



Speech by

Hon. Kevin Lingard

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

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WATER ASSETS

Hon. KR LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (6.04 pm): It is only natural that everyone is seeking an assurance that the water structure in this state will not be privatised. One of the big changes that we have noticed since the 1960s is the change in attitude not only of ALP governments but also of all governments towards building dams in this state. Until the 1960s, dams were built with the idea that water was a basic commodity. So dams such as Maroon and Moogerah were built in those areas by the government, with the structure being built by the government, with the farmers themselves—who are on irrigation—mainly looking after the maintenance of the irrigation channels. Governments considered that because water was a basic commodity it was necessary to build the structure of the dam.

In recent years when we go to ministers to ask about a dam we find that they say, 'Yes, that is a good idea,' but at the end of the half hour they turn to you and ask, 'Who is going to build the dam?' With that type of attitude, it was quite obvious that no dam was ever going to be built in an agricultural area, because farmers could never contribute to the cost of building a dam. They could contribute to the maintenance of the irrigation channels, which they were prepared to do. But they could never contribute to the cost of building a dam. The only dams that were being built were those that were being built for an urban water supply, because a government could borrow money through areas such as the Brisbane and Area Water Board, they could build the dam and then, through water rates, they could get the financial return on the structure of the dam.

Dams such as Moogerah and Maroon were built in the 1960s under a government concept which said, 'We will build the dam and we will build it for agricultural viability. We believe that money can be taken out of consolidated revenue to build a dam for the benefit of the area.' But now we find that these dams are being taken over by the government. We need an assurance that this government is not going to get a return on its money by privatising those dams.

The water from Maroon Dam comes down through Beaudesert, through Cedar Grove Weir, and will come into the eastern corridor water grid. Water within that grid can be sold to new townships. One of those townships will be Yarrabilba. Yarrabilba can go to the government and ask for a cost for getting an amount of water to maintain Yarrabilba. That cost will be quite substantial. But the difficulty for people in rural areas is that that water will be considered priority water.

When irrigation water is made available, generally the farmers pay only 33c a megalitre. Then there are the urban users. Then there are those particular industries that would be considered priorities, which would pay a high cost for that water. Everything goes okay in times of good rainfall. The difficulty occurs when we face a period such as what we are facing now, because the industry says, 'We can't lose our water,' the urban users say, 'We can't lose our water either' and, of course, the first ones who lose their water are the farmers and those people who want irrigation from the dams.

SunWater is now a GOC. We cannot question SunWater. SunWater is virtually a law unto itself. SunWater can make all of the rules in terms of the whole irrigation system of either Moogerah Dam or Maroon Dam. Fair enough, that might be okay. But a similar thing would happen if the government

privatises the water supply, because a private company will obviously be out to get all the money it can. Certainly, those people who are priority water users would never, ever come off that list. So the farmers and other rural people are concerned that they are always the ones who will lose out. Under the present system, because no dams will be built unless someone can pay for them—and it is the government who pays for them—there is obviously a great concern about this particular water supply system being privatised or being put under the control of a private company such as SunWater.