




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 16 October 2019

MOTION

Paradise Dam, Parliamentary Inquiry

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.41 pm): It is somewhat disturbing that we have people such as the member for Bancroft talking about such a serious issue for my electorate. This is a really serious issue.

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: The member for McConnel will cease her interjections and put her comments through the chair.

Mr BENNETT: I rise to support the Leader of the Opposition's motion and to thank the member for Nanango for championing the fight against the disastrous decision in relation to the Paradise Dam. This is a very serious issue and my region deserves nothing less than a parliamentary inquiry. The motion is detailed and highlights the very issues about which details must be provided. I know that the member for Nanango understands the issues confronting our region, because the day after the tragedy started to unfold the member for Nanango drove to the Paradise Dam where she met us and then she drove to Bundaberg to meet with stakeholders. That is in contrast to the minister, who has moved to rob the wealth of my community. He has failed to meet with stakeholders and he has failed to attend any of the subsequent meetings. At those sham meetings, Sunwater has been thrown under the bus. They are not answering questions and they are not dealing with the issues that my community needs addressed. We still have no details about the safety issue. Those details have never been provided.

Today the Labor government must come clean on what is going on. We all need to know. Today, they must announce what is proposed. Are they going to rebuild the wall after chopping five metres off the top of it? Potentially, more will come off the dam wall if we let them continue. What are the issues with the dam? No-one has told us anything. This is a betrayal. It is disgraceful. The spin on the issue has made us all dizzy. We do not want to hear any more nonsense about free water claims. The people sprouting those talking points do not understand what is going on. This is about unspecified safety issues.

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for McConnel, you are warned under the standing orders.

Mr BENNETT: If it can be proved that there is a safety issue, we are somewhat complicit in what is going on. Now is the time for Queensland Labor to come clean and explain to my community and the community of Queensland what is going on.

This issue is affecting property values and investment decisions in a region that grows the most macadamias, sweet potatoes and many other crops. That is the wealth of my electorate and it all comes from water. That is all at risk, but we have no answers. We have lost our No. 1 regional benefit, that is, the security of water supply. We need an inquiry to get to the bottom of this. I cannot understand what

the government is trying to hide by not allowing a parliamentary inquiry to get to the bottom of what is potentially the biggest failure of infrastructure that this state has ever seen. I can tell the House that all I have been shown is an iPhone photo of core samples. Is that the safety standard that we apply when decisions are made?

This announcement is a bitter blow to our regional economy and the future of high-value irrigated agriculture. It is devastating that the government can decide to lower the water capacity of the Paradise Dam after spending so much on repairs following the 2011 and 2013 floods. All those repairs have been completed, but now they will tear it down.

The proposal to lower the dam wall by five metres is based on a new safety standard. Members should make no mistake: this is about a new one-in-15,000-year or one-in-33,000-year safety standard that is being applied. No-one knows where it came from. I make a prediction that no dams will be built in Queensland under Labor governments with that new safety standard. Today we have seen more evidence that Labor is anti dams with its politically motivated announcement to halve the size of Rookwood. Do we need any more evidence? I also predict that it will not end with chopping five metres off the dam wall, as has been spoken about. We know that originally there were reports that talked about taking 17 metres off the dam wall. I believe that is the agenda of what is being proposed.

It is unbelievable that in the middle of the worst drought in years the Labor government would progress with damaging water security for my region. It has been a long time since 2013. What is the urgency? Where are the reports to give us the confidence that there is anything at all wrong with the Paradise Dam, other than a photo of a core sample, which I have been shown on an iPhone?

In Queensland there is nothing more vital than water security, but Labor's policies are literally bleeding our region dry. I note that the member for Maryborough is not in the House, but I make the point that he has spoken about the importance—

Mr SPEAKER: Member, the convention is that we will not refer to a member's absence from the House.

Mr BENNETT: I notice that other members of the Labor Party have spoken about the importance of the Paradise Dam. I welcome their contributions and I hope that we can get their support in ensuring future water security for all Queenslanders, not just those in the bush. I was not being critical of the member from the other side. I was making the point that I hope that we can get more pressure from that member so that this government gives us the answers that we need.

Members have spoken about tourism and the environment. Members should make no mistake: we have first-class reports from the environmental sector that the platypus, the turtles and the lung fish are all at risk, yet we hear nothing from the other side. Stop the politics. Table the reports. Do the inquiry. Let us get to the bottom of the truth about the Paradise Dam. We continue to be told about these reports, yet no-one will table them. This will be the biggest infrastructure fail in our great state's history and there will be no reports. That is simply shameful. I ask Labor to come clean. I ask them to give us the reports so that we can get to the bottom of what the Paradise Dam should be and could be, for the future of my region.