



Speech by

**ELISA ROBERTS**

**MEMBER FOR GYMPIE**

Hansard 15 October 2003

### **WATER SUPPLY**

**Miss ELISA ROBERTS** (Gympie—Ind) (6.25 p.m.): I am pleased to speak to the motion moved by the member for Lockyer but not so pleased that inadequate water supply continues to be an issue of concern for the people of my electorate, especially in light of the fact that the population is now at 40,000 and increasing on a daily basis. Currently the Cooloola shire's primary water source, Borumba Dam, is at only 48 per cent capacity, which means that we are once again eight per cent away from being classed as critical. Last year my electorate experienced major drought conditions, and it would be disastrous if we were once again subjected to these conditions as a result of limited storage capacity.

In 1994 the then Labor Primary Industries Minister announced that, due to the rapid population growth in the Mary River Valley and on the Sunshine Coast, the Borumba Dam walls would be raised to deal with the increased demand for water. The dam was to be progressively raised 25 metres between 1997 and 2010 at the projected cost of \$49 million. Nine years down the track, the raising is still to eventuate. In 1994 the government also announced a new dam to be built at Amamoor Creek. This, too, has not eventuated, even with cabinet at the time giving the necessary guarantee that hundreds of thousands of people would be able to get the water they required well into the next century.

The then Primary Industries Minister also stated that the Labor government's water strategy provided an economic solution without excessive impact on the local environment and communities. I find it interesting, however, that this government is planning to push ahead with the construction of a \$200 million Paradise dam near Bundaberg, even though scientific and economic reports have shown that there are better environmental and economic alternatives to the construction of this dam.

What really annoys many residents is the fact that the question of whether there will be a new dam or whether the raising will occur is never adequately addressed. I have no doubt that my electorate would appreciate an honest answer as to what is actually happening and the reasons for it. If this government has come up with a much better way of ensuring a continued, usable water supply, then my constituents will be satisfied. I am aware that, fortunately, Gympie does have a forecast for rain over the next few days—every drop helps—and we may not experience the dry conditions we faced when the drought was at its worst. It is, however, vital that we can be prepared for the very worst case scenario.

I know that there is a lack of appreciation on the part of many in this House and many members in the urban population not only in relation to the importance of water in our personal, day-to-day lives but also in relation to how essential water is to the people who work on the land. As an ex-city dweller, I admit that I took water for granted. I did not even know what a rain gauge looked like, much to the amusement of my new country neighbours. The thought of running out of water was never an issue for those of us in the CBD. It was something we never even contemplated. However, now that I reside in a rural area I have come to realise how precious a commodity water really is.

The residents of my electorate are frustrated at having been kept in the dark for so long about what their future water resource options are to be. They do not care who implements the best water policy, whether it be the federal government, the state government, Labor or the coalition. They just want to know that they can be confident regarding water access and availability.

Presently we know that there has been talk within the Department of State Development about securing land for any future upgrades of Borumba Dam and about plans to look at different scenarios

such as hydrological modelling. These strategies hold little comfort to an electorate which has been waiting for the promise of increased storage capacity to be fulfilled for years and years.

As this motion is directed at water issues throughout the whole state, I have to be honest and say I can only really speak on behalf of my electorate and the needs of my constituents. However, from what my colleagues have already said, there seems to be something amiss in regard to water supply generally.

Finally, I must say I am extremely disappointed that the National Party members refused to speak on this motion, even as many of their electorates are in the midst of water allocation problems. The reason is that the motion mentioned something negative about the federal government. I find it reprehensible that an issue as vital as water resource management has been politicised by the National Party and I believe this will be one further nail in the coffin for the party, particularly in areas such as the Gympie electorate.