



Speech by

TREVOR STRONG

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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WATER INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT [BURNETT BASIN] BILL

Mr STRONG (Burnett—ALP) (3.44 p.m.): I rise to support the Water Infrastructure Development (Burnett Basin) Bill and inform members of the effects and benefits it will have in the long term in my region. The region surrounding the Burnett River has just experienced seven of the 10 driest years in its long history, all in the space of an 11 year period. The information from CSIRO and other meteorological societies is that the area will not get as many rain events but will end up with more rain. In that context, the storage of water will play an important part in the near future.

The drought-like conditions the area is experiencing at present are putting an extraordinary strain on the two major groundwater aquifers of the region—the Gooburrum and the Elliott. The Gooburrum is maintained through the great work of local farmers and the likes of David Dempster from the Department of Natural Resources. They hold a meeting once a week depending on rainfall to work out how much water needs to be pumped from the groundwater system. This system has worked marvellously well, because farmers in the region are achieving greater tonnages now than in the past. Although this is holding the salt intrusion at bay, it is not the long-term solution. The other aquifer in the region, the Elliott, is not as fortunate and every dry week brings it closer to crisis point.

In relation to the passage of this bill through this place—to misquote an earlier statesman, 'It is not the end of the end, nor is it the end of the beginning, but it is the beginning of the end,' considering the fact that the irrigation plan for this region started some 40 years ago. The scheme at present is also struggling to provide adequate flows to the Isis as well as to the irrigators of the Burnett. The job is not finished. It is only halfway there, if that. The Isis mill, which plays a large part in my electorate, produces the finest sugar on the planet. It out-Brazils the Brazilians as a result of years of commitment, initiative and dedication to the task by workers and management to produce the world's finest sugar. In these times of such volatile world sugar pricing, the Isis mill has become a classic success story that is the envy of other organisations up and down the coast. It creates a quality of sugar that is second to none.

This bill may not seem all that important or seem to warrant a high priority to many electorates which do not share the concerns I have previously illustrated, but it is the start of the realisation of the campaign promise and enduring commitment of the Beattie government to assist farmers in not only maintaining a level of sustainability but bringing to fruition growth in sugar production by enabling such projects as the B2K to go ahead, a project on which the hopes of many canefarmers are riding.

Fruit and vegetable growers in my electorate involved with either the Food Park Project or the Ausfood Marketing Consortium are indeed concerned about the long-term viability of their industry. They, too, have concerns relating to the reliability of water flows to meet their growing needs for overseas markets. This bill will not minimise an effective environmental impact study, nor is this a proposed short cut. This measure will give added impetus and a sense of urgency to the preparation process of this most needed and welcomed level of infrastructure.
