



Speech by


Hon. Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Wednesday, 1 August 2012

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Irrigated Agriculture Industry

 **Hon. AP CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Mines) (2.26 pm): I am pleased to advise the House of the LNP government's strong support for the release of water from two Gulf of Carpentaria rivers to facilitate the development of an irrigated agriculture industry in North-West Queensland. Last week in an address to the Northern Outback Irrigators Forum in Hughenden, I launched a tender process for unallocated water from the Flinders River and the Gilbert River catchment areas—an announcement that is set to give a considerable boost to communities in North-West Queensland. This announcement is part of the government's current six-month plan and builds on our commitment to support and grow the agricultural sector as one of the four pillars of the state's economy.

Under the gulf water resource plan, volumes of unallocated water were set aside to ensure the state government could meet emerging water needs and continue to sustainably manage our water resources into the future. The announcement that we will now release that water strikes the right balance between economic development and responsible management of our water resources. This release of unallocated water delivers a timely boost for the economy of the north of this state. The release will also test potential for the demand for water in these catchment areas in the future. There will be 80,000 megalitres of water made available in the Flinders River catchment and 15,000 megalitres in the Gilbert River catchment. Importantly, no one applicant submitting a tender will be able to secure more than 40 per cent of the volume being released from a single catchment so as to ensure an equitable allocation of water for multiple users. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines will grant water licences based on criteria and will set a reserve price to ensure Queensland's natural resource assets are valued and allocated sustainably. New water licences will also include conditions to protect existing rights to water and the gulf's environmental, cultural, tourism and fisheries values.

The Queensland government is also keenly interested to see the outcome of research being conducted by the CSIRO through the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy that will confirm the capacity of the Flinders River to support development beyond the volume being released. Irrigated agriculture on the Flinders and Gilbert rivers has been talked about for a very long time, and we are finally seeing action from an LNP government in Queensland. This announcement means that there will be new opportunities for economic growth in the north-west of this state. I am proud that as the Minister for Natural Resources in the Newman government the LNP has been able to make a strong contribution to helping make those opportunities available to the communities of North-West Queensland—something that was never possible under the former government. The closing date for tenders is 28 September 2012 and further details about this release of unallocated water is available on my department's website.