

QUEENSLAND ELECTION

Queensland election: Turnbull dips toes into poll waters



Queensland LNP leader Tim Nicholls takes to the waters of the Peter Faust Dam near Proserpine yesterday. Picture: AAP

Charlie Peel, *The Australian*, 12:00AM November 4, 2017

Malcolm Turnbull has weighed in to the Queensland election campaign, almost a week after it began, by welcoming the Liberal National Party's cash splash to build dams. The Prime Minister's move came after LNP leader Tim Nicholls faced a week of questions about whether Mr Turnbull would be a positive force in the campaign.

Barnaby Joyce initially planned to join Mr Nicholls in Queensland to announce the party's water infrastructure commitments yesterday, but the former prime minister had to pull out because of the looming by-election in his seat of New England.

At Townsville's Ross River Dam yesterday, Mr Nicholls announced \$160 million in new funding, and the prospect of \$1.3 billion worth of water infrastructure projects being unleashed if he wins government on November 25. The federal government is expected to co-fund environmental impact studies for three dams.

"The commitment will ensure the Urannah dam, Nullinga dam, Rookwood weir, raising of the Burdekin Falls Dam and the Ross River Dam Pipeline

duplication to Townsville become a reality,” Mr Turnbull said in a statement. “It will provide certainty for farmers, industry and the communities of regional Queensland. “This bold nation-building investment will secure Queensland’s water supply and create more job opportunities in the region.”

It was disappointing the “Palaszczuk government has been so unwilling to invest in the Rookwood weir”, Mr Turnbull’s statement said. “It is now clear that only the LNP is committed to building the vital water infrastructure Queensland needs,” he said. “We look forward to working with a future LNP government to deliver these water commitments.”

The Weekend Australian understands the LNP leader met senior federal government figures, including Mr Joyce, in Canberra on a recent trip to discuss joint funding.

Asked about Mr Joyce missing yesterday’s announcement, Mr Nicholls said the Nationals leader had been very supportive. “I’ve been speaking to Barnaby, who has been a fierce advocate for water in regional Queensland, as everyone knows,” he said. “People know that Barnaby Joyce wears his heart on his sleeve when it comes to supporting rural communities and supporting them with water infrastructure.

“That’s why there is the \$2bn (water) loan fund. We are taking advantage of it in a way that Labor never would and never will because they are held subject to inner-city Greens preferences.”

Mr Nicholls said he had also spoken to Mr Turnbull, a self-described “water maniac”, about the dam funding.

Asked whether he had invited Mr Turnbull to join the campaign, Mr Nicholls was noncommittal.

Mr Nicholls said if he formed government, he expected to spend \$812m on the \$1.3bn dams project, with the balance coming from the federal government.