Speech by

Hon. Jeff Seeney

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Mining Industry, Water

Hon. JW SEENEY (Callide—LNP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning) (2.16 pm): Last week, I travelled to Rockhampton to announce our government's plans to deal with the issue of water quality in the Fitzroy Basin and the difficult problem of legacy water in the region's coalmines, which has cost our state economy dearly. I announced that we will be implementing an initiative that offers a long-term solution to protect water quality in the Fitzroy Basin catchment. The solution needs to ensure that we can sustain economic development. It needs to ensure that different industries can co-exist across the basin. It needs to ensure that water quality remains acceptable at all of the basin's communities and for all of the basin's water users.

With Central Queensland coalmines still coping with the excess water from recent years flood events, it is clear that we need a well-designed, considered management system to enable mines to deal with disposal of excess water on a continuing basis. We need a solution that is firmly based on science, one that establishes a clear set of principles for releasing water from the coalmines into the river system. We have begun an investigation into the feasibility of establishing a salinity trading scheme for the region. The Hunter Valley in New South Wales has a salinity trading scheme, which we believe may provide a model for the future of the Fitzroy Basin. Like the Fitzroy Basin, it drains the largest coastal catchment in New South Wales and contains 20 big coalmines, three power stations and a wide range of agricultural activities. Its salinity trading scheme has cut salt levels in the Hunter River by over 20 per cent over the last 10 years.

The Hunter scheme is based on the release of water during flow periods where the river has the capacity to absorb a salt load without impacting on the environment. Stored mine water can then be discharged when there are good, natural flows of low-salt, fresh water in the river. River monitoring determines when discharges are possible and tradeable salinity credits are used to determine the total amount of salt that can be released.

We believe that it is timely to investigate whether a similar market-driven framework that allows water discharge volumes and salt credits to be traded can be put in place across the Fitzroy Basin. The government will initiate a pilot release of water from four mines in the upper Isaac River during the coming wet season. The pilot release will be strictly monitored and the findings will improve our understanding of the river system and provide the basis to develop a permanent solution for the management of excess mine water.

When I travelled to Rockhampton last week I met with the Fitzroy Basin Water Quality Advisory Group, a group of people who have been involved in monitoring the Fitzroy River Basin since the former government made an absolute mess of the discharge of water from the Ensham mine. The advisory group and, indeed, the basin's communities have been grappling with these issues for all of the years since. I believe our proposal was well received by the water quality advisory group and it was seen as a way forward after years of dithering and inaction. We will continue to work with this group, and with all interest groups in the Fitzroy Basin, to ensure that we get a solution to the issue of water in mines in Central Queensland and that will assist to get the state back on track.