



Speech by
**Hon. NITA
CUNNINGHAM**

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

Hansard 12 December 2001

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT [BURNETT BASIN] AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. J. I. CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (Minister for Local Government and Planning) (4.39 p.m.): I am very pleased to speak to the Water Infrastructure Development (Burnett Basin) Amendment Bill, which represents another major step forward in delivering the Beattie government's commitment to water infrastructure development in the Burnett region as outlined in the government's 10-point plan for Bundaberg. The need for extra water storage is paramount to the future of my electorate of Bundaberg and to the entire Burnett catchment. The urgency of our problem is well known by the minister, the Premier and the government, and planning to meet those needs is being afforded a very high priority.

My electorate of Bundaberg has one of the worst unemployment problems in Queensland and in Australia, and this problem cannot be overcome until we get new industries and until we expand existing industries. That is not possible until we get more water and a secure water supply. The Bundaberg irrigation scheme was completed some 30 years ago and was supposed to overcome all of our problems. However, after years of bungling we were left with severe saltwater intrusion, a scheme that is struggling and one dam instead of two. We are now desperately in need of that second dam.

The Burnett region is currently experiencing the worst drought in recorded history. It has severely damaged the region's agricultural industries. Anyone who has been in Bundaberg in the past few weeks and seen its young cane curling up on the ground will need no convincing of the desperate need in our district for water. Economic studies produced in 2000-01 by government departments and by independent experts have highlighted the economic decline of the region and the urgent need for water infrastructure to support local industry, agriculture and development. As the member for Southern Downs said in this House during a previous debate on water storage on the Burnett—

The farmers want it, businesses want it, employees and other voters in that part of the world want it. This issue is about jobs. It is about delivering to the people of Bundaberg and the Burnett region.

This is what this amendment is all about: delivering. The five water projects—the Burnett River Dam, the Eidsvold Weir, the raising of Walla Weir, the development of Barlil Weir and the raising of Jones Weir—will ensure that the region's future water needs are met. The more substantial and enduring benefits from these projects will arise from the increase in agricultural production. Studies show that the infrastructure projects will result in increased production of more than \$1 billion per annum in direct terms and more than \$1.6 billion in increased turnover, suggesting net wealth creation of \$800 million per annum.

There are several factors that are likely to generate significant growth for fruit and vegetable production. Population trends are likely to underscore the Burnett region's capacity to substantially increase its production of high value horticultural products. Australian fruit and vegetable exports have increased threefold over the past decade, achieving average growth of more than 10 per cent per annum. The location of the Burnett region provides it with some unique advantages in exploiting these market opportunities.

The announcement by the Premier that this government would proceed with the dam and the construction or upgrading of four weirs was the best news our community had for many years, and the confidence of the whole district was boosted. I congratulate the Minister for State Development on bringing forward legislation earlier this year to form the company Burnett Water Pty Ltd which, with the

dedicated cooperation of a large number of people and thorough investigation, succeeded in completing the necessary studies and assessments in just five months. This company did an outstanding job and earned the respect of everyone who has been working so hard for this water infrastructure for almost 25 years.

The assessment reports demonstrate that the potential for economic development in the Burnett region that arises from the water made available through these projects is very significant, providing the region with its best opportunity for economic development in years. Its studies estimate that up to 7,500 new jobs associated with increased agricultural production will be created in the Burnett region.

In preparing the EIS report, significant effort was directed to development infrastructure operational strategies that enable the environmental flow objectives of the water resource plan to be met. The analysis undertaken shows that when the proposed allocations associated with all five structures are included, the mandatory high and medium flow objectives are complied with at 16 of the 19 nodes at which the objectives are specified. The changes required at the remaining three nodes are generally a matter of a few per cent, and the outcomes and objectives of the WRP are not significantly affected by these amendments.

I congratulate the minister on now taking another step forward with this amendment bill that will clear the way for the necessary statutory approvals to be issued and will provide a further signal to the Commonwealth minister that this House is committed to seeing these projects completed. However, it is ironic that, now that this long-awaited dam is so close, we have some nervous Nellies coming forward. The newly formed Burnett Water for All group is now opposing the dam, saying that ecological impacts have not been fully considered and expressing concern about loss of future opportunities for inland Burnett communities. This new group clearly has no idea of just how much consideration and research into ecological impacts has occurred over and over again on this river.

Another group, Burnett Catchment Care, has now suggested that it would like to see the dam made smaller. This dam started off as a major 700,000 megalitre dam. Its size was reduced to 500,000 megalitres and then to 300,000 megalitres—less than half the size originally proposed and just over half the size of the Fred Haigh Dam. But it is interesting to note that some members consider that the reliability of the yield is a major factor in favour of Paradise. In the meantime, the longstanding Burnett Water Development Group continues to represent industry, commerce and local government from throughout the Burnett catchment, and it continues to support the proposals and continues to work throughout the region to help bring these water infrastructure proposals to completion in a fair way for everyone.

I am pleased to support this amendment—a bill that supports the minister's and this government's commitment to delivering sound, long-term water planning for Bundaberg and to providing security and certainty to water users throughout our district. Our farmers, councils, industries and residents can see that this government is working hard to resolve the chronic water shortages that have plagued our district for so many years. The bill before the House is all about getting on with the job. On behalf of the people of Bundaberg, I ask all members of this House to support the bill and help us to build a better future.
