

PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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Tillegra Dam

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TILLEGRA DAM

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Mr GEORGE SOURIS (Upper Hunter) [12.08 p.m.]: I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak about the Tillegra Dam in the shire of Dungog in my electorate. I want to support the local community and the Dungog Shire Council in the battle they are having over the proposed construction of the Tillegra Dam. I am not a supporter of the dam; I am an opponent of it. I am particularly concerned at the loss of a rather large number of productive farms, the employment that goes with those farms, the expenditure that those farms create in the local district and the employment that that then generates throughout the district. As well as that, the taking of a large amount of land will deprive the shire of a rate base and in fact will cost the small shire \$350,000 per annum at current rating levels—and, of course, that is in perpetuity.

The town will have to bear a number of impacts temporarily during the construction period and, following that, the economic loss incurred by the district will come very starkly to light. I imagine there would be only one employee regularly servicing the needs of this particular water reservoir. The water is not destined for the local people in Dungog; it is destined for places that are well and truly further away. The Government initially announced its intention that this would relieve water supply pressures on the Central Coast, but later as those pressures eased the Government said it would provide Hunter Water with a great opportunity to invest in new industry requiring new water supplies.

Be that as it may, it is interesting that Dungog Shire Council has for the last two or three years been battling Hunter Water and the New South Wales Government to ensure there are adequate replacements for the losses that will occur. One can think of it as compensation or as an adequate replacement in terms of infrastructure, economic activity and future employment for the shire. Whilst the shire has not necessarily supported the construction of this dam, nonetheless it has come to the conclusion that on behalf of the community it is as well to participate in the discussions with the Government and Hunter Water to ensure that a number of projects come to fruition.

I thank the Minister for the Hunter and her staff for the briefing I received this week. However, in conversations and discussions with people from the community and the shire council it is clear we are staring at a very disappointing cocktail. The so-called measures of assistance are really only routine assistance that in the scheme of things would eventually receive priority for funding, whether they are in the departments dealing with State forests or the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, or Planning and the work associated with the local environmental plan, or the Roads and Traffic Authority. Each of the projects under discussion has to find its way to the top of the list to be funded in the usual way.

Hunter Water is making virtually no contribution to the future stability and economic base of the shire. It is taking land, using the power of government and the potential threat of compulsory acquisition. It is not fulfilling its obligation at all. I would have expected Hunter Water to produce some of the money, if not all of the money, particularly in relation to main road 301, which is the main road from Raymond Terrace through Clarence Town to Dungog. It will be used very heavily in the construction process and there is a crying need for this road in the shire as I speak. Hunter Water has had no role in that. The council and the people have had to fight for it through the usual channels. I do not believe this is a very satisfactory approach or outcome. I ask the Government to take this issue seriously.

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