



Speech by

Hon. S. ROBERTSON

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

Hansard 29 November 2001

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Water Resources

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) (10.16 a.m.), by leave: I rise today to correct a recent misleading report in the *Australian* newspaper that the Queensland government is considering proposals to build new dams on the Flinders and Walsh Rivers in the state's far north. There is currently no proposal being considered for a large dam on the Flinders River, and any such development could not proceed until a water resource plan was in place for the catchment and proper impact assessment studies were completed.

In September last year the Beattie government put in place comprehensive legislation to ensure the sustainable management of the state's water resources. This objective is achieved through the whole-of-catchment water resource plans that are being prepared by my department throughout Queensland to control the allocation and management of water. At present, my department has finished water resource plans that apply to a quarter of the state, while plans currently in preparation or proposed account for a further 50 per cent of land area. While these plans provide a means for securing existing development and providing for environmental health, they identify possible levels of further water allocation that could be used so that the long-term viability of any new proposals can be fully evaluated.

A further safeguard is supplied by the Queensland Treasury guidelines that require all proposed water infrastructure developments to demonstrate their economic and environmental viability before they can proceed. In addition to determining the availability of water to support any development, the Queensland government would have to evaluate whether additional measures such as farmland and water management plans were needed to prevent soil degradation.

Preliminary land resource assessments by my department's scientists indicate that some areas around Richmond already have high salinity levels just below the surface. Accordingly, there is a high risk that without proper planning and management any agricultural development in the area could result in soil degradation and environmental damage. Any future consideration of a possible dam at Nullinga on the Walsh River west of Cairns would be subject to similar processes and evaluations. A draft water resource plan for the Barron and Walsh Rivers is well advanced and due for release this year.

Through the processes the Beattie government has put in place, we can consider further water development in the appropriate parts of the state while protecting the health of our river systems. In closing, the publication of this article in the *Australian* is unhelpful because it raises expectations and does not reflect reality. I hope that any further articles will be based on a full appreciation of the planning processes that underpin how water is allocated and conserved in Queensland.
