



Speech by

HOWARD HOBBS

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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DROUGHT

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (6.35 p.m.): I am pleased to be able to participate in this debate tonight. The Premier has asked for bipartisan support, but how can we give bipartisan support when all we get when we try is photo opportunities, gimmicks and hocus-pocus schemes that nobody can access. The minister will not even try. The government's own amendment to this motion says 'To implement reforms to the federal government's Exceptional Circumstances Scheme agreed to by all states and territories'. The reforms have been agreed to; it is just that those opposite will not pay their share. It is not a lot of money. The government is making money out of most of the applications it puts in, anyway. The government will not support them. It is playing politics. All the state Labor ministers have ganged up and are trying to blame the federal government. That is why we have these problems today.

We have a spirit of cooperation and we want to work with governments of all persuasions. We cannot afford to be too political because the people are really hurting. In our motion we talked about this government refusing to mitigate the impact of future droughts by failing to reinstate the \$2 billion water infrastructure development plan developed under the former National Party led state government. There is nothing at all about water in the government's amendment.

Water is the lifeblood of this nation. We have the driest continent on earth. We can do a lot more. I have here the report of the Water Infrastructure Task Force. All those opposite have to do is read it and follow it. This report was put together by a task force in May 1996. There were 148 nominations to be on the task force. A program was put together whereby the government had \$1 billion over 15 years. We advertised widely across the state to see if people would tender submissions about where they believed that water development should occur. They did that. The idea was to identify, prioritise and, where possible, accelerate those water projects which could provide tangible, economic and social benefits within an ecologically balanced development framework.

We received over 350 written submissions containing over 383 separate proposals estimated to cost nearly \$8.3 billion. The task force subjected all the submissions to an evaluation process to identify, classify and prioritise. An enormous amount of work was done. It cost squillions to put it together. It is a very professional process which was put in place to look at the water needs of this state. It has been done. It is here. On 28 February 1996 the task force presented a 267-page report listing 93 proposals in three categories. There were 16 in category 1 which were high priority water supply projects estimated to cost about \$2.1 billion, of which \$1 billion would have been by capital contribution by the proponents. There were 17 other projects in category 2 and three projects in category 3. They were still important projects, but it was a matter of priorities.

Clearly, planning and assessment studies had to be undertaken and funding was provided for that particular purpose. One of the recommendations was that the government allocate additional funding for baseline research and studies in streams where infrastructure works were proposed. The task force noted the need for accurate baseline information for individual water catchments to facilitate objective infrastructure development and planning. They had to do such things as hydrological data and the geology of potential dam and weir sites. Other matters included water quality and riverine biodata. The list goes on and on. It was not just about building dams; it was about making sure that we had an economically sustainable and viable water industry. The funding was already provided.

All the work has been done. All the government has to do is follow it. Some of the proposals included the Nathan Dam, the Paradise Dam, Hells Gate, the raising of the Burdekin Falls stage 2, Urannah Dam, the Elliot Main Channel and Nullinga Dam. All of those roughly come in at about 10.2 million megalitres. That amount of water would irrigate something like 650,000 hectares. Members should think of the additional benefits that would bring to this state. It might not necessarily be used for agricultural purposes; it may be used for industrial purposes and everything else. There is an enormous amount of potential. This government talks about economic growth. It paid \$64 million to introduce all these other schemes and attract companies from overseas such as Time Warner. However, charity begins at home. The government should look after Queenslanders. So much more could be done in terms of water development, but all the government has done so far is lock it up. We do not have to. We can have sustainable development. For instance, the Paradise Dam—

Time expired.