



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Hansard Wednesday, 10 October 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Traveston Crossing Dam, Freshwater Species Conservation Centre

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier) (9.34 am): The Queensland government continues in its resolve to deliver water security to the 2.2 million residents of south-east Queensland. As part of that work, today I can advise the House that this week the environmental impact statement for the Traveston Crossing Dam has been provided to the Coordinator-General to confirm it addresses the terms of reference. Subject to his confirmation that it does address the terms of reference, it is expected that the EIS will be publicly released as early as next week. After six weeks of public consultation, the Coordinator-General will then consider the response. If he approves the EIS, it will then be placed before the federal Minister for the Environment—whoever that may be—early in 2008.

Based on a recent assessment by the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation or SMEC, I am confident that this project meets the highest technical and engineering standards. That said, we also acknowledge that any dam of the scale of the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam has the potential to create impacts that must be addressed, which is exactly why we have an environmental impact statement process. Concern has been raised about the potential impact on the Queensland lungfish, the Mary River turtle and the Mary River cod. They are extraordinary creatures that are already under stress with their populations in decline, and they deserve protection.

The project proponent, Queensland Water Infrastructure, proposes a number of measures to address these concerns. Today I can announce that it is proposed that a \$35 million Freshwater Species Conservation Centre be built near Gympie, adjacent to the Bruce Highway on the eastern shores of the dam, upstream of the dam wall. The funding will be sourced from the \$1.7 billion Traveston Crossing Dam project. Its prime goal will be to ensure the survival and improve the status of the lungfish, the Mary River cod and the Mary River turtle. This proposal is about learning more about those species and ensuring that they just don't survive, but that they thrive.

The conservation centre will be run in partnership with the University of Queensland and will be overseen by Australia's leading science agency, CSIRO. The world's leading experts in the research of this field will be involved to provide independent advice. The scientific panel consists of Professor Jean Joss of Macquarie University, Professor Gordon Grigg of the University of Queensland and Dr Col Limpus of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. I thank those people for their willingness to serve on this panel. I table brief CVs for the scientists.

Tabled paper: Details of the scientists providing independent advice to the Freshwater Species Conservation Centre.

I place on record my thanks to Professors Joss and Grigg for their personal efforts to ensure that I and the government understood the unique and precious features of the lungfish, and the Mary River cod and turtle. Professors Joss and Grigg have made clear their opposition to the construction of the Traveston Crossing Dam. I have no doubt that their opinions remain unchanged, but I thank them for supporting this project which is intended to achieve just one thing, that is, the protection and sustainability of those three very important species.

In April this year I visited Professor Joss's research laboratory at Macquarie University in Sydney. I understand her passion and commitment to this extraordinary fish. The time I spent with Jean and her fish was a revelation.

The facilities proposed for the new centre include breeding tanks, fish and turtle ponds, research laboratories and researchers' accommodation. It is proposed that the centre will have 14 staff and provide an education and awareness focus for the species. The centre will provide Queensland's first opportunity to show off this 'living fossil', which is said to be more than 110 million years old. It is expected to attract visitors, students and scientists from all over Australia and overseas. As I said, when I visited the facility at Macquarie University, as a Queenslander it struck me how little I knew about this species and how little most Queenslanders know about the species. This is an opportunity to have an interpretative centre where people, including schoolchildren and other visitors, can understand how unique it is to Queensland and how important it is in understanding our own evolution. It will make a very significant contribution, particularly to the local area.

The \$35 million funding package includes resources for operational and research funding for the next 10 years, along with funding for the implementation of research findings. This is a world-class initiative. It will be the only centre of its type that we know of. I am reassured by the support of world-class scientists from the University of Queensland and the CSIRO.

The work that Jean Joss has dedicated her life to was at risk of coming to an end as she moves towards her own retirement. For us to pick up the ball and move her research to Queensland is not only an important part of preserving this species, it is a scientific coup for Queensland.

Subject to the Commonwealth giving the dam final approval, it is expected that detailed planning of the centre will commence by mid next year with the first sod being turned by mid 2009. I look forward to the centre becoming a focus for international research and attention. This project is an important step in the protection of some of the most unique creatures on our planet and it is a legacy that we can all be very proud of leaving to our children.