



PRIME MINISTER

OPENING OF THE ORD RIVER DAM

KUNUNURRA, W.A.

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon
William McMahon, C.H., M.P.

30 June, 1972.

Mr. Premier, Mr. Chairman, Sir Reginald, Sir Charles, my other Parliamentary Colleagues, Distinguished Guest, including my own Minister for the Interior, Mr. Hunt, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Before us as you can see stretch the waters of the greatest man-made lake that has ever been built in Australia. It is a unique and imaginative enterprise.

For years we have talked about the Ord Irrigation Scheme - here on Australia's North-West frontier, in a region where some of our pioneers wrote their names into the record of our history.

This is the country to which the overlanders came in the last century. Let us, now, remember those adventurous men and their families, who drove their cattle until they reached the Kimberley.

The story of the Durack family is only one which enriches the history of the far North-West. They first crossed our continent to settle here in 1835, and it took them over two years to get here. Today the site of their homestead, named Argyle, lies under this lake.

It is singularly appropriate, therefore, that the Government of Western Australia has given the name - Lake Argyle - to this great stretch of water.

The early pioneers broke the silence of this land. Since then, the modern pioneer has come, and technology has made its contribution to the pace of development.

The Ord River Irrigation Scheme is one result, with this dam as its central feature. Storing millions of acre feet of water, it gives a new kind of life to this area: To the cotton and other crop farmers, and to the adventurous Australian families who lived and have made their homes here in Kununurra. They have demonstrated their confidence in the North West in an unmistakable way.

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It is not my intention today to recite the history of the Ord River Scheme although I want to say I have had a long association with it ever since it was first mooted in the Commonwealth Cabinet.

In some ways, it has been a controversial project, which has had its troubles and its problems. Many have been overcome but new ones crop up to test the skill and energy of the farmers, research workers, and of the officers of the two Governments - Commonwealth and State - as well.

Let us put problems aside to talk about the engineering triumph this dam really is. Let us acknowledge the spirit, the enthusiasm and the labours of those who live here.

The North-West no longer sleeps in the past. It is bustling, adventurous and progressive. Beef-roads have spread across the Kimberley. Highways link the outposts with our ports and with cities, and the jet-port at Kununurra has conquered distance and brought the Ord River community into the web of a rapid transport system.

I am pleased to mention here that the Commonwealth recently approved a major upgrading of the road to the Kimberley on the Northern Territory side of the border. This will provide a high standard, all weather link through to Katherine, Darwin, Alice Springs and on to the east.

The West Australian and Commonwealth Governments have taken many initiatives together in the East Kimberley. We began in 1946 when the two Governments financed the Kimberley research station. We brought the CSIRO to the area, and it is still here and will continue to do valuable work. The Commonwealth has contributed many millions of dollars to assist the West Australian Government in its development programmes in the whole of the North-West.

West Australia has always had faith and confidence in this Ord Scheme and in the impact it would make in the East Kimberley and in the North.

It was against this background that the Commonwealth Government decided in 1967 to provide funds within a limit of \$48 million for the main dam and the development of the irrigation area around here.

You, Mr. Premier, as you so well said, as Minister for Public Works - were a driving force for this project in its early stages - and so were Sir David Brand and Sir Charles Court in later years. The results of this enterprise and co-operative effort not only by governments but by people cannot yet be measured fully. Much has been achieved but - and I repeat more or less what you said Mr. Premier - there is much still to be done.

But let me mention two or three developments that stand out at this time. First - cotton. I am told the cotton area per farmer has almost doubled in about seven years. The yield has reached top world standard - now 1000 lbs. of lint per acre - or nearly double what it was seven years ago. That is a first-class performance.

Then there is research. The experts tell me the Kimberley Research Station has made good progress on hybrid cotton, cattle production, peanuts, safflower and sorghum. So, too, have the West Australian Department of Agriculture, and scientists and researchers of the University of New England in New South Wales who are also working in this area.

These applied experiments will help to increase the range of activities here, and give the Ord region further economic diversity. They will make their contribution, Mr. Premier, to the goals and to the ideals that you have mentioned.

So we have here today something made and something in the making. It is an interesting and spectacular country and provides the attractions and climate, I believe, for tourists. Who knows that at some time in the future this Lake could be the site of a great water carnival for the North and the North-West, attracting overseas tourists who want to see the grandeur of our new frontiers.

Both governments have been alert to preserve the natural beauty of this environment, and funds have been provided for ecological studies over a very wide area. This is a place, I believe, where man and nature can live in harmony.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have here today - a huge dam - a great lake - and a new horizon for the East Kimberley and the North-West.

Those associated with this project have planned and built well. I would like to mention the personnel of the constructing authority, which was the Public Works Department of Western Australia, and the contractor, Dravo Pty. Ltd. which was awarded the contract in world-wide competition. I congratulate them on the jobs they have done so well.

This is part of our nation-building, - and we are a great country - part of a process that is going on all over Australia today. I now have the very greatest pleasure in officially declaring the Ord River Dam open.
