



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH**

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Hansard 9 December 1999

**WATER RESOURCES AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs PRATT** (Barambah—IND) (12.25 p.m.): In rising to speak to the Water Resources Amendment Bill, I begin by acknowledging that there would not be a person in this House who does not realise just how important water is. The very first lesson that we learnt at school was that Australia is the driest continent on earth. I grew up in a rural environment. I still live in a rural environment. Water is the most precious thing to rural people. It could be said that the most valuable thing a rural Queenslander can have is a washer for the pump, a washer for the taps and a washer for the hoses. I remember vividly the very first flogging I ever got—and it was a flogging! When I was six and a half years old, I left the tap on at the dairy during a drought. That was a big no-no. I will never forget the flogging that I got.

**Dr Prenzler** interjected.

**Mrs PRATT:** I have probably deserved a lot more over the years, too. But it was a very valuable lesson. My father rammed it into me that we must preserve water at all times. Assured water supplies are critical to the development of all communities, industry and farming. It is a magnet to any area. If there is water, people are safe; they can survive. Water guarantees a quality of lifestyle. It guarantees crops. It guarantees survival of towns, communities and everything that we hold dear.

There are many conflicting views on the best possible solution to the water resource issue. Some people say that we should conserve it to the nth degree. Some people say that we should store it in dams. Some people say that we should build tunnels so that water can be fed backwards into the interior. Others say that we should build the Nathan dam. Whether these schemes are real possibilities or just pipedreams, only time will tell. But one thing is obvious: a reliable water supply is essential to everybody. The construction of the Nathan dam is very important in terms of the creation of jobs. It is critical to the growing of crops. It is critical to the opening up of central Queensland. I find it very difficult to understand why the Government treats the Nathan dam project as a joke, as it did last night. It is a huge project. It will have a tremendous effect on the area. Some people will be affected in a positive way; for others it will be a bad thing. However, there are times when we have to balance the good of the majority against the disadvantage to a minority.

The Boondooma Dam and the Bjelke-Petersen Dam are situated in my area. These dams are real tourist attractions. They attract fishermen. The dams do get restocked, but one of the problems with the restocking of the dams is that fish migration is hindered by an insufficient number of fish ladders, or no fish ladders at all. When we are building dams, we must ensure the preservation of wildlife. Without sufficient fish ladders, the fish cannot quite make it. This in turn threatens fish numbers.

Unfortunately, when it comes to building dams or other big projects, it seems that Governments are afraid to take the bit between their teeth and go ahead with it. I do not know whether they are thinking of their short-term popularity, whether they are just too scared or whether they do not have any vision. One of the biggest problems in this country at the moment is that people do not have vision. They are looking for short-term solutions to everything. They rush in and make decisions and further down the track we are left to wonder whether those decisions were made for the benefit of all or just a whim.

As I said before, water restrictions are a way of life for most people in Australia. I do think there would be a person west of the ranges who does not conserve and manage water to the best of their

ability. I can remember Kingaroy being subjected to incredibly tight water restrictions during a drought quite a few years ago. It got to the point where the council encouraged people to use their grey water, which was quite unheard of at the time. In some areas people were washing up in literally a cupful of water. It sounds almost impossible, but it can be done. Water was recycled in ways never used before.

Water infrastructure is not cheap, but with reliable water supply crops are guaranteed, resulting in permanent markets, which is something everybody wants, especially in rural Queensland. Unreliable crops, unreliable markets and having to live year to year are banes of the existence of most people out west. With long-term markets, producers can have prices locked in for three to four years. They can plan ahead to a certain degree and count on a certain lifestyle.

People who live in relatively close proximity to rivers often build big ring tanks in order to conduct water harvesting, but they cost megabucks. In the cotton areas around St George and further west, these big ring tanks at times cover hundreds of acres of ground. This is an area of great contention with a lot of people, especially those on the green and not the cropping side of the issue.

Water also allows for diversification of crops. Irrigated cotton has become a major crop in Barambah, especially in the areas of Murgon, Byee and Redlands. Dryland cotton has been grown before, but the irrigated cotton crops are expanding over vast areas.

Once, Kingaroy was really only known for three things, peanuts being the main one. That crop is also under threat with the importation of peanuts with higher levels of cadmium. These were once solely dryland peanuts, but irrigation is starting to become more widely used. The second thing the area was known for is navy beans. Those not familiar with navy beans should just think baked beans. We have the greatest supply in Australia. We send them to New Zealand and other places. The third thing we were known for is Lady Flo's pumpkin scones. A lot of water is needed even for pumpkins.

I have often said that Kingaroy and the South Burnett are my idea of heaven. With adequate water facilities, it could also be the Garden of Eden of Queensland. Many crops are establishing in the area. We are the second largest stone fruit producing area in Queensland. Avocados are another emerging industry. We have the largest supply of wine grapes in Queensland. We have beautiful vineyards and wineries. I had planned to bring a few bottles of wine to show everybody and to share them around, but I know that members will get enough Christmas spirit in a few weeks' time. We have lovely wines and beautiful wineries around the place. Anyone who comes to the area should look at not only the water sports, fishing and so on but also our grapes and wines. I guarantee that anyone who does that will keep coming back.

Stuart Range Winery, situated in Kingaroy, has won several medals this year, as have Barambah Ridge, Rimfire and Cranes. We also have others. I would like to see local wines stocked at Parliament House. I have not seen a bottle here yet.

Barambah also has soya beans, mung beans, navy beans, wheat, lucerne and olives. Our olive industry is currently the second largest in Queensland. Silver perch and red claw are other alternative industries. We are also the largest supplier of duboisia in the world. It needs water, of course, but as yet it is not irrigated. The wildflower industry is an alternative offered to people involved in the timber industry. There are so many crops in the region. With the Nathan dam and an adequate water supply, this region could be a veritable Garden of Eden. I think the whole of Australia could be if we managed water properly.

The Bjelke-Petersen Dam is in my area. Water opens up tourism, which seems to be an alternative to "real work", as in manual labour on properties and so on. People are turning to host farms and so on. We also need water if we resort to tourism, as everyone keeps telling us to. Water is very important to everybody. I think members know that, but I will give an example of how we are held to ransom by our need for water.

**Mr Reeves:** It is very important. If we do not drink water we die.

**Mrs PRATT:** Exactly.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr D'Arcy): Order! As a Temporary Chairman, the member for Mansfield should know that he should interject from his allocated seat. Also, I want to hear the member for Barambah and I would prefer to hear her in silence.

**Mrs PRATT:** A prime example of how we are held to ransom by our need for water occurred in 1994, when the worst drought this century sapped the water supply for the Tarong Power Station to dangerously low levels. Mr McGrady will verify this. Water is necessary for the steam turbines. As everyone knows, the drought continued and a pipeline was proposed, not only to meet the power station's need for water but also to give a lot of the farmers along the way some access to it.

This pipeline from Wivenhoe was to be 75 kilometres long. It became a reality. It was a fair old feat, because water actually had to be lifted over the Blackbutt and Cooyar Ranges. It was essential because 40% of the State's power supply was jeopardised. This water pipeline was the only guarantee

of that supply continuing. As I said, there were plenty of spin-offs. Approximately 100 property owners along the route would have had access to it. The water pipeline is still there and it is just sitting there. The day the Minister pushed the computer mouse button to launch a torrent of water 30 metres high, the sky actually opened up. It was a beautiful thing. Not only did we finally get some water; it was coming from all directions.

This water pipeline stands ready for use at any time. At the time it was proposed to be constructed it was estimated to cost approximately \$80m. There is a perfect opportunity to utilise this pipeline and to ensure the safety of the Brisbane water supply—even though the Minister says it is not unsafe, there are still a lot of people with doubt—by locating the gas units proposed for Wivenhoe at the Tarong site.

When the Government lifts a drought declaration from properties, it does not actually rain dollars on farms. Those people suffer for up to four years after. I know I digress a little, but I think Parliament should be aware that there are a lot of people in the Miles area who are still suffering severe effects from the drought. People are still donating food and so on to be freighted out there.

During the drought, freight was free, and people could send out cartons and cartons of goods to aid those people. When the drought was lifted, the freight subsidy on those goods was removed. That made it very difficult for many charitable organisations and people who wanted to help by sending goods out there. So I ask the Transport Minister to at least look into that to see if he cannot help them in some way, preferably before Christmas, because there are people who want to send cartons out there and it would be nice if they could get there before Christmas.

It is necessary to concentrate on water, because we have to preserve the purity of water in any way possible without damaging the surroundings, the wildlife and, technically, without killing the river. It is not something that can be rushed into, but it is an important issue, and it is growing daily in importance. Our population is growing. We are getting a lot of migrants—both illegal and legal—and this will continue. Australia is a growing country.

I also ask that the Nathan dam project be given further consideration. It seems to have been shelved or put on the backburner, where it is fading away. I ask that it be considered seriously. I know that some people will not benefit but will actually lose a lot if it is built, but perhaps the needs of the majority far outweigh those of the minority. Whether we need water for residential, farming or other purposes, this issue needs to be addressed, but it will not be easy.

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