



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 8 June 1999

WATER BACKFLOW

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (10.23 a.m.): The State Government's backflow prevention program began under the Goss administration in 1995, continued under the Borbidge Government, and then under the Beattie Government until just a few months ago. The continuum was shattered early this year when a major contract involving backflow prevention in the high priority area of public health was cancelled without warning. This inexplicable decision has derailed a crucial element of the Government's program. It has also exposed taxpayers to a compensation claim of nearly \$500,000 for breach of contract. The Minister for Public Works and Housing has a lot of explaining to do.

Contrary to the Minister's self-serving protestations, it is not scaremongering to give a sense of the gravity of this issue by detailing potential consequences, including loss of life. I have acknowledged that any one of us has more chance of winning the casket than dying from backflow, but the fact remains that people can and do win the casket quite regularly.

The Government's own report makes it clear that backflow has resulted in loss of life as well as many other terrible consequences. I remind the Minister of what he said in his press release of 9 March—

"There had been one recorded death from backflow—in Sydney in the early 1990s in an incident involving a person handling pesticides using a hose and later drinking from the hose."

This is the last time that this House will rely on something put out by this Minister.

As a former Minister for Public Works, I am the first to acknowledge that this huge program was never going to be completed overnight. However, by cancelling a key contract this Government has exposed Queensland families to a very real danger than would otherwise have been the case. For that reason, I welcome a fair and impartial inquiry into the reasons why that contract was cancelled, provided that the inquiry is open to public scrutiny from day one.
