



Speech by

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HUGHENDEN, WATER SUPPLY

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (8.54 pm): I want to raise a very important issue, that being the investment in infrastructure in rural and regional Queensland and in particular a dam at Hughenden. Water is our most valuable asset. Life depends on a reliable water supply. There can be no doubt about the benefits that water infrastructure can bring to a region. Emerald is an example. Since the completion of the 1.4 million megalitre Fairbairn Dam in 1972, we have seen the development of an irrigation scheme that has helped produce crops such as citrus, cotton, peanuts, grapes and flowers. This small town expanded into a major tourism destination and a thriving region.

We keep hearing about the infrastructure problems in the south-east corner caused by the pressure of the thousands of people pouring into the region each month. I believe that a way to help alleviate infrastructure problems is to invest in infrastructure in rural and regional Queensland. Focusing on major infrastructure projects in regional areas will create jobs, prevent rural decline and encourage people to move and invest in these areas and in turn take the pressure off infrastructure in the south-east corner.

That is why I have raised a number of times in this parliament the need to seal the Hann Highway. It is an integral part of the trucking and tourism industry. It would open the west to the north and the south and link the southern states to the gulf area. Since Joh was Premier one lousy dam has been built in Queensland and now we have a water crisis. The state government now realises that if it continues to neglect to invest in water infrastructure there will be an absolute catastrophe.

While there have been proposals for a number of dam sites, I would like to bring to the attention of the House the need for water infrastructure in the Hughenden region. The town of Hughenden is situated on Queensland's longest river, the Flinders River, which has a mean annual run-off of 3.7 million megalitres—approximately 50 per cent of the flow of the Burdekin River. Yet there is not a single weir or dam on its entire network.

The Flinders council commissioned a report into potential dam sites in March 2003. The proposed development involves the construction of an in-stream dam at Mount Beckford, approximately 15 kilometres north of Hughenden. An estimate is that the capital cost of a dam would be \$70 million. The surrounding area has been considered viable for crops similar to those in the Emerald irrigation area—cotton, crops related to cattle production and horticultural crops.

The other significant benefits that a dam would bring to a small community like Hughenden are the associated benefits of recreation and tourism. Crop development, tourist attractions and the flow-on impacts for the workforce in the shire have conservatively been estimated to increase by more than 85 per cent. The population of the town would increase by more than 75 per cent. Having a diverse number of industries would ensure that the region remains a viable place for people to live in and invest in.

There is very strong support for the scheme from the local residents who want the additional farming business and job opportunities that it would bring. There is no doubt that this dam would result in increased population, improved business viability, improved services, diversification of the economic base and new recreational facilities for the residents of Hughenden. It makes sense to make rural and regional Queensland attractive and an alternative option for people tired of living in the congested areas in the south-east corner.