



Australian Citizens Party

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Morrison's Hells Gate Dam is half-baked

Support a national bank to fund the full Bradfield Scheme.

First the good news: Prime Minister Scott Morrison has announced \$5.4 billion to fund the Hells Gate Dam on the Burdekin River, northwest of Townsville.

The announcement follows years of campaigning by Bob Katter MP, the Citizens Party, and even current Deputy PM Barnaby Joyce, for the Bradfield Scheme, of which Hells Gate Dam is the centrepiece.

Designed by Australia's greatest engineer, Dr J.J.C. Bradfield, who built the Sydney Harbour Bridge that turned 90 last week, the scheme would divert some of the water from the high rainfall areas of Queensland over the Great Dividing Range to water the dry inland areas of Queensland, and even eventually reach the Murray Darling Basin.

(While Dr Bradfield's proposal was criticised for using incorrect elevation figures, which were based on surveys in the 1940s, the critics' figures were even more incorrect, and more modern engineering surveys have verified the concept is sound.)

The coastal strip of North Queensland receives more than 21 per cent of Australia's surface water run-off, whereas the huge Lake Eyre basin on the other side of the range receives just 1.9 per cent, and the Murray-Darling basin, Australia's food bowl, receives 6.1 per cent.

On 2 February, the Citizens Party released a 6-minute video, "[Barnaby Joyce: an infrastructure phony, or fair-dinkum?](#)", which challenged the deputy PM to prove his support for the Bradfield Scheme was genuine, and not just a cynical vote-grab to promote before elections.

Joyce pushed the scheme very hard as a lowly backbencher in the 2019 election, but since returning to Cabinet as deputy PM he hadn't said a word.

Does this announcement show that Barnaby got the message?

Well, it may show that Barnaby got his act together and convinced Morrison to do *something*, but—and this is the real news—what they have announced is not good enough.

Barnaby Joyce would know that better than anybody.

The government's version of Hells Gate Dam is enough for 60,000 hectares of irrigation in the Burdekin River basin, but it is not high enough to divert water into the dry inland where it can do the most good.

Queensland State MP Robbie Katter, who has been involved in fighting for the Bradfield Scheme with his father for his whole life, explained in a 23 March statement that unlike the Morrison announcement, "the Revised Bradfield Scheme (backed by Sir Leo Hielscher and Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen), would send the water west via channels to irrigate the rich black soils of inland Queensland starting at the Uplands Desert near Pentland (where there is a break in the Great Dividing Range)."

The beauty of the Revised Bradfield Scheme is the power to divert would come from gravity, but only if the Hells Gate Dam is high enough; Morrison's announced dam isn't.

"To enable this", Robbie Katter continued, "the building of the dam wall to a height of 395 metres [above sea level] is crucial, meaning the proposal that's tabled at the moment would kill the Bradfield Scheme forever.

"Let's do it properly once", he urged. "This dam is too big of an asset to make short-sighted decisions on."

National infrastructure bank

The Citizens Party's video about Barnaby Joyce shows that he knows very well that Scott Morrison's announcement isn't good enough.

This botched announcement is an example of two problems with Australian politics:

1. what happens when infrastructure is used primarily as an election ploy, by major parties who otherwise have no commitment to the long-term economic development of Australia; and
2. the severe shortcomings of funding infrastructure through grants from the annual budget, as this \$5.4 billion is, which leads to penny-pinching and small-mindedness, rather than through a national infrastructure bank, which can provide sufficient long-term credit to enable governments to build projects properly the first time.

The Citizens Party's policy of a national banking system, including a retail postal bank to serve consumers, a national development bank to direct credit to farmers and manufacturers, and a national infrastructure bank, would provide all the funding necessary to not only build the right version of the Hells Gate Dam, but the entire Bradfield Scheme, the cost of which is estimated to be around \$17 billion.

The Citizens Party is working with Bob Katter to draft and introduce bills to establish these banks, but in fact the government could do this already on an emergency basis, using the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA).

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the RBA has issued over \$300 billion in emergency money called quantitative easing (QE), but only to prop up the banks.

If it can do that to support the banks, there is no reason the RBA cannot be deployed for an economic recovery program centred on nation-building infrastructure.

Politicians assume the so-called "central bank independence" of the RBA means it cannot be used this way, but that is not true.

The RBA is 100 per cent owned by the Commonwealth government, and its founding legislation requires the RBA's board to advance "the economic prosperity and welfare of the people of Australia", and also empowers the government to override any objections from the board.

Australia has immense potential to be a food bowl for Asia and the world, and with visionary nation-building infrastructure we can tap that potential; however, that means we need leaders who are visionary nation builders.

To fight for the visionary policies Australia needs, support the campaign for a national bank.

[Click here to sign the petition:](#)
[For national survival, Australia needs a national bank—now!](#)