



Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**


**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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Record of Proceedings, 6 February 2020

**PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT**

**Burnett Electorate, Paradise Dam**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (2.13 pm): This afternoon I take this opportunity to talk about the biggest infrastructure fail in Australia's history and its impacts on my region—the Paradise Dam. We cannot underestimate how much devastation taking five metres off the spillway is going to cause to our region. We have done the surveys and stakeholders have paid their own money to engage with the community. One in five jobs is predicted to go from the Bundaberg region. We are talking about a billion-dollar hit to the economy.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr BENNETT:** It is important that members opposite take the opportunity to grasp the realisation. I am not being political; I am talking about the real impacts on my region.

**A government member** interjected.

**Mr BENNETT:** I take the interjection from the minister. If he does not realise what devastation this is going to cause and step up and do the consultation in my community, I say to all of those opposite: shame on you!

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Stewart): Order! Member for Burnett, I believe we are debating this in a bill at present.

**Mr BENNETT:** I do not believe that the amendments have been tabled yet, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** One moment, please.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! That is not a signal to start debating across the chamber. I am taking some counsel from the clerks at the table. The amendments have been circulated and I counsel you that you should not be debating this while it is under consideration.

**Mr HART:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. My understanding is that the amendments were circulated under a different bill and we have had members speaking to the House under that bill. The amendments have not been circulated to my knowledge under the bill that we are about to speak about.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, member for Burleigh. I will take counsel again, if that is okay. The rule of anticipation in this instance would mean that the speech that the member on his feet is giving relates directly to the bill being debated in the House at present. Member for Burnett, I suggest that you do not go down that road or otherwise I will ask you to resume your seat. Can you move on to—

**Mr BENNETT:** Mr Deputy Speaker, can I take some guidance from you before we start the clock?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Yes, certainly.

**Mr BENNETT:** I am talking about Paradise Dam. The spillway reduction has been common knowledge and debated for a long time. I am not actually talking about the amendment. The amendment is about giving the minister unfettered access to do this work. With regard to the economic impacts of the lowering of the wall—I am just asking for your guidance—is that related to the amendment particularly?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, member for Burnett. I think you answered your own question when you said that the amendment is about the repair and the maintenance of it, so I again counsel you to perhaps change—

**Mr BENNETT:** A further point of clarification, if I may. When we resume normal debate, is it fair then that members talking on the agriculture bill can then talk about the Paradise Dam amendments? Is that your understanding? If I am not allowed to talk about it now, are our members allowed to talk about it then, because we have been told that we are not allowed to talk about the amendment in the agriculture bill debate?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** One moment. I will get further counsel. I just want to make sure that we get this correct. Thank you, members; I appreciate you bearing with me on this. Member for Burnett, again it is anticipating debate. I have taken counsel. I have made a decision. I am now asking you to move on. I will not be entertaining any further debate around this.

**Mr HART:** I rise to a point of order. Mr Deputy Speaker, while I understand that the amendments have been circulated, they have not been moved yet and therefore debate would not be anticipated.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, member for Burleigh. Again I will say that with regard to anticipating debate I have made my ruling. It is time to move on. Member for Burnett, can you move to another topic perhaps?

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. We all recall that last year we had to make a decision, as the government did, to start to release water from Paradise Dam and I want to talk about the economic impacts that that action has caused to my region. Economic surveys have gone around to the growers who are now faced with a 16 per cent water allocation in June/July and they are anticipating that one in five jobs will be lost in the region. We are talking about 55,000 hectares of irrigated agriculture that will now not necessarily be able to anticipate avocados, macadamias and mango trees for future viability and sustainability.

It is important to realise the anticipated hit to the economy of about a billion dollars to the bottom line with the lack of expansion. It is also important to note that before Christmas there were already \$3 billion worth of contracts that now have clouds over them that will not progress because of the issue around water security. It is a serious issue for our region about the future viability of water security. It is an important issue for Queenslanders as we continue down the path of being a dry state. We have had welcome rain, but I want to highlight that the issues around water security in my region cannot be underestimated. I urge those opposite: please do not try to cheapen and please do not scoff and laugh when introducing water security issues. It is a big issue and we want to continue to make sure that water security and the Paradise Dam issue continue to be front and centre for everyone.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Pause the clock. Member for Burnett, I have actually taken some further advice. The amendments that have been circulated lie outside of the long title of the bill. You can resume back to what you were speaking on before. I apologise.

**Mr BENNETT:** Can I get my three minutes back?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** No, you cannot, I have given you some latitude here, and I apologise, but I have now given you the opportunity to resume your discussion and again I do apologise.

**Mr BENNETT:** Does that mean we can talk about the amendments that have been circulated in the ag bill?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** You can continue with the speech that you were giving around Paradise Dam. That is outside of the long title of the bill. When we get to the bill we will address it in the bill. My apologies again.

**Mr BENNETT:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. In wrapping up, I want to highlight and thank those stakeholders in my community who invested their own money to bring an international expert to Bundaberg, and thank Sunwater for talking to the expert, who has fixed up Missouri dams with anchoring and who is indicating we can repair the dam. It is important to recognise those stakeholders who had to pay their own money to undertake consultation that identified one in five jobs are now at risk—\$1 billion to the bottom line of the Bundaberg community. We must take the biggest infrastructure fail in Queensland seriously. We must put Queensland first but, more importantly, do not underestimate how serious this is to my community. We need to do everything we can to maintain the dam's integrity. There are other regions that need water, such as Biggenden, Maryborough and Hervey Bay. We have a real opportunity to access water in this state, but we cannot do if we start to chop the wall down.