



Speech by

David Gibson

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr GIBSON (Gympie—NPA) (3.15 pm): Firstly, Mr Speaker, let me offer my goodwill and congratulations to you on your election to this high office. You enjoy our goodwill, and I am confident that you will earn our respect as you conduct your duties with independence, neutrality, fairness and good humour.

I acknowledge the presence of my wife and children in the gallery today. I thank them for so many things that cannot be counted. I would like my sons and my daughter to know how very proud I am of them, and I pray I will be a good example to them as I serve in this parliament. My parents are also here today. I am the eldest child of deaf parents. I know firsthand what it is like to be a part of the disadvantaged in our society. My parents made many sacrifices for my sister and me when we were young. For me, sign language was my first language. Spoken English came later in life through my grandparents. Unfortunately, I am no longer as good as I should be with signing, so I will pass the task of interpreting my speech to a professional interpreter.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Mr GIBSON: My parents were Labor supporters. Indeed, I think this recent election was the first time that my father has voted for a non-Labor candidate. I mention this only to position myself politically. Fewer than 12 months ago, I had never been a member of any political party when I saw an ad in the *Gympie Times* calling for community minded individuals to stand up and represent the people of Gympie. Imagine that! A political party that was willing to advertise to find the best person to do the job.

Before I joined the Nationals, I made some inquiries into what they stood for and I was impressed. Here was a party that is based on three principles: security, individual achievement and strong representation for local communities. I discovered the Nationals are committed to upholding family values and fighting for a better quality of service, opportunity and life for all people, and I quickly came to the conclusion that this was a party I could be proud to belong to.

When I was preselected, I was required to give up my career in the media. It was not a decision made lightly. We had many family discussions and I sought advice from trusted friends. It was a matter of prayer and quiet meditation for me. But, in the end, it was the support that my wife Alicia was willing to provide for our family by taking the responsibility of becoming the sole income earner that helped me to make my final decision. It is through these experiences that you discover what true love means, and for that I am grateful that our marriage is for time and all eternity.

I must thank those who helped me in the campaign—for whilst I had a successful career in business, and prior to that the military, I was incredibly politically naive, and without their help I would not be here today. I wish to show gratitude to our zone vice-president, Teresa Cobb, who gently guided me in the right direction; our electorate council chair, Guy Burnett, who provided wise advice and a trusted ear; my Liberal friend, Michael Kucera, whose energy and drive was boundless during the campaign; and all the members of the National Party branches who put so much into the campaign, including a concern for my dietary habits.

I must also thank my friends, who do not have any political desires but who offered to help, as well as the members of the public who walked in off the street and asked what they could do to wipe the smile off Beattie's face. It was that broad support that resulted in our election victory in Gympie. It was a brave decision by the people of Gympie to put their trust in someone as relatively unknown as me. I am honoured by the confidence they had in me and I will not forget the responsibility I have to all the people of the electorate.

I am the 18th person to represent the seat of Gympie since it was formed in 1873. Gympie has given our state many great men. Andrew Fisher was both the state and federal member representing the people of Gympie and was, of course, the first Labor Premier. Jacob Stumm and Tom Dunstan were also Gympie men who sat in this very Assembly. They were also associated with the *Gympie Times*, as I was. In my case I served as the general manager for two years before stepping down to campaign. Interestingly though, Jacob Stumm had the luxury of retaining his position as editor whilst he was the local member from 1896 to 1899. I am sure there was never a bad story about him.

These newspaper men brought to this House a good understanding of the local issues and a healthy dose of common sense. I would like to reflect on a comment Jacob Stumm made in this very chamber in 1897. He said, 'When party obligations come into conflict with pledges to constituents they must give way to the constituents.' It was good advice nearly 110 years ago and I intend to follow this advice today. We saw in the last parliament what Labor did to the former member for Noosa when she put her constituents before the Labor Party. Thankfully, the National Party is far more enlightened and has a policy of 'electorate first'. In effect, if an issue is important enough locally, I am free to vote with my community instead of along party lines. I doubt I will ever need to use this, but I want the people of Gympie to know that I will fight for their interests. In the end I must return to live with them and I will do that with my head held high.

There would have been few times in the history of this parliament when a new member, rising to make his maiden speech, could not have been confronted more with a sense of urgency and a need to bring about change. Of course, I speak of the water crisis we face in south-east Queensland and in particular the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam. Media reports recently indicated that Brisbane could be facing level 4 water restrictions in as little as two weeks. Based on current demand and rainfall predictions, Brisbane will run out of water in 2008 if we do not do something. The proposed dam at Traveston Crossing has been put forward as a solution to this crisis. However, the reality is that it will not secure the future water supplies for south-east Queensland. The proposed dam will not be constructed until 2012. Assuming it takes two years to fill, it will not provide any water until 2014—six years after Brisbane has run out of water.

In April this year the Premier flew over the Mary Valley, landed at Gympie Airport and, like some water messiah, announced to the people of south-east Queensland that Traveston Crossing was to be the site of a 'megadam', which would solve our water problems. The south-east Queensland dam options report was used to justify the decision, quoting a capital cost per megalitre of yield of only \$4,600, making it the most cost effective of all the options considered. However, less than two months later the official government cost estimate had risen to \$1.7 billion and the yield had dropped to only 70,000 megalitres, increasing the capital cost per megalitre from \$4,600 to \$24,300, making it the most expensive option considered. The estimated cost is now between \$2 billion and \$2.5 billion and the capital cost per megalitre has once again blown out to between \$28,600 and \$35,700 per megalitre. If this dam goes ahead it will become a financial millstone around the neck of every Queenslanders, resulting in higher taxes to service the debt. Is it this government's intention to burden future generations of Queenslanders with this debt?

I appreciate that at times there are unintended consequences to the decisions that are made. The original GHD desktop report identified the Traveston Crossing site as the best location from a hydrological perspective. However, it has serious flaws from a geological perspective. Geologists advise that the proposed dam site is an ancient subduction zone which is the junction of two tectonic plates, the easternmost of which has dived under the stationary western plate forming a trough which is the Mary River bed. This is an area which geologists refer to as a chaotic geologically complex environment known in geological terms as a classical melange setting. Melange means a motley assortment of things and in this case it means a collection of rocks, shale, slush and gravel, all of which has to be sealed somehow. This is why the test drilling has not revealed suitable bedrock. It is extremely difficult in engineering terms to build a safe dam on a subduction zone. I am not aware of any other government in Australia that has been foolish enough to try due to the risk and high cost.

There are also further areas to consider in terms of the impact of this proposed dam: the devastating social impact on families and communities and the loss of extensive areas of valuable and irreplaceable agricultural land. Indeed, up to 12 per cent of Queensland's milk comes from the inundation area as well as beef and crops. Were this dam to go ahead we would see Queensland move from a water crisis to a food crisis in a matter of years. The ecological damage resulting from this dam will be nothing more than wanton environmental vandalism. I urge this government to heed the call made yesterday by the federal

environment minister and rethink this dam, otherwise the Beattie Labor government will be remembered as the government that destroyed the Mary River, the Mary Valley and all of the life associated with her.

I am a pragmatist, however, and I realise that if we do not go ahead with the proposed dam at Traveston Crossing we will still need solutions to the water crisis that we face. As members of this parliament, we do not have the luxury of becoming nimbies, or 'not in my backyard' members. For this reason I am glad the Deputy Premier found time last week to undertake a secret visit to my electorate. I note that the meeting was so secretive that she dispensed with the courtesy of advising the local member's office that she was visiting the electorate. However, notwithstanding this slight, I am glad that she made time to see the problems firsthand. I applaud elements of the water policy that this government announced during the election. It is comforting to know that, if the National Party offers a policy that is good for the state of Queensland, this government is prepared to pinch parts of it.

There are many alternatives that could provide more secure water supplies for south-east Queensland. Let me quickly discuss three. The first one involves a re-engineering of Borumba Dam. I have been told that if a new dam wall were built 300 metres in front of the existing dam wall and it were built to a maximum height and with two new saddle dams, Borumba could provide up to a two million megalitre storage capacity. That is twice the size of the Wivenhoe Dam. Had this work been done as the National Party had committed to, a much larger dam would have been full in the year 2000. In fact, the data shows that a raised Borumba Dam would have been full for the last 40 years. Why? Borumba is a very deep storage with a relatively small surface area and is located in solid rock. So evaporation and leakage losses would be minimal. Indeed, it only takes 10 millimetres of rain in the Borumba catchment to create any run-off. By contrast, it takes 50 millimetres of continuous rain in the Wivenhoe catchment area to create any useful run-off.

The second alternative worthy of consideration is of course desalination. There are over 7,500 desalination plants in operation around the world, the largest being in Dubai which produces 232,000 megalitres per year using waste heat from a co-located power generating plant. Why do we not consider co-locating a major desalination plant with a new power station that we would need on the coast? What about one along the upper reaches of the Brisbane River which would treat the brackish salty water and then pump the desalinated water back into the Wivenhoe Dam? Surely this Smart State can embrace these alternatives.

No discussion of alternative solutions to the water crisis would be complete without acknowledging what the Premier referred to as the 'Armageddon solution' which, of course, is nothing more than the concept of water recycling. I had the opportunity a couple of weeks ago to drink recycled water with the Cooloola Shire Council Mayor, Councillor Mick Venardos, and the Greens candidate for Gympie, Mr Paul Marshall. The water was from Singapore and in my opinion had no taste to it at all. It was incredibly bland. If I were given a choice it would not be my first preference and it fails to compare to a glass of rainwater any day of the week.

I know that there has been a lack of political courage on the recycling issue from those on both sides of this House. However, we do not need to wait for a referendum on water recycling. At a fraction of the proposed cost of Traveston Crossing Dam we could implement water recycling today as part of a source substitution scheme. This is where additional water is extracted from the river systems and replaced with highly treated recycled water. The net impact on the environmental flows is zero and the public is not required to drink bland, recycled water.

As an example, the Brisbane River at Mount Crosby has a system yield of 379,000 megalitres and an allocation of 286,000 megalitres. The balance of approximately 100,000 megalitres is reserved for environmental flows. If 50 per cent of that flow were harvested for the drinking water supply and replaced with highly treated recycled water, this would effectively provide an additional water source of 50,000 megalitres per annum for Brisbane. This represents only a fraction of the total system river flows in the Brisbane River which are over a million megalitres per annum. So when we compare this to the cost and the yield figure of just 70,000 megalitres for Traveston Crossing, we see that it becomes a very attractive alternative.

From listening to me today, members may think that water is the only issue affecting the people who live in the Gympie electorate. This is far from the case. On 9 September the electors in Gympie recognised the real source of their difficulties and voted against a government which has presided over the mismanagement of and decline in services in our region. Let me touch on a few of them.

Just last week the RACQ identified the Bruce Highway around Gympie as being worthy of only a two-star rating—the worst in Queensland. That is nothing new to this government. Previous reports identified that section of the Bruce Highway as the most deadly stretch of highway in Queensland. We have funding provided under the AusLink program from the federal government; however, the state Labor government has shown that it is unable to get on with the job. No-one doubts that we need a bypass. However, the uncertainty that the delays have created for the residents in the study area is unacceptable. We need leadership from this government, not buck-passing.

Health is another issue that many in my electorate are concerned about. We heard the recent announcement that we will lose our Gympie health district—a health district that has to be one of the most efficient in Queensland. This is a path we have already been down with the Goss government and which was, without doubt, one of the most negative things to happen to our health service. I fear that history will repeat itself.

Another area of concern relates to our schools. Were it not for the commitment of teachers, support staff and parents, the situation would be dire. I specifically refer to Gympie Special School. It caters for the most vulnerable students in our community and yet it does not even meet the basic standards for a special school. The school relies on the outstanding efforts of the P&C members to fill the gaps. People like Janet Jarrem work tirelessly to provide basic items for students—items that Education Queensland would not provide such as a covered eating area for the children and a wheelchair accessible playground. The services that we enjoy in Gympie are not always as a result of good government but rather as a result of a strong sense of community and the dedication of staff.

I feel a strong sense of responsibility to the people of Gympie, representing them as I now do as their member. The people of Gympie put their trust in me because I love Gympie. I love the lifestyle it offers. I love the environment. I wish to preserve it for future generations. I see it as my task in this place to work for and with the community to repay their faith in me through my commitment to them. In doing that, I intend to be governed by the examples and philosophies that I have referred to in this speech, particularly with honour and a special regard for those people needing assistance.

Those of us who have made the pilgrimage to parliament share many common ideals and make significant sacrifices. In the main, we are committed to the institution of parliamentary democracy. We also have our own visions for a better future for our state and the wellbeing of our fellow Queenslanders. Those visions vary, as do our philosophies and the policies we would pursue to achieve them. It is my aim to work with all colleagues in this House, regardless of where they sit, to achieve the very best for Gympie and for Queensland.