



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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NATHAN DAM

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (2.01 a.m.): In 1998 the then Borbidge government gave the go-ahead for the Nathan Dam to be built on the Dawson River between Taroom and Theodore. That announcement was long overdue then and, unfortunately, the current drought conditions being experienced across central Queensland are demonstrating in all too graphic fashion just how badly that water infrastructure is needed.

Of course, following the election of the Beattie Labor government in 1998 the Nathan Dam has not proceeded, much to the frustration of so many communities and so many individuals in the Dawson and Callide Valleys and in the central Queensland region generally. Had it proceeded back in 1998, as announced by the Borbidge government, it may well have been able to be in a position to supply some water to augment the critical shortages currently being experienced in the central Queensland communities.

The mistake that is often made is to consider the Nathan Dam proposal as an agricultural project that would facilitate the development of a large new irrigation area in the Dawson Valley. It is important to realise that this water infrastructure project would do so much more than that. Had construction started in 1998, water may well now be available to ensure domestic and industrial supplies in Biloela and Gladstone were not restricted as they are at the current time. Both domestic and industrial users in Biloela and Gladstone are currently facing restrictions which are certain to get very much more extreme if run-off rain is not received by March next year.

Instead, the knee-jerk response is being considered now that water supplies are restricted for domestic and industrial users. That response is to build a pipeline to bring water from the Dawson catchment at the mouth of the Fitzroy River down the coast to Gladstone and then pump it over the range to the head of the Callide Creek in the Dawson catchment from where the water may well have come in the first place. This is a desperate measure which is attractive only because of its short lead time and it is only being considered because the current government did not have the wit or the wisdom to proceed with the Nathan Dam project which would have by now ensured adequate water for the whole area.

That is the sort of situation that arises when there is no long-term planning for infrastructure or, as has happened in this case, when the infrastructure projects identified as necessary are not proceeded with by a procrastinating government. The current drought will no doubt end one day but, if nothing else, it has demonstrated the need to proceed with water infrastructure projects in a timely manner. In particular, this drought situation has clearly demonstrated that the Nathan Dam project is desperately needed to ensure domestic and industrial water supplies are adequate in Biloela and Gladstone as well as providing for irrigation development along the Dawson River.

The government needs to proceed quickly to construct the Nathan Dam. It will not provide a solution to the currently potentially disastrous situation but it will certainly ensure that it is not repeated in the next dry period that we will inevitably experience.