




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 18 October 2018

**STATE DEVELOPMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND AGRICULTURAL
INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (3.50 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the Auditor-General's report titled *Security of critical water infrastructure*. In reading this report, there is a serious overview of the state's water providers including issues of monitoring and control of water transport, treatment and distribution. We need to be checking and testing our systems, especially water distribution networks, for drinking water, reservoirs, pump stations and wastewater treatment plants.

What was disturbing was the increase in reported attacks on critical infrastructure through information technology. The report found that all entities audited were susceptible to security breaches or hacking attacks because of weaknesses in processes and controls. This has not been addressed or highlighted in any detail and that is concerning. Although there have been recommendations to the department responsible, we read in the report that the department has turned to a bureaucratic response by undertaking a 'project'—whatever that means—to improve its understanding of weaknesses across the sector. We now have key performance indicators implemented through a technical working group. Does this instil any confidence or raise concerns? It does with me.

I share the committee's concern and we should be deeply concerned that the department's progress towards the recommendations of the Audit Office has not been timely and is limited. Actions not being delivered by the original deadline also set a disturbing trend. The committee was right to highlight that these government water service providers have not paid sufficient attention to potential vulnerabilities with their water infrastructure. Considering the serious breach of management and leadership, the minister needs to urgently advise what is being done to secure these audit findings. Just providing a letter next year in June 2019, with due respect to the committee, is not good enough. This is serious. While the minister is at it, he can explain serious proposals that risk security of critical water infrastructure. I am referring to the Paradise Dam improvement project. From what I see, there are no improvements, just devastation on the horizon.

Having become aware of serious consideration being progressed to a detailed business case to lower the spillway at Paradise Dam by a massive 17.6 metres or 10 metres, one can imagine our surprise that many key stakeholders have not been advised or, even worse, have not been consulted. The boffins who are doing the briefing claim they will consult before works commence. How about consulting now before the minister tries to spin a preferred position of wiping out our agricultural, economic and cultural future? This is serious and is something the minister needs to address, not dismiss.

I am concerned that this attack on our critical water infrastructure is being driven by extreme environmentalists who we know control this government. They do not want dams so they spin hysteria in an attempt to remove our critical dam infrastructure, and they will do anything. A new safety standard and proposals have identified 17 projects across multiple dams in Queensland. We need to realise how

devastating this is for critical water infrastructure. Why are we even considering this? The minister as early as yesterday claimed that the dam is safe, so why a ridiculous proposal to lower a dam's spillway by 17.6 metres? If the spillway is lowered by 10 metres, it will cut our water allocations in half. If it is cut by 17.6 metres, you may as well take the dam away and forget it was even there. I can tell the House that there is only one option that will be discussed: leave the wall as it is and fix it up. If they cannot do that, get out of the road and let someone else do it. Sort out this ridiculous safety standard that is posing such a devastating threat to our critical water infrastructure.

I wonder if the people responsible for this proposal understand just how devastating these options are. Our region has a great reputation for water security both now and into the future. We are seeing record investment into horticulture and agriculture based on our dam and water availability. In good years we currently have 95 per cent water allocation. If you lower the spillway by 17.6 metres, it is calculated that allocations will drop by 50 per cent, halving the water allocation to the Burnett and Bundaberg regions. That will halve production costs, halve the value of properties and halt any proposed expansions of production and value adding.

I anticipate that the value of high-value irrigated agricultural land will also significantly drop. This is a disaster. As late as today there have been many phone calls from those who have not been consulted on these proposals who continue to be very disturbed. The Bundaberg region is currently seeing record investment. Hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent on high-value irrigated agriculture. To have even a proposal being endorsed by a minister without consulting with stakeholders is very disturbing. This is about critical water infrastructure. We need to be very careful that this government's agenda does not destroy what is a magic opportunity for the future of the region.