



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

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MURRAY-DARLING 2001 INITIATIVE

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (8.33 p.m.): Last week, I was very pleased to be able to attend the opening by the Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines of the new Department of Natural Resources office in Toowoomba. Following the opening, the minister also presented a number of cheques from the National Heritage Trust Fund to various groups which are doing excellent environmental work throughout the Cunningham electorate. However, concern has been expressed by the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee about funding of the Murray-Darling 2001 initiative for the 2001-02 round of Natural Heritage Trust funding.

The Queensland Murray-Darling Committee is a community and government partnership that provides an overview of the Queensland portion of the Murray-Darling Basin. The Cunningham electorate falls within this basin. The committee is doing excellent work in meeting its goal to have a healthy basin through the equitable use of water, land and other environmental resources of the basin. Unfortunately, despite the excellent work being done by the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee, the state government is yet to commit funds to match the federal government's commitment for the 2001-02 round of NHT funding for the Murray-Darling 2001 initiative.

The federal government has already committed approximately \$2.1 million. However, this is contingent on the funds being matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis by the state. To date, it is my understanding that the state has committed only \$500,000 for the year. This means that the pool available from federal and state governments for 2000-01 is \$1 million, rather than the \$4.2 million that it would be if the state were to match the federal government funds. For those projects that are two-year or three-year projects needing recurrent funding, approximately \$1 million is required to enable those projects to continue. This means, at this stage, with the available funding no further projects can proceed.

There is also a real concern now that the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality has been announced—with approximately \$3 million—and that there will be no net increase in funding and, therefore, no extra benefit obtained. The further concern is developing that this plan will polarise natural resource management activities to only those dealing with salinity and water quality and only in those areas targeted by the plan. This concern is prevalent regardless of commitments given by the Prime Minister, the Premier and the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee. If the state does not provide matching funds to the Murray-Darling 2001 initiative, it will only serve to fuel those concerns.

A lot of important projects have been recommended for funding under the 2001-02 round of the initiative. The project to fund the four catchment management associations is one of these projects. I know it is consistent with the aims of the minister, and I urge him and the government to match the federal funding commitment dollar for dollar so that any concerns about the future of this project can be dispelled but, more importantly, so that the excellent work that they are doing can continue.
