

Support escalates for Bradfield Scheme

By Jeremy Beck

The Bradfield Scheme to water inland Australia is becoming quite popular now that North Queensland has suffered devastating floods while areas to the south are parched. Former Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, Barnaby Joyce, even promoted it, speaking with Peta Credlin on Sky News and in an opinion editorial in the *Northern Daily Leader*. And former Queensland Premier Peter Beattie has said that although he tries to stay out of politics these days, he maintains his support for the Bradfield Scheme. Senator Pauline Hanson issued a statement promoting a Hybrid Bradfield Scheme and spoke about it on Sky News.

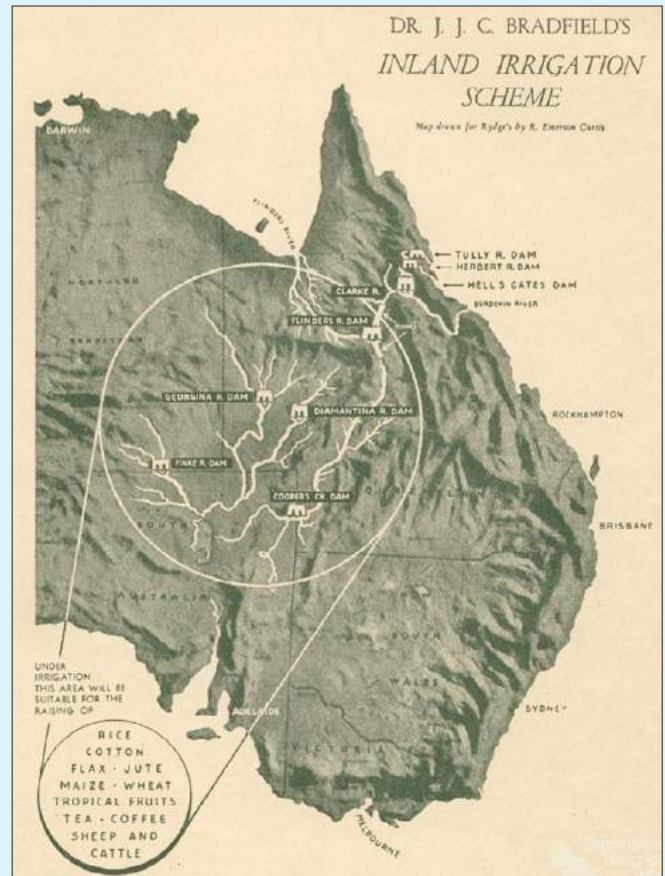
The Bradfield Scheme, first proposed in 1938 by the great engineer Dr John Bradfield, would transform the continent of Australia, diverting vast volumes of Queensland's flood waters west of the Great Dividing Range, eventually flowing through to Lake Eyre. It would green the interior and open up new agricultural areas that would generate many billions of dollars' worth of agricultural produce. And the potential to improve the climate, moderate temperature extremes, and increase rainfall in Central Australia has inspired many great minds for decades.

Member for Kennedy Bob Katter has long promoted the Bradfield Scheme, as has the Citizens Electoral Council, which included the proposal in its book, *What Australia Must Do to Survive the Depression*, first published in 2001. But the fight to realise Dr Bradfield's vision has a much longer history. The Hon. William Riordan, Member for Kennedy, in Parliament on 14 March 1945 gave a particularly inspiring speech, part of which went as follows:

"The problem of drought is not a new one in Australia. It may be said to be a part of our heritage. Every year some part of Australia is affected by drought. When the country is gripped by a severe drought, much is said and written about the need to take precautions to meet such a situation; but when the rains come, all proposals for grappling with the problem are put on one side and forgotten till drought recurs. Only last year, this Parliament voted money for the relief of drought-stricken areas, but the people in many parts of Australia which are subject to drought received no assistance from the Commonwealth or from the State governments.

"In time of drought hundreds of families are ruined by conditions over which they have no control, but those conditions might be controlled or mitigated by government action. This Parliament should deal with the matter as a national problem, or it could act in association with the State governments. It is my earnest wish that the National Parliament should deal with the problems of drought and soil erosion in a national way. ...

"During the last parliamentary sittings great duststorms, the like of which had never previously been experienced, occurred in certain parts of Australia. It was stated by the honourable member for Forrest (Mr Lemmon) that those storms carried away the top soil of fertile farms in Victoria and New South Wales, much of which was blown into the ocean. The question has been asked whether there is a dust bowl in Australia. I am convinced that there is, and that it is centred in the Lake Eyre district in Central Australia. Sand from that area has been blown into Queensland and New South Wales, and even Victoria has been affected. In South



Australia, many farmers have been forced to leave their homes because of the sand deposited by means of windstorms. ...

"The late Dr Bradfield left valuable proposals for the improvement of the position. He achieved an international reputation, and has left many monuments in Australia, one of which is his scheme for the preservation of our heritage by mitigating the effects of drought and thus saving the people of this country many millions of pounds. If no action be taken to grapple with the problem of soil erosion, the present devastation will continue until the more fertile portions of the continent are affected. The time is long-overdue for a complete investigation of Dr Bradfield's proposals. They were not hurriedly prepared. He himself declared that for 30 years he had given thought to the problem, having ridden through most of the northern portion of Queensland on horseback, and walked over a great area of the country.

"He came to the conclusion that water which now runs to waste into the Pacific Ocean on the eastern side of the Great Dividing Range in far northern Queensland, should be diverted to the western portion of that State. That would make a greatly increased population possible in that part of Queensland, and lead to the preservation of the pastoral industry. *The Battle for the Inland*, written by F. R. V. Timbury, should be read by every honourable member. The scheme outlined by Dr Bradfield appears as an appendix to that book. Timbury refers not only to the Bradfield scheme, but also to the proposals in Ion Idriess' book, *The Great Boomerang*, and urges that the Government should take action to implement those schemes. I hope that the Government will, as soon as possible, appoint a committee, if not a royal commission, of expert and practical men for the purpose of investigating the proposals of Bradfield and Idriess. ...

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“Dr Bradfield first proposed that the floodwaters of the Tully, Herbert, Burdekin and Clarke rivers, at about the 1,400-foot level on the coastal side of the Great Dividing Range in north Queensland, should be diverted. Today those waters rush away to the Pacific Ocean and no use is made of them. At present those rivers are in flood. The flood in the Clarke River is 50 feet high, and the people at Wyandotte Station have been forced to leave the homestead, because of the rapid rise of the river level. Rail and road traffic has been dislocated. Ten spans have been washed from one bridge.

“Dr Bradfield suggested that these waters, taken at the 1,400-foot level, should be diverted by means of a tunnel to Western Queensland. They could thus be directed to the head waters of the Flinders River, which flows in a westerly direction, thus filling all the water courses and storage basins from Hughenden through Winton and Longreach, and down through Central Australia towards Lake Eyre. It was suggested that the tropical downpours experienced in far northern Queensland should be utilised, so that the conserved water could be used in some of the finest pastoral country in Queensland. One recalls the valuable work done by the Chaffey brothers along the river Murray. Ernestine Hill in her book *Water into Gold*, tells the story of their trials and tribulations and the success, which they eventually achieved. ...

“Dr Bradfield thought that the water should be stored above ground. He contended that the terrific heat in that part of Australia would evaporate an enormous quantity of the stored water and that it would fall as rain. Dr Bradfield's conclusions have been supported by Mr E.T. Quayle, an Australian scientist, who has investigated rainfall problems and has made a study of inland Australia. Dr Griffith Taylor, of the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology, in his Atlas of Contour and Rainfall Map of Australia, issued by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in 1918, also supports the contention of Mr Quayle and Dr Bradfield that the enormous evaporation from large bodies of water will inevitably precipitate rain and bring about a humidity from which dew would be precipitated to the benefit of vegetation. ... Living conditions would then be much more tolerable than they are at the present time, particularly in the summer months of the year.”

Climate wars

Debate over whether the Bradfield Scheme would produce significant beneficial climate change has continued for decades. Most of the establishment meteorologists have long poured cold water on the idea. But establishment scientists are often wrong. “Heavier than air flying machines are impossible”, said Royal Society President Lord Kelvin in 1895, only to be proved definitively wrong just eight years later.

Edwin Thomas Quayle, who was Senior Meteorologist at the Bureau of Meteorology, dissented from the wet blanket view of Dr Bradfield's scheme. Prior to his work at the Bureau of Meteorology he worked for the Melbourne Observatory, which experience no doubt assisted his research into the relationship between sunspots and rainfall.

Quayle concluded that the Bradfield Scheme would “bring about very considerable local improvements in the climate of the southern half of our continent”, and added, “I am loath to believe that nothing of similar character is likely to result in the northern half from the development

of such a scheme as that of Dr Bradfield's.” Quayle had for decades studied such possibilities for improving the climate, and he leaves us good evidence in many archives. In his paper “Possibilities of Modifying Climate by Human Agency, with Special Application to South-Eastern Australia”, published in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria* in 1921, Quayle makes his case and concludes: “Such an increase in our irrigated areas is likely, therefore, not only to be worthwhile in its direct effects upon the country's production, but by making further irrigation possible, to have indirect effects of very appreciable magnitude.”

Can't fool all the people

Now with catastrophic floods again in Queensland, combined with massive fish kills in a parched Darling River, even Blind Freddie can see the sense of diverting floodwaters over the Great Dividing Range. And we're now all too aware that so many farmers have suffered in the recent drought. Finally, words of wisdom are making the mainstream. Glen Norris in *The Courier-Mail* on 1 February stated what should have been obvious all along: “Many years ago a very clever engineer called John Bradfield came up with a way to tap all that wasted water flowing into the sea up north and channel it into the parched south. Bradfield, who designed the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Brisbane's Story Bridge, wanted to divert water from the Tully, the Herbert and the Burdekin Rivers, across the Great Dividing Range into the Flinders and then the Thomson River. The water would flow to eventually fill Lake Eyre. The idea has been kicked around for the best part of 80 years with pollies including Joh Bjelke-Petersen, Bob Katter and Peter Beattie being proponents of the scheme in various forms. All to no avail and so the millions of tonnes of water up north are essentially being wasted. Isn't it about time we had another look at this visionary idea? ... Of course, the current crop of Australian pollies think so small they would 'focus group' the opening of an envelope so your diarist is not holding his breath.”

Premier Beattie even took out a full-page open letter in *The Australian* on 22 February 2007 supporting a revised Bradfield Scheme. A large map of eastern Australia showing the proposal was copied straight from the CEC's 2002 “Infrastructure Road to Recovery” *New Citizen*. Following Beattie's retirement later that year, Premier Anna Bligh failed to take the necessary action, as did Labor and the Coalition at the Federal level. No further inter-basin water diversions were considered, and even local water projects received little support. In a 5 November 2014 media release the CEC chided Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce for his inaction: “The ‘Agricultural Competitiveness Green Paper’ released by Minister for Agriculture Barnaby Joyce on 20 October listing 27 possible water infrastructure projects lacks nation-building vision for the future, and there's no guarantee or commitment that any of the projects will be built in any case. So many qualifiers such as ‘could’, ‘possible’ and ‘future consideration’ pepper the infrastructure proposals.... Urannah Dam is one of 17 projects in the Green Paper's category of, wait for it, ‘Likely to be suitable for further consideration for possible assistance to accelerate feasibility studies, cost benefit analysis or design’. (Emphasis added.) Sir Humphrey Appleby from *Yes Minister* would be impressed, so don't hold your breath!”

Now is the time to demand that this inaction stops. We must start nation-building again, as we once did so well with the Snowy Mountains Scheme.