



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Record of Proceedings, 28 October 2014

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Regional Queensland, Water Infrastructure

 **Mr COSTIGAN** (Whitsunday—LNP) (11.56 am): I again rise to speak about the growing importance of building new dams and water infrastructure projects in regional Queensland, in particular, throughout Central, North and Far North Queensland. New dams are vital to the future economic development of our state, especially those places north of the Tropic of Capricorn. Something I am most passionate about is building a stronger regional Queensland which I consider to be the promised land of the 21st century. Think about how many people have come here to Queensland since European settlement and then think about those hardy, brave souls who ventured into our regional areas in search of opportunity, looking to farm the land, to start a business, to start a family, despite all sorts of hardships. I have no doubt that more and more opportunities beckon in the future, but much of that will depend on secure water supplies for agricultural and mining projects and for urban use. That is why I am encouraged by the federal government's push into this important area of public policy, in particular, the recently released green paper on dams, and looking ahead a round table discussion in Canberra this week in relation to various water infrastructure projects.

One of those projects is the Urannah Dam—something I have touched on before, something that fires me up, something that I continue to strongly lobby for and something that I know has the support of other regional MPs, in particular, the members for Burdekin and Gregory who also understand the benefits of this project. Last week was National Water Week. 'Big deal' some might say. But it may well be a big deal if we run out of water, if we have no water for new farming projects or new mining projects. These job-creating projects can happen and will happen if we build dams like Urannah. If Urannah were built as was envisaged back in the sixties when Eungella Dam was built further upstream along the Broken River in the Burdekin catchment, we would have had a massive water storage facility west of Mackay—something like 1.5 million megalitres. That makes it bigger than Fairbairn Dam on the Nogoa River near Emerald in Central Queensland, three times bigger than the Peter Faust Dam in my electorate of Whitsunday, 12 times bigger than the Eungella Dam, which partly borders my electorate, and comparable to the dam well known to the member for Burdekin, the 1.86 million megalitre Burdekin Falls Dam.

To gain a better understanding of the Urannah project, I actually visited the upper Broken River last week on Cloverly Station thanks to an invitation from Mick and Judy Cook, the owners of the property, who I accept would be seriously impacted by the construction of a dam in their own backyard. However, they are well aware of the many opportunities that would be afforded to people from all walks of life and all backgrounds on the back of the construction of Urannah, which has been talked about since the sixties. Back then, there was no Bowen Basin as we know it today. For us long-time locals, of course it was the Brigalow Belt. We have seen many mines pop up here and there over the years. More can come on line, in particular, in the northern Bowen Basin so long as water is available. The same water from Urannah could potentially be gravity fed to mines in the neighbouring Galilee Basin. In terms of agriculture, the water could be used for up to 30,000 hectares of irrigated

farmland on the Bowen River. Not only that, we would have water for a new baseload power station back in Collinsville, smack bang between the two biggest regional economies of the north.

It is not just Urannah that needs to be built; the Nathan Dam on the Dawson has been talked about for decades as well as projects on the Flinders-Gilbert, the Connors River Dam and the Nullinga on the Walsh River in the far north. It goes on and on. It is my hope that we can start building some of these dams, starting with Urannah, which was always part of the Burdekin plan. If members are not sure about that, they should check out the map next time they go to the Burdekin Falls Dam overlooking Lake Dalrymple and they can see it themselves.

Last Monday, I had a refreshing swim in Massey Creek, which is in a remote part of my electorate, about 4½ hours from my office in Proserpine. It is one of the tributaries of the Broken River, which leads into the Burdekin. It gets about 22 inches of rain a year, enough to fill Urannah pretty damn quickly. Afterwards, we lunched back at the station house and then headed to the coast but not before stopping off at Eungella Dam. I looked at the plaque on the dam wall, unveiled 45 years ago by Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the most legendary of all Queensland premiers, the man who opened up Queensland, the man who certainly transformed regional Queensland. We now need a new wave of projects to build our regions, build our state and help build our nation. Looking forward, the LNP government's \$8.6 billion Strong Choices investment program can certainly help deliver much-needed water infrastructure projects in partnership with the Commonwealth, industry and community. It is my hope that Urannah will happen sooner rather than later for the sake of jobs and regional development and, in particular, for the benefit of the Mackay-Whitsunday region.