



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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Hansard 5 December 2002

### **REVOCATION OF STATE FOREST AREAS**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (11.42 a.m.): I rise to make some comments in this debate about the revocation of a small area of the Goodnight Scrub National Park to make the construction of the Paradise Dam possible. It is appropriate that I do that because the Paradise Dam site is within the Callide electorate. Even though it is within the Callide electorate, all of the benefits of that construction will flow to areas such as Burnett and Bundaberg. Undoubtedly, the effects of the Paradise Dam construction will be felt within the Callide electorate and therefore it is appropriate that I make some comments in the course of this debate.

I have listened to the Minister for Environment and the member for Burnett move and second this motion for the revocation of this 55 hectares of national park and the other area of resource reserve. I am somewhat disappointed by the flippant way in which both members of this parliament approached this subject. I am somewhat disappointed in the way in which this motion was brought before the House today and the hollow justification that we saw both from the minister and the member for Burnett.

Let there be no doubt that I and the opposition, as the opposition spokesman said, support this motion. It is necessary to allow the Paradise Dam construction to proceed and we in this House all agree that the Paradise Dam is a very necessary piece of infrastructure. I wonder what the debate in this House would have been like if the situation were reversed? If we were sitting opposite and the minister and the member for Burnett were sitting here, I wonder what this debate would be like? I wonder whether it would be the same flippant, offhand type of approach that we have seen today.

**Mr Lawlor** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** If the situation did ever come about, the member for Southport would not be here to see it. The member for Southport washed in here on the tide and he will wash out again just as quickly. I wonder what that debate would be like if the roles in this House were reversed. I suggest that the debate would be very different. This motion demonstrates that the Labor Party government and the Minister for Environment can make these changes when they want to. This is the second change that has been made to facilitate the construction of the Paradise Dam. The first was the change made to the water resource plan for the Burnett River by the Minister for Natural Resources. We carried a special piece of legislation to adjust the environmental flow levels in the water resource plan to make this project possible. I supported that. That is an appropriate course of action to find a balance between development and environmental values. It is an appropriate course of action for the parliament to take to strive towards finding that balance, just as this motion before the House today is an appropriate course of action to once again find a balance between the environmental values that we all hold dear and the economic development that areas like Burnett and Bundaberg so badly need. If those two members were in the House, they could certainly stand up and tell their colleagues just how much that economic development is needed.

It is a very valid move on the part of the parliament to find that balance. I hope that, if the day ever comes when members who constitute the government are sitting on this side of the House, they will remember this. I will certainly be here to remind them. I hope that they will remember that this is the type of legislative approach necessary to find a balance between preserving environmental values and achieving economic development.

**Mr Shine** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** What did the member say? I note for the record that the member is not prepared to repeat it. I genuinely did not hear it. This is a valid legislative approach. It certainly has our support and my support, but I am a little disappointed in the offhand, flippant sort of approach that has been adopted.

I want to make some comments about the Premier's remarks this morning in relation to water infrastructure. This motion makes possible the first piece of major water infrastructure that the Beattie government has considered or even looks like delivering in its four-and-a-half years in power. It is a long way away yet. The point needs to be made that the Paradise Dam is a long way from being delivered. While it is being supported by all parties in this House—as far as I am aware it is being supported by the opposition and the government—it must be remembered that there are a number of issues involving the construction of that water infrastructure very pertinent to the upstream areas.

When we start to talk about the Burnett River dam, as the title that the government is trying to use, there is a downside—another side—to the story. It involves the effect that the construction of that infrastructure will have on the upstream communities, water users and irrigation systems already there. I know that as part of the whole Burnett River water infrastructure project which Burnett Water is engaged in a number of very much smaller projects are envisaged for areas upstream, namely, raising the Jones Weir at Mundubbera and the construction of the Eidsvold Weir at Eidsvold and the Barlil Weir at Murgon. They are also much-needed infrastructure. However, they are much smaller than the Paradise Dam.

They are the types of infrastructure identified in the Water Infrastructure Task Force report prepared under the former coalition government and that was spoken about so derogatively by the Premier this morning. That is a shame, because now more than at any other time it is painfully clear the extent to which there needs to be a major investment in water infrastructure right across Queensland. Under the current drought conditions it is obvious to everybody that there has to be a commitment to the continual development of infrastructure to run ahead of development and to make sure that water resources are available not just for irrigators but also for industry, communities and domestic use. Water is essential. Everyone needs it. We cannot wait until an urban community runs out of water before throwing our hands in the air and saying that somebody should have done something. We cannot wait until water stops coming out of the tap because it is recognised that there is a problem and that there needs to be a capital injection.

I applaud the government for at least giving the appearance of pressing ahead with the Paradise Dam. This motion will facilitate that. That is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the water infrastructure required across the state. That water infrastructure was identified in the Water Infrastructure Task Force report prepared under former minister Howard Hobbs and which was spoken about so derogatively this morning by the Premier. I wonder why anybody with half an interest in the welfare of Queensland communities would seek to do that. I wonder why anybody would seek to suggest that that sort of water infrastructure is not needed in places other than the electorates of Burnett and Bundaberg. The Paradise Dam is required to provide the economic development in those two electorates in that area of the lower Burnett Valley. The issue of water shortages there is critical and is one that any government could hardly have ignored. This will be the second time this parliament has considered a particular piece of legislation aimed at facilitating that development, and so it should be.

That needs to be repeated right across the state. It needs to be repeated in a lot of other areas that are also facing severe water shortages, which are being accentuated and brought into sharp focus by the current drought conditions. We cannot afford to be playing politics with this issue in the way the Premier unfortunately did this morning in regard to the coalition government's Water Infrastructure Task Force. The issue is just too important for that. It is one of the core responsibilities of any state government to make sure that the infrastructure of all sorts is available for community development and community growth. The infrastructure necessary to ensure that there is an adequate water supply is probably one of the most important. It is something that seems to have been lost in a philosophical argument about the necessity to find this balance between environmental values and the need for this type of development to proceed.

I am pleased to see this motion before the House today. I am certainly not pleased to see the flippant way in which it has been handled. But it certainly needs to be addressed. We are only too pleased to lend our support to the passage of this motion. I do not believe that the revocation of that 55 hectares from the national park will have a significant effect on the Goodnight Scrub National Park. Everyone would agree that it would be better were it not to be revoked. Unfortunately, it is one of those things that is necessary. As I think the member for Burnett said in his very short address, most of it will be incorporated into a buffer strip anyway, so the values will most probably still be there; it just will not have the protection of a national park. The Goodnight Scrub National Park is a unique area. It is remnant of the type of vegetation that used to be quite common in that area. It has survived and remains there today because of a unique set of circumstances. Nobody would like to see that any other way. It will provide a very spectacular backdrop to the Paradise Dam storage area when it is completed. The member for Burnett may well have been to the site. The part of the Goodnight Scrub National Park

near the Paradise Dam site contains a lot of spectacular vegetation and will have much scenic value when the lake formed behind the Paradise Dam fills. In that regard, it is legitimate to argue that the dam will enhance the area from both a scenic and environmental point of view, as well as providing the necessary water for areas in the lower Burnett Valley.

I once again lend my support to the motion today and I again express the hope that this sort of motion can always be considered in this parliament in a fair and equitable way. Irrespective of which party is on which side of the House, there needs to be a realisation that this is the type of thing we need to do, and do so sensibly, if we are going to achieve that balance that we all want to see between preserving environmental values and providing the infrastructure that is necessary for people to live a fulfilling life and enjoy the benefits that are available from economic development.

**Mr Lawlor** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** What was that?

**Mr Lawlor:** There's no-one greener than you.

**Mr SEENEY:** The member for Southport would be surprised to know just how close to the truth his sarcasm is. His remark, made from a cynical and sarcastic point of view, is probably a heck of a lot closer to the truth than he could ever realise. The natural ecosystems and natural environment have been a huge part of my life. For me they have not been an abstract concept. They have not been something that is a wonderful theory and about which I could afford to philosophise in the way the member for Southport does, safe in his ivory tower on the Gold Coast, where the environment has been totally destroyed.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Liddy Clark): Order! The member for Callide! Relevance!

**Mr Lawlor** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Southport!

**Mr SEENEY:** There could not be a greater example of the shallowness and hypocrisy of the member for Southport than his accusation about someone who has spent their entire life managing and caring for the natural environment. I invite the member for Southport to inspect my little—

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Callide will stick to the motion.

**Mr SEENEY:** I think I have a right to take an interjection irrespective of how stupid that interjection is.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member has taken it. He will now get back to the motion.

**Mr SEENEY:** I certainly have a right to respond to it.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** You did.

**Mr SEENEY:** Thank you. Very adequately, I might add.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Relevance! Get on with it!

**Mr SEENEY:** In conclusion, I look forward to the day when the Paradise Dam and the other associated water infrastructure on the Burnett River is completed. I anticipate that it will be completed in such a way so as to enhance the natural environment and provide the economic benefits that we all want to see.