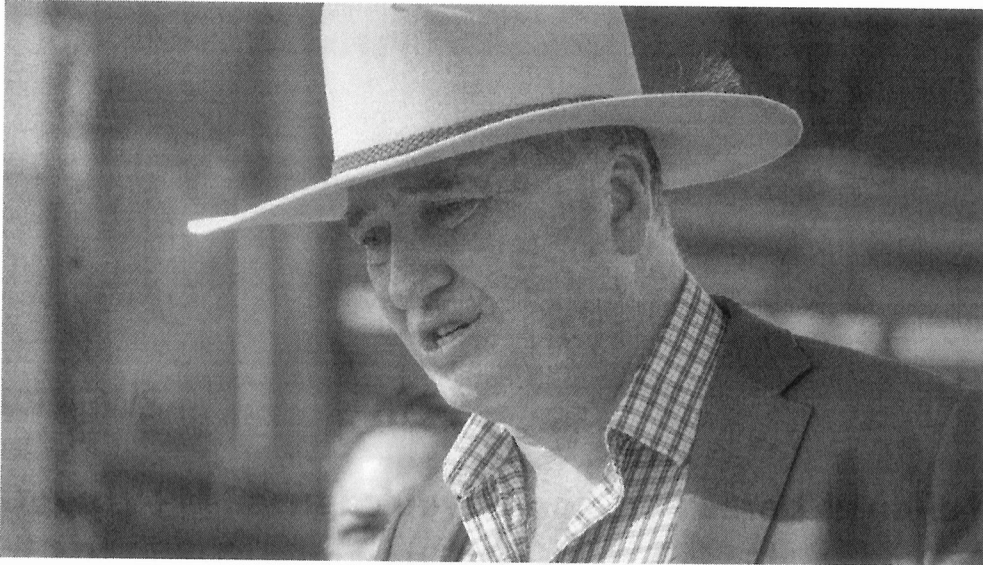


Deputy PM Barnaby Joyce 'not interested' in calls for transparency about new Dungowan Dam

ABC New England / By Patrick Bell and Kristy Reading

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Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce argues the project must proceed quickly. (ABC Rural: Xavier Martin)

Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce has declared he has "no real interest" in seeing the business case for a proposed new dam in his electorate of New England.

The stance puts him at odds with a local council calling for the NSW Government to "urgently" release the document, which remains a secret despite an order for its release by the upper house of the NSW Parliament.

The state and federal governments announced joint funding for the new Dungowan Dam near Tamworth in late 2019, at the height of the drought.

But the total cost is rumoured to have blown out from the initial estimate of \$484 million, with documents obtained as part of a parliamentary inquiry last year suggesting it could cost almost double that amount.

There are questions about the dam's value for money, which Mr Joyce told ABC local radio was not an important consideration for the Commonwealth.

Key points:

- The new Dungowan Dam, near Tamworth, is expected to cost more than half a billion dollars
- There are growing calls for the NSW Government to make the business case public, as the dam's value for money is questioned
- Barnaby Joyce says the federal government is not looking for a direct return on its investment

"We're not asking for a return, so we're not really interested in the business case," Mr Joyce said.

"I want the thing built.

"We believe it's the right thing to do for the city."

'Barnaby has lost it'

Mr Joyce's comments came in response to a motion passed unanimously by the Tamworth Regional Council, which called on the government to release the business case.

Labor Councillor Stephen Mears instigated the push for more information, and said residents were concerned they could end up paying more for water.

"The best way to address the gossip and speculation is to provide the real information," Cr Mears said.

The motion was passed unanimously by the council, which includes former Chairman of the NSW Nationals Bede Burke, and former Nationals candidate for New England Phil Betts.



Then NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian, Deputy Premier John Barilaro and Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced the new dam in late 2019. (ABC News: Caitlin Furlong)

Listeners to ABC New England North West questioned why releasing the business case would pose a problem.

"Barnaby has lost it; who would not want to see how the money is being spent on the Dungowan Dam?" Brad from Manilla wrote in a text message.

"Is there something he doesn't want to tell us?"

NSW Water Minister Kevin Anderson said the joint funding commitment from the state and federal governments showed their commitment to improving Tamworth's water security.

"The memories of the drought are still fresh in our community," Mr Anderson said.

He has previously said releasing the full document could jeopardise commercial interests, but excerpts of the business case will be made available in the environmental impact statement.

