




Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

Record of Proceedings, 9 March 2021

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Floods, Litigation; Paradise Dam

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (2.35 pm): In the summer of 2011 Queenslanders experienced a major flooding event—in fact, it could be called a disaster—that affected the lives of thousands and thousands of people. It destroyed lives, it destroyed property, it destroyed businesses and community organisations. Many of those memories are still with us today. These memories were made worse for the victims with lengthy court cases and Sunwater and Seqwater deciding to appeal the decision. The victims, and there are more than 6,500 of them, have had to fight so hard and for so long. It was interesting to hear the member for Ipswich not mention these people in his speech.

On 29 November 2019 the Supreme Court found that the plaintiff and group members suffered loss and damage as a result of the negligent operation of Wivenhoe and Somerset dams during the 2011 floods. It has taken eight years to win this landmark case. After this win it has taken more than another year for a settlement to be reached with Sunwater. I said at the time of the class action decision that the Premier had the power to direct the government owned corporations not to undertake appeals. It has been a cruel action which has cost taxpayers even more so that these entities could carry on defending themselves in court.

Finally, on 26 February 2021, there was a partial settlement with two of the defendants, the State of Queensland and Sunwater for \$440 million—only half of the liability for those damages. However, Seqwater, which owes another \$440 million, continues to appeal. To make matters worse, the Queensland Audit Office report by the Auditor-General reveals that Seqwater's financial statements do not include liability and a matching expense for the \$440 million it owes in damages. That report has been discussed by the parliamentary committee. I thank the members of the opposition who are on that committee who demanded of Seqwater an answer as to why the Palaszczuk government has decided to be so negligent by not forcing that government owned corporation to have the money sitting there ready to pay out those poor people who have suffered such tremendous loss which was determined through the court. In fact, the report says—

The judgment created a financial obligation for the group members that can be estimated and is likely to require payment. Under the accounting standards, Seqwater should have recognised a liability and a matching expense. SunWater has appropriately recognised a \$330 million liability and expense.

I plead with the government to remember these people who have lost so much.

I will briefly mention Paradise Dam because I do not think I could make a speech in this parliament, particularly as the shadow minister for water, without mentioning the debacle that is going on at Paradise Dam under the Palaszczuk Labor government. Just a few weeks ago I talked about what we learned in the estimates process in relation to Paradise Dam. We learned that Labor is refusing to guarantee that the Bundaberg Scheme will be returned to its original capacity, or allocation for that matter.

At that time I highlighted that, according to Sunwater's own forecasts, levels in Paradise Dam will drop to zero by June 2021 unless there are significant inflows. I need to update the House on that statement. Revised figures now show that it will be empty—I repeat: Paradise Dam will be empty—by the end of March. That is just three weeks away. Where are the local members? They are absolutely silent on this issue. I congratulate the good people of Bundaberg and the farmers and business owners, as well as the member for Burnett who continues to fight the good fight and the great former member for Bundaberg, David Batt, who also continues to fight the good fight. Where is the—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It is time for the Palaszczuk government to front up, stop covering up and listen to the people of Bundaberg and the farmers of Central Queensland about their needs.

(Time expired)