct terms—\$1 billion a year—and over \$1.6 billion in increased turnover. By any standards it is a major project for the state.

The proposed weir at Barlil is located on Barambah Creek 135 kilometres upstream of its convergence with the Burnett River and about eight kilometres north-west of the township of Murgon. While it is a much smaller project than the Paradise Dam project, the economic benefits that it will provide to the South Burnett region will be just as important to the people of that region. It is expected to be approximately seven metres above bed level at the site and have an estimated storage capacity of 1,600 megalitres. Jones Weir is located on the Burnett River 240 kilometres upstream from the river mouth and immediately adjacent to the township of Mundubbera. This project involves raising the weir by approximately 1.5 metres, which will increase the capacity of the reservoir by 2,700 megalitres.

No single piece of water infrastructure has been more long awaited or more times promised and not delivered than the raising of the Jones Weir at Mundubbera. No issue has occupied more of my time since I have represented that area than this simple raising of the Jones Weir. It is a very simple, relatively small job that should have been done years ago. It will make some extra water available in an area where water is short, and it will allow the Mundubbera shire to access enough water for its urban use. Currently, the Mundubbera Shire Council is forced to purchase 200 megalitres a year from its neighbour the Gayndah shire.

The Eidsvold Weir is located on the Burnett River five kilometres north-west of Eidsvold. There is a capital cost of \$18 million and it is expected to yield around 18,500 megalitres per annum for potential users in established industries that produce vegetables, citrus, peanuts, fruit, nuts, table grapes, pigs, dairy, fodder and urban uses in the very productive central Burnett region. This infrastructure package is long overdue and badly needed, and the process involved in its planning has been long and convoluted and unarguably very comprehensive. It is time that these dams and weirs

were built, and the sooner physical site work begins the better for all the communities in the Burnett Basin.

I now turn to the second of the things that this bill does, to which I referred at the beginning of this speech. As well as facilitating the construction of infrastructure development, this legislation secondly clarifies some arguments that have raged for some time about the purpose and the meaning of water resource plans and their environmental flow limits and objectives in particular. The water resource plans which were the product of the water allocation management planning, or WAMP, process used a number of measures to determine the current situation in the river as well as illustrate the impact of any new proposals at a particular site.

These measures were developed to demonstrate the current impact of water use and to provide a measure of the impact of proposed development. The idea was to determine what amount of water was available for consumptive use at any particular level of impact. There were a range of such measures developed, including the remaining percentage of natural mean annual flow, which is probably the simple one and which this legislation seeks to amend for the Burnett River; the percentage of natural mean wet season flow; the annual proportional flow deviation, or APFD; and the average recurrence interval, or ARI, for 1.5-year intervals, five-year intervals and 20-year intervals. The last point is one of the indicators this legislation seeks to amend.

The draft WAMP documents each contained an application of each measure against the current situation and a situation that would exist if all current licences were developed. These measures were applied at a number of situations, or nodes, along the river system. In that regard they were a valuable tool to illustrate what is by its very nature a very difficult situation to understand and a very difficult situation to define and describe.

The WAMP documents also contained a theoretical plot of those measures for the river system after the proposed developments had been modelled or factored into the system. The draft WAMP documents also contain two other terms which have become the crux of much debate since this process began. The environmental flow limit, or EFL, was defined in the draft WAMP documents as 'the level below which there is an increased risk of unacceptable environmental degradation'. This measure is now more often referred to as the environmental flow objectives. The second controversial term was the planned development limit, or PDL, which was defined in the draft WAMP documents as 'the level of deviation from the EFL that would accommodate existing and future water resource development and water usage.

It is obvious from the definitions of these terms that the setting of these levels was always going to be somewhat arbitrary, and it had to be so for two reasons. The measures developed to illustrate the impacts of any development were based on comparisons of the so-called natural flow of the river. The natural flow figure formed the basis for the comparisons and, of course, that natural flow was impossible to measure, given that there has been 150 years of development in the catchment and a natural situation no longer exists. Therefore, a modelling system had to be developed to mimic or model the river system to allow the effects of the current development to be excluded. The aim was to arrive at a calculated mean natural flow as a basis for comparison with current and future flows. This was the only way to allow any sort of comparison of various scenarios and their impacts. The basis for the comparisons was with the so-called natural flow, which in itself had to be a product of the model.

The model and the modelling techniques were obviously very important, not only to establish the basis for comparisons but also to establish the accuracy and the relevance of any developed comparative measure of impact on the river. The accuracy and the integrity of the model was especially important if those comparative measures were to be used to make policy decisions which would have profound impacts on many individuals and communities as these so obviously were. If the measures were to be the basis of any legislative process, then they had to have integrity. They had to be able to stand up to the most rigorous peer group challenge. That has been shown not to be the case—not by the opposition or by me, even though the opposition and I have long claimed that we believed that not to be the case. It was an appeal hearing in the Land Court that showed the lack of integrity and accuracy in the process.

The first time the department's process was used to try to defend the government's position in a court case, it failed miserably to do so, and the government was forced to surrender the case before judgment was delivered against the Department of Natural Resources. Honourable members in this House should remember that I have spoken about this case before. We are still awaiting a response from the Minister for Natural Resources to its wide-reaching implications. I note with some dismay that the Minister for Natural Resources is not on the speakers list for this debate. I would have thought this was an issue which the Minister for Natural Resources would have insisted he had an input into. I also note with some puzzlement that the member for Burnett is not on the speakers list. I would have thought the member for Burnett would be one member in this parliament who would have ensured he had an input into this debate.

The Land Court case at St George had wide-ranging implications on the whole water reform process. On 4 August 1999 Anchorage Farming Pty Ltd applied to the Department of Natural Resources to amalgamate water harvesting licences which had been issued with respect to their properties in the St George district. The purpose of the application was to allow the appellants to use licences already issued in conjunction with the water harvesting infrastructure constructed on a property and to use that water for irrigation purposes.

Exercising their rights pursuant to the Judicial Review Act, the appellants requested the DNR to provide reasons for the decision it made to refuse that application. In providing those reasons the DNR advised that the decision involved consideration of the draft WAMP and the findings that to allow the application would facilitate an increase in the diversion of water in circumstances where the draft WAMP and the technical studies upon which it was based showed that the available water resource was overcommitted, with consequent deterioration in riverine health and ecological outcomes. DNR further advised that it was decided to refuse the application because if it was granted the increase in diversion of water could contribute to further deterioration in riverine health and ecological outcomes as once again defined in the draft WAMP.

It is very important to recognise that the draft WAMP was the basis of the reasoning for refusing the application to amalgamate those existing licences the subject of that court case. This was a draft WAMP that was based on a modelling system that has been used in every other river system in the state, including the Burnett, the Border Rivers system and the Fitzroy River.

The documents DNR relied upon in seeking to resist that appeal and which were put before the court included both the draft WAMP and the environmental flow technical report prepared during the WAMP study process. The essential process of reasoning upon which the draft WAMP was based was that the technical analysis of information gathered from test sites in the lower Balonne led to the DNR putting forward the conclusion that there had been significant ecological damage.

A further matter that emerged from the evidence was the lack of correlation between flows in the river, natural flows and the ecological condition of the river. The evidence suggested and demonstrated that there was no attempt in the modelling undertaken to establish what would be the natural flow in the river. I ask members to remember that this is the same modelling process that has been used in every other river system where the WAMP process has been completed. This is the same modelling process that had produced the figures which this legislation seeks to amend today. It is the same modelling process that was the basis of the Burnett water resource plan, which this legislation seeks to amend.

The evidence showed that the DNR reference to natural flow did not in fact refer to conditions equivalent to a natural state by any meaning of that term. Evidence from an expert hydrologist was that the effect of land development would be to increase water run-off and therefore natural flow by some 40 per cent. It is therefore apparent that if one were to attempt to define desirable environmental flows by reference to a percentage of what would be the natural flow, then it would be more important to identify the actual natural flow. This was apparently never done with any accuracy, and it was never done by the DNR in any of the other river systems, including the Burnett system, to which this bill applies.

The DNR's modelling attempted to identify what was the flow of the water at the end of the system expressed as a percentage of the mean natural flow. The percentage that is identified as the remaining proportion of the river's mean natural flow is one of the most important figures used to determine the level of water that can be used from any system. The legislation before the House today seeks to change that figure for the Burnett system from 75 per cent to 72 per cent. Putting to one side the issue of the substantial differences between the natural flow and the modelling produced by the DNR, there is an even more fundamental issue that has been raised in the case at St George that has implications for all river system management in Queensland. That is, the very accuracy of such a model would not generally be expected to be any better than plus or minus 20 per cent.

That was the evidence that was given in the court case. The effect of that evidence was that the model's result might be, therefore, 40 per cent out—a 20 per cent variation either way. There are huge implications not only for the Burnett but for the Fitzroy and the Burdekin, where irrigation development is being restricted based on this model, a model which has been shown to be possibly 40 per cent inaccurate. A model that could be 40 per cent inaccurate is being used to impose a water management regime that has enormous costs to individuals and communities across Queensland.

This legislation seeks to change the results of that model in the Burnett River system by three per cent, from 75 per cent to 72 per cent. Let every member of this House be very clear about this before we pass this bill. This legislation seeks to change by three per cent a figure that has been produced by a model that has been shown in court to be 40 per cent inaccurate. Just how absurd is that? How absurd is it that this legislation seeks to change by three per cent a figure that has been produced by a model that has been shown to have a variation of 20 per cent either way?

Evidence given by the hydrologist called by the DNR, Mr Paul Harding, revealed in that court case an even more damaging feature to the hydrology studies upon which the draft WAMPs have been based. In his evidence, he revealed that the modelling was not even intended to seek to model reality. In explaining the discrepancy between what was observed as a matter of fact and the results produced by the model—results that became the foundation of the draft WAMP and the ecological analysis—in evidence to the Land Court, he said—

So I think if you look at those numbers, you can see why the model is not reproducing those numbers, but the important point is it wasn't intended to. It's intended to calculate the entitlement, not reality.

In dealing with Mr Wood's opinion that the level of accuracy of the model would not generally be expected to be any better than plus or minus 20 per cent, another witness, Dr Harding, revealed that in fact the variation might be up to 50 per cent.

It has been and it remains impossible for me to reconcile that responsible policy making by any government could proceed on the basis of a study that could not lay claim to any reasonable degree of accuracy, yet it has. This study regime and modelling has been used in the Burnett system, it has been used in the Border Rivers, it has been used in the Fitzroy and it has been used in the Burdekin. It must be emphasised again that Dr Harding was not giving evidence in support of the appellant's case when he spoke about the accuracy of the studies. Rather, he was an expert who had been relied upon by the DNR itself in relation to the hydrology supporting the WAMP process.

It is again worth making the point that we support the water reform process, and the irrigation industry in Queensland supports the water reform process, and every responsible water user supports the water reform process, but the process has to have credibility. It has to be able to stand up to rigorous scientific examination. What we have seen in the development of the St George case has reinforced what so many people in the irrigation industry have been saying all along, that is, the water reform process which was pursued by the previous minister, Mr Welford, and which has continued to be pursued by this government, has not been based upon creditable science and it will not stand up to rigorous scientific examination. It certainly did not stand up to any sort of rigorous examination in the appeal that the DNR brought to the Land Court involving that St George case. During evidence in that case, as I said, the government's own experts gave evidence under oath that the models could be 40 per cent inaccurate. And given the large number of assumptions necessary to make such a model operate, that should not be surprising to anyone.

So when the Burnett WAMP was released, we had this set of figures, based on a very assumptive model, to illustrate the impact of a range of scenarios on the river system. Unfortunately, these measures were seized upon by some interest groups as hard and fast measures. They were seized upon as lines that could not be crossed if sustainable management of the resource was to be achieved. That argument, unfortunately, has gained some false credibility simply by repetition. There have been all sorts of emotive, almost hysterical claims about how, if these lines were exceeded, all sorts of disasters would befall the Burnett River system. Of course, it was absolute rubbish, and not only because of the fact that the measures were, by necessity, very subjective and assumptive, as I have outlined.

The other reason that such claims were and are and continue to be absolute nonsense relates to how the environmental flow objectives for the Burnett River were set in the first place. At the time, the Minister for Natural Resources was Mr Welford. His zealous ideology was to become well known, not only to those of us who live in the Burnett catchment but also to all Queenslanders associated with the management of natural resources.

I argued at the time—and I still do so today—that the environmental flow limits—or EFLs—in the Burnett water resource plan were set for political purposes to reflect the then minister's desire to severely restrict any further irrigation development in the Burnett region. That is why this legislation is before the House today. We need to pass this legislation today. We need to pass this legislation to correct the ideologically based impositions that the previous overzealous minister placed on the development of the water resources in the Burnett system. The previous minister, Mr Welford, placed those impositions on development in the Burnett basin for political purposes, and the Minister for State Development has been sent in here today to adjust them—again for political purposes.

With the passage of this legislation, this parliament will correct those environmental flow limits just enough. We will correct them just enough to allow the delivery of the Premier's political promises to the people of the Bundaberg and Burnett electorates, even though the Premier has failed to meet his time frames, as I referred to earlier. This legislation does not correct the Burnett water resource plan properly, and it does not give the Burnett water resource plan any credibility. In fact, this legislation destroys whatever credibility the Burnett water resource plan may have had in the eyes of some, until now.

This legislation adjusts those politically derived environmental flow objectives set by Mr Welford to restrict irrigation development in the Burnett just enough to allow the Premier's political promises to be delivered to the Bundaberg area. That illustrates better than any argument that I could ever put just

how absurd it was and how absurd it is and how absurd it remains to consider those environmental flow limits or the environmental flow objectives as some sort of hard and fast line that defines sustainability in the Burnett. The truth is that the measures were derived from a system that was very objective and assumptive and that could, according to the DNR's own expert evidence under oath, be 40 per cent inaccurate. The truth is also that the limits and objectives were set for political reasons, and this legislation adjusts them for political reasons.

This legislation strongly reinforces the argument that I have made from the very beginning of the WAMP process in the Burnett that the enactment of this government's water reform process has been politically driven. Every WAMP study that this government has produced has been politically driven. Every WAMP study has set out to arrive at a preconceived position to reflect a political ideology. That was the case with the Burnett WAMP, and it is proven by this legislation being in the House today. The initial WAMP was written around a proposal that Mr Welford developed for the Paradise Dam and no further development. It was the case with the Fitzroy WAMP. That particular study was written around the construction of the Nathan dam and then no further development. And it was certainly the case with the Condamine-Balonne WAMP, where a major wind-back of current water use was on the government's agenda from the very start of the whole process.

There is no creditable scientific base for the whole WAMP process in the Burnett system or anywhere else. It is a process that has been politically driven and ideologically driven from the start, and it remains so today, and this legislation illustrates that clearly. There is no scientific basis for the setting of environmental flow limits at their current levels in the Burnett WAMP or the environmental flow objectives at their current levels in the water resource plan for the Burnett River. They were political figures from the beginning, and the new figures that this legislation will set when it is passed tonight will still be political figures.

This legislation opens the way for many more corrections to these politically motivated restrictions, and everyone should be aware that those corrections to Welford's flawed WAMPs will and must continue. If they do not continue under the current government, the correction of those politically motivated restrictions on the development of water infrastructure will continue some day under an alternative government. We will achieve a more balanced approach which ensures sustainable use of our most precious natural water resource to realise the economic potential of regions such as the Burnett, the Fitzroy and the Condamine-Balonne. We will develop the potential of those areas very carefully and in a very measured way, having learnt well from the lessons of past mistakes in other areas of Australia. We will develop that great potential in a responsible and a sustainable way. We will use this bill introduced by the Beattie Labor government as a valuable precedent to follow in the legislative management of that development.

Let me place on record in a very careful and a very measured way that in government we will follow the precedent that the Beattie Labor government has set here today. In government we will follow the precedent set by the Beattie Labor government and we will adjust those politically set figures to a more credible and a more sustainable level. As the need develops in the inland Burnett, we will correct Mr Welford's WAMP to make sustainable development opportunities available to communities there, just as this legislation does for the Burnett region today. There can be no doubt that this legislation sets a precedent in this parliament. Queensland water users can be assured that we will follow that precedent set here today in order to correct some of the politically set figures in other WAMP documents and make sustainable development opportunities available for other communities in other catchments. Let there be no mistake or misunderstanding about that. This legislation sets a precedent that we will follow. When that time comes, as it one day must, let there be no hypocritical opposition from members of the Beattie Labor government who will support this legislation today. I look forward to that day and I look forward to receiving the same bipartisan support as we will give this legislation today.

Before I conclude, I want to make some comments about the opposition to this development and to this legislation that has been expressed from some areas of the Burnett Valley. As some of the people expressing this opposition are my constituents, I have spoken at length to the parties involved. However, I do not support their views and I do not support their opposition. I believe that their opposition is somewhat misguided, to say the least. The opposition to this legislation and indeed the opposition to Paradise Dam seems to stem from two diametrically opposing views being expressed by the same people in the one organisation.

The first argument is the extreme environmental argument from the same old anti-everything brigade that all members who have been involved with the management of natural resources in Queensland are familiar with. They have seized on setting the politically motivated flow management objectives as some sort of 'never to be crossed' limit and they oppose this legislation simply because it changes them. I have dealt with that argument already in some detail. In reality, I believe we have to accept that there are always going to be people who will never agree to any development of any sort of our natural resources, be it water resources or any other. There will be people who will never agree to

development of natural resources no matter what efforts those of us who manage those resources implement to make that development sustainable.

No matter what efforts we take to make that development responsible and sustainable, there will be those who oppose that development. Their closed-mind approach must surely cost them credibility in the debate. Their arguments are mostly emotive scaremongering that is always unsupported by any evidence, and so it is in the current debate in the Burnett region. The arguments that are being run are certainly emotive scaremongering and there is no evidence to support those arguments. Regrettably, that emotive scaremongering always has a certain attraction to certain sections of the media. That attraction gives far and away more credibility than the arguments deserve.

The second argument that is diametrically opposed to the first concerns the equitable distribution of water between users both upstream and downstream of the major dam at Paradise. This issue is a very genuine one. It is one that I have argued about since the draft WAMP was first released quite some years ago—that is, this argument about equity of access to water along the system. However, I can see no evidence that the legislation before the House impacts on that debate. I can see no evidence that the legislation before the House affects that need to achieve an equitable and fair distribution of water along the system. However, if the first argument put by the extreme conservation lobby was successful, there would be no argument about equity of access to additional water supplies. The puzzling thing about the people who are opposing this dam and opposing this legislation is that they have been prepared to run both arguments at once. If the extreme conservation argument was successful, there would be no argument about access to additional water supplies simply because there would be no additional water supplies and those that are available now would be severely restricted.

However, the equity argument is a very valid one along the Burnett system. It is a very valid one along every river system, but it is more of a concern along the Burnett system because of how widespread the infrastructure is. As I said, the Paradise Dam will be about 130 kilometres from the river mouth. There are a number of other irrigation areas and a number of other water infrastructure storage areas that are considerably further up the catchment than the Paradise Dam will be. At 130 kilometres from the river mouth, it is relatively close to the mouth of the river. There are dams like Waruma, Cania, Boondoomba and Bjelke-Petersen which are at the head waters of the major tributaries of the river. That is a unique system in Queensland and is one that brings into sharp focus the argument about the equity of access to water by different groups who live and operate in the Burnett Valley.

Most of the current concern about the equity question is arising out of the moratorium on any further development which has been in place since the WAMP study first started. I can understand that that was a necessary part of the WAMP study at the time—that is, to bring any further development to a pause, if you like—until the situation could be examined and the impact of the current situation on the river could be determined. But that moratorium on further development has gone on now for quite some years. Particularly in some parts of the catchment, it is starting to have a detrimental impact on what would be normal and expected development. There are some good examples of that, especially in the Barker-Barambah tributary system which, for the benefit of members who do not know the area, is but one of the major tributary systems that make up the Burnett River.

As an example, a number of major piggery enterprises are proposed to be developed in the area, especially around Murgon. Those projects have been held up simply for the lack of water. They have not been able to get access to a water allocation, even though in the WAMP study there was unallocated water identified in that area. This is an issue that needs to be resolved quickly, because it is an issue which those people who want to scaremonger and frighten people are making the most of in building opposition to the development of water infrastructure like the Paradise Dam. The problem with gaining access to water allocations in those upper areas stems from the moratorium. It does not stem from the proposal to build the Paradise dam, yet it is very easy to understand how scaremongers can convince people that that is the case and thereby build opposition to the development of further infrastructure like the Paradise Dam.

However, the arguments about equity of access are worthy of great credit. They represent a very genuine area of concern for communities and individuals upstream of the Paradise Dam. I believe those individuals and those communities need some assurances—not just from the Minister for State Development but also for the Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines. That is why it is regrettable that the Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines has chosen not to make a contribution to this debate today. Those communities need some assurances about equity of access now and equity of access in the future. They need those assurances to counter the scaremongering that has been going on in that area about land use restrictions and all of the other crazy stories that have been promulgated by people who have as their agenda to somehow bring into doubt the worth of the development of this infrastructure.

People need assurances about restrictions on further developments in those upstream areas, because there is enormous potential for development in the inland Burnett and that Barker-Barambah

system, which services the South Burnett shires—the Murgon, Wondai and Kingaroy areas. There is enormous potential for development in the central Burnett around Gayndah and Mundubbera. That is an enormously productive area, the economy of which is based on irrigated, intensive agriculture. There is an enormous pool of human talent in that area. That area will continue to grow and develop. The people of that area need assurances that this infrastructure development will not restrict their further development.

There is potential for further development even further up the river to Eidsvold and Monto. As part of this process to develop this new infrastructure, those people need to be assured that they will get a fair go, that they will have an equitable chance at sharing in the resources that are available in the Burnett Valley and in the Burnett River system.

Another story that has been misused by people of late concerns releases from those other dams further up the river to somehow top up the Paradise Dam when it is built. Those people need assurances that that is not going to be the case. Those points will become clearer when the river operation plan is released. But that assurance needs to be given quickly to counter the scaremongering that is being carried out maliciously by people who have an agenda to somehow call into question the worth of this infrastructure development.

The opposition will support this legislation. We are pleased to give bipartisan support to this long overdue infrastructure development. It will have huge benefits for every Queensland and for the Queensland economy. This parliament needs to pass this legislation to allow the construction of the Paradise Dam and the other infrastructure, the Barlil Weir, the Eidsvold Weir and the raising of the Murgon Weir, to proceed. We need to pass this legislation to correct, as I said before, the ideologically based impositions that the previous, overzealous minister, Mr Welford, placed on the development of the water resources in the Burnett system. The previous minister placed those impositions on development in the Burnett Basin for political purposes. Today with this legislation the Minister for State Development will adjust those impositions, again for political purposes.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasise that this legislation does not correct properly the Burnett water resource plan; it only begins that process. It does not give the plan any credibility. In fact, this legislation destroys forever the argument about the credibility of the original WAMP document. This legislation adjusts those politically derived environmental flow objectives that were set by Mr Welford to restrict irrigation development in the Burnett just enough to allow the Premier's political promises to be developed in the Bundaberg area.

In government, we will follow the precedent that has been set here today with this legislation. We will adjust those politically set figures to a more balanced, a more creditable and a more sustainable level. As the need develops in the inland Burnett especially, we will correct Mr Welford's WAMP to make sustainable development opportunities available to the communities there, just as this legislation here today corrects Mr Welford's politically driven WAMP to provide opportunities for the Bundaberg region.

This legislation is primarily about correcting Mr Welford's WAMP. This legislation is but the first step in a long process of correction of the Beattie government's failed water reform process. I am pleased to support this legislation today as the first step in that correction process. I look forward to be part of that correction process in the years ahead as it develops and as it produces a more credit worthy water reform program for the state of Queensland.
