




Speech By
Tony Perrett

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

Record of Proceedings, 12 October 2023

STATE DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (3.11 pm): I rise to speak on the State Development and Regional Industries Committee's report examining the Auditor-General's 2021-22 report *Regulating dam safety*. The Auditor found that the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water was not effectively managing the information it collected or targeting risks to noncompliance. When a government is obsessively focused on media management, on how things look, and is besieged by chaos and crisis, it is not surprising it has haphazard processes and problems with governance and how it conducts business.

When discussing this report, the member for Bundaberg boasted about the millions being spent on fixing Paradise Dam. It is brave to boast about the cost to fix another example of a botched Labor government project. Paradise Dam was built by a Labor government and according to reports corners were cut. While the department advises it has implemented all the QAO recommendations, the Auditor's report is yet further evidence proving this government's incompetent management. The Auditor found—

There are gaps in the way it collects and manages the information it needs, how it targets risks, and how it acts on non-compliance. The department needs to improve its regulatory approach to compliance, monitor dam owner planning and progress in achieving necessary upgrades, and better address non-compliance by owners.

The department does not follow up. Data is not current. It is reluctant to enforce compliance. This has serious implications for those who live downstream of dams, for those who rely on dams for their water security, drinking water, irrigation and industrial use, and for those who are vulnerable to floods. If safety reports are considerably late or not provided, how can you assess whether dams are safe? The Auditor told the committee—

... there are 107 referable dams and an estimated 790,000 people live downstream ... and would be at risk if these dams were to fail.

The Auditor found in 2021 that 720 people were at risk from the Borumba Dam which was last upgraded in 2008 and targeted to be upgraded by 2035.

Dams are substantial pieces of infrastructure which underpin the viability of many regional areas, such as Gympie. They mitigate against floods and provide a reliable and secure water source for domestic, agriculture and industrial use. Gympie is familiar with all these issues. Dams attract controversy in my region. The same Labor government which botched the Paradise Dam planned to build a dam in the Mary Valley. The Traveston Dam fiasco cost Queensland taxpayers half a billion dollars. It was another example of obscenely wasteful projects by Labor governments. It remains an appalling example of Labor's insensitivity, incompetence, callousness and complete disregard for a community and taxpayers' money. The department's response to the QAO recommendations said—

Planning controls ... such as land acquisition and land zoning are challenged by uncertainties that the measures will be permanent.

Premier Beattie flew in, dictated to the community and acquired properties which had been held for generations. It was called 'the biggest bloodbath in the state's history'. Echoing the mood of today, it was another arrogant and out-of-touch premier and a government which ignored the local community and thought media management and appealing to vested interests in the south-east corner was its primary purpose.

This government has proposed a pumped hydro scheme at the Borumba Dam. Locals are justifiably cautious. The government must not ignore community concerns and must not ride roughshod over it. Executive director of water operations and systems, Jarrod Cowley-Grimmond, told the committee that 'generally ... dams take between five and 10 years to upgrade'. For years I have advocated raising the Borumba Dam wall to ensure our region's water security. The project requires significant quantities of water. It must not compromise Gympie's water security. When I have asked about water security, the Minister for Water deflects responsibility to the Gympie Regional Council. Last year I asked about plans to ensure downstream domestic, industrial and agricultural water users will not be adversely impacted by the lack of supply. The minister said that water takes—

... must align with the outcomes, objectives and strategies of the Mary Basin water plan to ensure the sustainable management of water in the plan area and protection of existing water users.

The minister then said that any further information about the proposal and technical assessments are the responsibility of the minister for energy and renewables. It is concerning that the minister seems to have little to do with the purpose of the Borumba Dam.