



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

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Hansard 19 June 2001

BUNDABERG, CHILDERS AND MARYBOROUGH DISTRICTS

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.30 a.m.): Last week I had the opportunity to visit the Bundaberg, Childers and Maryborough districts and, with my parliamentary colleagues, to meet with community leaders; businesspeople; local farmers; state, primary and high school educators; manufacturers and residents. Firstly, I would like to thank those communities for the hospitality that was shown to me and my parliamentary colleagues the shadow minister for Education, Employment, Training and Sport, Mr Kevin Lingard and the shadow minister for Environment, Heritage and Industrial Relations, Mr Vince Lester, during our visit.

The innovation and enterprise that we saw in the Bundaberg and Childers districts could best be described as impressive. I want to give credit to those communities for the work that they are doing and the contribution that they are making towards making our great state even greater. There are some exciting projects in the area, including the B2K project, Bundaberg City Council's CBD revitalisation, the continued development of the sugarcane and horticultural industries and associated value-adding activities and businesses such as Bundaberg Brewed Drinks, the Bundaberg Foundry, the Phillips family's tomato packing business and the Dorrian family's avocado and mango business. These are just a small few of the projects that are creating opportunities and jobs for people not only in the Burnett but also throughout Queensland.

But the overwhelming message from everyone we talked to was that the Burnett is an area that can do so much better—that can generate so many more opportunities, so many more export dollars and so many more jobs. All the Burnett needs is water. Additional secure water supplies are essential to unlock the enormous potential for further development and job creation in the Burnett region. The same applies throughout the state. The Paradise dam and B2K project simply must happen.

The Queensland Nationals are committed to seeing these projects brought to fruition. In 1998, the Borbidge coalition government promised to construct the Paradise dam on the Burnett River within five years to relieve the region's chronic shortage of water and to complete the development of the Bundaberg irrigation scheme, which was always planned, with the initial construction of the Fred Haigh dam. That was always important. The second stage of that whole irrigation scheme was to construct the Paradise dam to complement the Fred Haigh dam, which is not in a good catchment area. That commitment was matched by the then leader of the Labor opposition, Peter Beattie—a promise to the people of Bundaberg that was recorded in the *Bundaberg News Mail* on 11 June 1998.

In the lead-up to the 2001 state election, the Queensland Nationals again reaffirmed their commitment to providing secure additional water supplies to the Burnett region by immediately raising the Bucca, Jones and Walla weirs and commencing construction of the Paradise dam by June 2002. Once again the Premier promised to construct the Paradise dam.

The people of Bundaberg and the surrounding district are still waiting for the Premier to honour his promise. Despite all the words and all the rhetoric, they will not accept that the Beattie government is committed to constructing the dam until construction starts—until they see equipment in place and the work commencing. Sadly, the former Natural Resources Minister dragged his feet for three years. Now there is almost no prospect that the Premier will honour his initial five-year promise. Nevertheless, the Paradise dam must be built and the Queensland Nationals will keep up their efforts to make the Beattie government honour its commitment and build this dam.

There is also a need for the Beattie government to commit to building this dam itself rather than handing over responsibility for the dam as well as the allocation and sale of any additional water to a private company. First and foremost, any new water for the Paradise dam should be used to supplement the applications of existing water users to the level that they are supposed to receive now. Those irrigators have suffered year after year, receiving only a small portion of their total allocations because of the water shortages in the area. In turn, that has stifled their ability to realise the full value of their farms and has stifled the ability of value adding, manufacturing and other downstream industries to realise their full potential. That share of the water must not be allowed to fall into the hands of a private developer, who will sell off the new supply to other bidders at premium prices and again deny the irrigators their rightful allocation.

Other new water infrastructure developments also must happen. For example, farmers in the Isis district have been waiting three years for the raising of the Walla weir—a project approved by the former Queensland Nationals-led state government in May 1998. While the Beattie government has procrastinated, those farmers have been trying to run their businesses with initial water allocations as low as 15 per cent. That water has to be carefully husbanded in the early part of the cane season and very often farmers are not able to use that water to its full potential even if they do get further allocations later in the season.

The need for new water infrastructure is one issue, but the water pricing policies being implemented by SunWater on the Beattie government's behalf also risk stifling further development and must be overhauled. Water must be priced fairly, the local control of irrigation schemes should be encouraged and farmers should not have to carry the cost of a bureaucracy over which they have absolutely no control. More than ever people want government to start making decisions and to start taking some action. They are frustrated with the never-ending reviews and sick of government buck-passing. If Premier Beattie is serious about tackling Queensland's worst in the nation unemployment record, work must start on the new water projects that will unlock the potential of the Burnett to generate more opportunities and jobs for Queenslanders. If these water schemes can be constructed, there is the potential for hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs for anyone who comes to the area.

My colleague the member for Beaudesert and I also had the opportunity to visit Maryborough, to meet with members of that wonderful community and to receive a submission regarding the region's health services. I would also like to thank the Maryborough community for the hospitality that they showed to us during our visit. One of the consistent concerns raised with us was about the future of Maryborough's health service. The fact that more than 1,800 people put their names to the petition is a good representation in itself of the strong level of community support for a fully funded and comprehensive health service in Maryborough. That petition, which was sponsored by the Queensland Nationals shadow Health Minister, Fiona Simpson, seeks the retention of medical specialists in the private system as well the public hospitals to ensure the viability of St Stephen's and the services and jobs that that hospital provides to the people of Maryborough and the Fraser Coast.

Maryborough is an important regional city. It is adjacent to the Bruce Highway and it warrants a comprehensive health service such as it has always had. The St Stephen's hospital provides local jobs and a choice of health services for the community. In fact, it provides just over 100 jobs. As a private hospital it is also important for those people in Maryborough and the surrounding district who have private health insurance. The petition demonstrated the high level of community support for both the Maryborough Base Hospital and St Stephen's Private Hospital and should serve as a timely warning to the Beattie government against any moves to withdraw health services from the Fraser Coast.

The community has had enough of the ongoing review of the Maryborough hospital and having the future of their hospital dictated by bureaucrats and an out of touch Health Minister. As a former Health Minister, it has always been my position that the state government should maintain and enhance the health services that Maryborough has had traditionally. Maryborough deserves to keep what it has always had and to have improvements made to its services. My position has not changed. I want to reiterate the Queensland Nationals' commitment to maintaining services at both Maryborough Base Hospital and St Stephen's Private Hospital in Maryborough.

These are the sorts of issues that really matter to Queenslanders and they are the sorts of issues that Queenslanders expect the government of the day to address: jobs, economic development, service delivery, health, education, and law and order. Queenslanders living in rural and regional areas are becoming increasingly frustrated with the Beattie Labor government's preoccupation with its big spending in the city centre. Recently we have seen announcements for over \$700 million to be spent in a one square mile area in the centre of Brisbane. Queenslanders who live in the regional parts of the state and who contribute to jobs and exports are frustrated that projects like the Walla weir, which simply needs \$4 million—and I ask members to compare the Walla weir cost to the Lang Park redevelopment cost—and the Paradise dam, which will generate jobs in an area that needs them desperately, are left to languish while the Beattie government will do whatever it takes to get its pet projects like the Lang Park redevelopment.

I have given the Bundaberg, Childers and Maryborough community a commitment that the Queensland Nationals will keep fighting on their behalf. We will keep winding up the pressure on the Beattie government to deliver good government for all Queenslanders and get some real action in unlocking the opportunities and jobs that these areas could provide our state if only they were given the ability to do so.

This visit proved conclusively to me that in that area there was an opportunity to create jobs. No wonder the Labor government in this state has delivered Queensland the absolutely worst unemployment statistics in Australia for the past 10 months—month after month. Here is a chance to do something that will really deliver full-time permanent jobs to people, and they neglect it.
