QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 865

asked on Thursday, 26 May 2005

MR KNUTH ASKED THE MINISTER FOR NATURAL RESOURCES AND MINES (MR ROBERTSON)—

QUESTION:

With reference to his response to my Question on Notice No. 824, asked on 17 August 2004 and given his department's continual collection and reporting of data on water systems throughout Queensland—

Will he provide up-to-date details on when existing water supplies are estimated to be exhausted for the water systems in the following regions (a) far north Queensland, (b) north Queensland, (c) central Queensland, (d) Wide Bay-Burnett, (e) west Queensland, (f) south-west Queensland and (g) south-east Queensland?

ANSWER:

Estimation of the point at which demand exceeds water supply is based on assumptions such as projected growth in population and industry, yield estimates for various water supply structures, changes in per capita consumption, new technology, efficiency of use and restrictions regimes.

All of these are difficult to predict reliably but in general, careful management can extend significantly the projected date of supply/demand balance from what it might be on a business as usual basis, in time to allow new supplies to be accessed where necessary.

(a) Far North Queensland

In relation to far north Queensland and particularly the Cairns-Atherton Tablelands region, my Department's planning studies have identified significant opportunities for using approximately 50,000 megalitres of unused water entitlements from Tinaroo Falls Dam. The recently completed Least Cost Planning study for Cairns City identified a number of opportunities for the City's water supply requirements to be met until at least 2040.

Such opportunities include urban water efficiency improvements, accessing unallocated water and trading of water available from the Barron River system and groundwater supplies located to the city's south.

My Department is currently working with regional councils in far north Queensland with a view to developing a 50 year water supply strategy.

(b) North Queensland

The water supply planning study undertaken by my Department for the Burdekin-Townsville area identified non-structural and structural options for meeting the region's future water needs. Infrastructure that would supply water from the Burdekin River to Bowen and the central Queensland coal fields is currently being investigated.

Current urban and industrial water usage for the Townsville/Thuringowa region is around 60,000 megalitres per annum, most of which is supplied from Ross River Dam and Paluma Dam. NQ Water, the supplier of water to the twin cities, also holds a 10,000 megalitre allocation from the Burdekin Haughton Water Supply Scheme. There is also a 110,000 megalitre water entitlement from the Burdekin Haughton Water Supply Scheme reserved for NQ Water's future needs through a deed of agreement.

Estimates of the future long term (year 2026) urban and industrial needs of the Townsville/Thuringowa region are around 150,000 megalitres per annum. Such a demand would be accommodated by existing entitlements.

(c) Central Queensland

Planning studies undertaken in the central Queensland region by my Department have indicated that, with the exception of the Capricorn Coast, Bowen Basin and Dawson, existing water storages have adequate capacity to meet the needs of the area until the period 2010 to 2020.

The Central Queensland Regional Water Supply Study has been established to develop a strategic water supply plan for the region. It is anticipated that a draft strategy will be released in the last quarter of 2005.

(d) Wide Bay–Burnett

In the Burnett Basin, the construction of the Burnett River Dam, the Eidsvold Weir and other infrastructure will make available over 200,000 megalitres, which is likely meet demands beyond 2015. The introduction of water trading, which has been established through the water planning process, will also assist in ensuring that water moves to its highest value use.

Within the Wide Bay area, the proposed raising of Lenthall's Dam on the Burrum River, along with demand management, is predicted to meet demands in Hervey Bay until at least 2025.

(e) West Queensland

The shires and towns in western Queensland do not at this stage have the same growth pressures as we see in other parts of the State.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, township populations in the Georgina and Diamantina catchments increased slightly between 1996 and 2001. However, these populations are expected to remain relatively stable during the next 10 years. The Georgina and Diamantina Water Resource Plan (the Plan) allows for additional licences to be issued for town water supply purposes provided the proponent local government authority prepares a planning study satisfactory to my Department. The planning study would be required to demonstrate the need for the water and would need to address efficiency, environmental and other criteria as outlined in the Plan.

(f) South West Queensland

The major urban water supply system for the south west Queensland region is associated with Toowoomba City and the surrounding shires where it supplies potable water as part of a broader supply network.

The capacity of this system to meet future demands due to population growth and further industrial development in the region has recently been re-assessed by the Toowoomba City Council. Toowoomba City Council's most recent estimates indicate that its existing supplies from a combination of available groundwater reserves and the yield from Cooby, Perseverance and Cressbrook Dams, are already fully committed.

The remaining shires and towns in southern and western Queensland do not at this stage have the same growth pressures seen in greater Toowoomba and the rest of south east Queensland.

(g) South East Queensland

There have been no updates to the timelines when demand exceeds supply to those outlined in the South East Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy-Stage 1 Report other than for Toowoomba City. There have been no significant adjustments in the assessments of historical water availability from the major dams (Wivenhoe, Somerset, North Pine and Hinze Dams) in south east Queensland, though hydrological assessments are being undertaken to consider droughts worse than those on the historical record.

Water supplies for this region are being investigated in more detail in Stage 2 of the South East Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy, which is due for completion in December 2006.