




Speech By
Deb Frecklington

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

Record of Proceedings, 12 October 2023

STATE DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (3.06 pm): After at least 18 months I eventually get to contribute to the debate in relation to the Auditor-General's report on dam safety. I note that the Queensland Audit Office report identified a major gap in how the department had been monitoring and collecting information in relation to dam safety from dam managers. It was noted that the department had not developed clear guidelines for staff on how to consistently monitor compliance with dam safety conditions. This statement particularly worries me. It states—

The department plans to complete 10 audits per year, so monitoring of compliance with the dam safety conditions may take more than 10 years to cover all 107 dams.

In relation to dam spillways, the QAO report noted the following—

All the dams in Queensland scheduled for upgrade by 2015 were either completed or rescheduled by the department to 2025. The department does not have a formal requirement for owners to provide information on the progress of the upgrades by 2025 and 2035. Without these commitments, the department has no way to monitor owners' progress in achieving the upgrades by the due dates.

We know also that the QAO report noted major issues in relation to capacity to pay being an important issue in assessing the risk of maintenance and upgrade programs. The letter contained in the QAO report from the department dated 30 November 2021 states—

All dams due for upgrade in 2015 were completed on schedule and all dams to be upgraded by 2025 are on schedule.

I find that almost impossible to believe. I will provide the example of one of my own local councils, the mighty Toowoomba Regional Council. According to the schedule, Toowoomba Regional Council must upgrade the spillways at Cressbrook and Cooby dams by 2025. In August last year I wrote to the Toowoomba Regional Council asking for advice about the response by the minister to 2022 budget estimates question on notice No. 7, which asked about funding to help councils address these upgrades and their capacity to meet the 2025 deadline, given the minister had alleged the department had not received any requests from Toowoomba Regional Council for funding support. In response, then mayor Paul Antonio stated that this was incorrect, with the Toowoomba Regional Council in fact making 16—one six—requests to the government for funding for this project between 2002 and 2022. Now fast-forward to October 2023, I received further correspondence from Mayor Geoff McDonald. Congratulations to the new mayor of Toowoomba Regional Council. In the past I have passed on my condolences to the McDonald family.

The correspondence I received from Mayor Geoff McDonald was seeking my urgent assistance to help identify a funding solution for the Cressbrook Dam upgrades. That is because the new quotes suggest the upgrades will cost Toowoomba Regional Council somewhere between \$250 million and \$300 million. In his correspondence to me, Mayor McDonald said—

Accommodating such a massive expenditure will compromise Council's financial capacity and adversely affect our ability to fund other essential capital works including existing asset replacement and renewals.

He went on to state—

If Council is to bear the full costs of the Dam Safety upgrade, it will result in unavoidable adverse impacts to the Toowoomba Region.

The Labor government is not providing financial support for the dam safety works that it is mandating. That begs the question of what are these regional councils going to do about that. I believe more needs to be uncovered from this report.

Let us remember that this report was dated I think 1 December 2021. We are debating it in this House now, and nothing has changed since then. There has been no extra funding in the budget, irrespective of the fact that the minister knows this is a major issue. There was a paltry sum of I think \$70 million a couple of budgets ago to be spread over all of these dams. As members have seen, I have only had time to give one example of Cressbrook in the Toowoomba Regional Council. More needs to be done. I plead with the minister to actively manage the risk of affordability of significant upgrades and understand what is actually happening and the stress it is causing those dam owners.