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**PRIME MINISTER**

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
OPENING OF THE BURDEKIN FALLS DAM  
BURDEKIN - 14 AUGUST 1988**

For almost a century the dream of a dam upon the Burdekin River has inspired generations of people with the promise of new prosperity for North Queensland.

Today we mark the realisation of that dream - the completion of the Burdekin Dam and the formal opening of a new era for the people of this State.

In opening this dam today I pay unreserved tribute to all those who have planned and built it.

And I take unqualified pride in the fact that throughout the long saga of the Burdekin Dam, it was Federal Labor Governments which have led the way, and which have paid the bill, in the interests of North Queenslanders.

In 1889 - that is, ninety nine years ago - W.H. McKinnon presented his engineer's report which for the first time proposed a large dam on the Burdekin river to irrigate the surrounding land.

It was the Chifley Labor Government which set up a joint Commonwealth-State Ministerial Committee to investigate northern development. That was in 1945 - ninety nine years after the Burdekin was discovered and named by Leichardt. Chifley's committee selected the proposal for a dam at the Burdekin Falls as the one most suited for further development.

But various promises by successive conservative Governments came to nothing.

It was not until 1974 that, with the decision of the Whitlam Labor Government, the first Commonwealth funds were granted for water resource development in the Burdekin region. Three million dollars was allocated for the building of the Clare Weir, a pilot scheme for future large scale development. A further one million dollars was allocated to investigate the Burdekin Basin's potential for development.

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In 1976 a Townsville resident and Labor Alderman called Ted Lindsay helped establish the Townsville-Burdekin Regional Water Committee which went on to play a major role in advancing the cause of the Burdekin Dam.

It must be a matter of great satisfaction for Ted, who is of course now my colleague the Member for Herbert, to be here today to witness this ceremony in the knowledge that his hard work and dedication helped bring it about.

Because in 1983 the ALP promised to build the dam, and when we were elected to office we reaffirmed and subsequently fulfilled that commitment.

In 1984 the Burdekin Falls Agreement was signed by Senator Peter Walsh, the then Minister for Resources and Energy, and Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the then Premier of Queensland.

Less than three years later the dam wall was finished - a year ahead of schedule due to the good industrial and meteorological climate that prevailed.

Now in 1988, thanks to the recent cyclone, the dam is full and North Queensland is about to receive the benefits of this great achievement.

I say great, because the dimensions of this Dam beggar the imagination.

The dam wall is 876 metres long, with a spillway of half a kilometre, rising 37 metres above the river bed, holding 1.85 million megalitres of water, inundating 22,000 hectares of land and drawing on a catchment area of nearly 115,000 square kilometres, or about half the size of the State of Victoria.

The Dam will provide some 850,000 megalitres of water to convert through irrigation some 50,000 hectares of grazing land into 500 new farms capable of producing crops of the highest quality.

And 130,000 people in Townsville and Thuringowa will receive a water supply that is guaranteed and pure.

No wonder the dream of a Dam inspired so many people for so long.

No wonder the Federal Government is proud to say we have fully funded the realisation of the dream, to the tune of \$129 million.

No wonder Ted Lindsay looks pleased!

Back in September 1983, in Question Time in Parliament, I was asked a question about whether the Dam would be completed by 1988 - the question, I hardly need add, came from the Hon. Member for Herbert, Ted Lindsay.

I said then that the Federal Government was totally committed to building the Dam and that we were aiming to finish it in 1988 - our Bicentennial year.

It was clear even then that the opening of the Burdekin Dam would be a major event of our Bicentennial celebrations. It is a tremendous symbol of the reconstruction of the Australian economy which has occurred under this Government. And it is, in anyone's book, a significant achievement of nation building - something for which future generations will be indebted and grateful to us.

Many people can share in the glow of this achievement:

- . the workers whose efforts saw the dam completed ahead of schedule;
- . the contractors involved in the project, especially Leightons Contractors who won an Australian Federation of Construction Contractors, Engineering Award of Excellence for their innovative engineering which hastened the speed at which concrete was placed;
- . the Queensland Government which is to pay for irrigation works and a number of other associated infrastructure projects;
- . Senators Peter Walsh and Gareth Evans, the Commonwealth ministers responsible for the dam since 1983 and the Queensland ministers Mr Coleby, Mr Martin Tenni, and Mr Don Neal; and
- . the former and present Commissioners of the Queensland Water Resources Commission, Mr Don Beattie and Mr Tom Fenwick, and all Commission staff who administered the project.

It is a project which underlies the commitment of this Federal Government to the well-being of the people of North Queensland.

And it is a project which proves again the truth that, through constructive cooperation, Australians can perform great tasks and complete great achievements.

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