



Speech by

**HOWARD HOBBS**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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Hansard 8 December 1999

### **WATER RESOURCES AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—NPA) (10.46 p.m.): I am pleased to speak to the Water Resources Amendment Bill 1999. In the Explanatory Notes, under the heading "Reasons for the Bill", it states—

"... 'the Act') provides for the constitution, by regulation, of a part of Queensland as a water supply or drainage area in respect of the construction, acquisition, maintenance, administration, extension or modification of works for water conservation, water supply, irrigation, drainage, flood prevention, flood control or the replenishment or improvement of underground water supplies."

The legislation touches on most of the aspects of water in Queensland. I want to expand on a few of them.

As the previous speaker mentioned, not a lot has been done. I support the member and the comments that he made. At the Estimates hearings I asked the Minister to provide us with some details in relation to capital expenditure on the development of water resources in Queensland. We ended up with a document that explains some of the projects. An analysis of that document reveals that all that the Labor Government has done is abandon projects, stop projects, discontinue studies and provide insufficient data. I do not think the Government has opened anything. During the Estimates hearings I asked the Minister what he had done. He mentioned things that he had opened. I presumed that he was talking about projects he had opened. In fact, after he read out quite a few, I realised that I had opened most of the ones that he mentioned when I was the Minister. The honourable member for Warwick was also the responsible Minister at one stage, and he must have opened some as well.

This Bill deals with all of the aspects on that list—construction, acquisition, maintenance and administration. We are even talking about drainage areas. I will come to the finer points of the Bill in due course. I want to read into the record a paragraph relating to the planned progress, expenditure and projected completion dates for 1999-2000. It states—

"Although drafting of the plan is well advanced, it is not possible, at this stage, to provide a detailed breakdown of budgeted expenditure against each individual activity in the plan or at this stage, to detail anticipated progress during the year."

We know why that is the case. First of all, nothing is happening and there is no money. The money is all gone. The members opposite know that it is all gone. It is no good saying one thing and meaning another.

**Mr Hamill:** It dried up.

**Mr HOBBS:** It dried up, all right. The Treasurer probably played a very significant part in the drying up of the dam supply here in Queensland.

**Mr Hamill:** It is a very desiccated argument you are running.

**Mr HOBBS:** It is. I will explain a little more about it. The reality is that when the Government did the clawback from the various departments and—

**Mr Hamill:** Claw back?

**Mr HOBBS:** Lazy money. I think the word is "smoothing". The Government pulled back something like nearly \$37.5m from DNR. All the working capital has gone back to Treasury for

reallocation. So the funds are not there. Even if the Department of Natural Resources wanted to go out and build—

**Mr Hamill:** Is this to do with red claw?

**Mr HOBBS:** It could. Aquaculture may be a part of it.

**Mr Hamill:** A few of the dams have that in them, you know.

**Mr HOBBS:** It could be and it could be part of it. We might see if we can examine some of those details. If the Department of Natural Resources wanted to build even a small weir, worth maybe half a million dollars—that is a very small weir—it does not have the money to do it. There is nothing there.

**Mr Hamill:** Does red claw come under Fisheries or is it Natural Resources?

**Mr HOBBS:** It is in relation to water. The water is supplied by DNR and then the Minister for Primary Industries has to approve it. He has to grant the licence. We know all about that. We will move on.

I will go through a few of these programs. I refer particularly to Walla Weir Stage 1. This project has taken a long time to get off the ground, but finally it has got going. Stage 2 needs to be started urgently. The Bundaberg region is desperately in need of funding for that program. In that region an enormous amount of underground water supplies are being used and there is salt intrusion. It is very important to use the surface supplies and reduce the amount of water coming from the underground supplies. It is very important to utilise that water from the surface, and it can be done with very little funding. That needs to be taken into consideration.

Another important project that has been progressed very slowly is the Riversdale-Murray water management project. This is a great project that should be the benchmark in relation to sustained management of the canelands of north Queensland. This project seems to be bogged down in some areas, particularly in some of the DPI Fisheries areas. The Minister for Primary Industries may be interested in this issue. The problem in those areas relates to drainage. Mangroves may go up man-made drains. Drains that may have been there for 30 years get mangroves through them and then they fall under the Fisheries Act. Therefore the mangroves cannot be moved, yet the drain has to be cleaned out to make sure water can get through it. Eventually we worked our way through it and we were able to do one side at a time, but it is still not good enough. This problem can be fixed by regulation. It is very simple.

**Mr Palaszczuk:** Code of practice.

**Mr HOBBS:** Perhaps, but it needs to be smartened up as well. There is no need for bureaucrats to hold it up. We spent quite a long time working our way through this. The legislation put in place by the Goss Government was very difficult to—

**Mr Hamill:** I've heard about rats up drain pipes, but never mangroves.

**Mr HOBBS:** Mangroves do, too. In fact, they would be worse than rats up drain pipes.

**Mr Hamill:** I reckon they would be, too.

**Mr HOBBS:** They would be a damned sight worse.

**Mr Hamill:** I tell you why: it is their roots.

**Mr HOBBS:** That is true. They dig down. They get right down into it. That is the issue. I think it is very important that the Minister take that on board. I think there is more he can do with his department to make that a lot simpler. Mangroves grow back again anyway. It is probably something we can work our way through.

We have talked about the St George off-stream storage on numerous occasions. I see that that is lost now. For the life of me, I cannot see how it can be built. The site has been lost. It is probably not really the fault of this Government; it is probably more the fault of the channel farmers, who have not been cooperative in trying to get it happening. If they had, it would have been built by now. This Government has probably been a bit slack as well. It should have pushed it through a bit faster. We had it at the stage where all this Government had to do was push it and it would have been right. If we had been in Government, it would have been virtually built and up and running now.

The development incentive scheme is a very important part of water development here in Queensland. This very innovative scheme has been put on hold. It appears to me as if the Minister at one stage was interested in lowering the limit from 200,000 to about 70,000 for each scheme. That would have allowed a lot more of the cane people, the horticultural groups and dairying people to utilise that scheme.

**Mr Palaszczuk:** You didn't reduce it either.

**Mr HOBBS:** We were working on it. We knew we had to.

**Mr Palaszczyk:** Never doing anything.

**Mr HOBBS:** That is quite untrue. We started the program. We were in Government for only a bit over two years. We had to work the whole thing up and get it rolling. We had to deal with native title as well. That program was in place and we had to let it run for a while. The idea was to reduce it.

There is no money. The Government has lost the money. It is gone. The Government really has to try to get its act together. It would appear that the Minister has advised his department not—

**Mr Springborg:** The Treasurer has taken it away.

**Mr HOBBS:** That is true. The Treasurer has taken the money back. This is a very important thing for regional development. For a minimal amount of money we were able to give land-holders the opportunity to build off-stream storages. Dirranbandi, in the St George region, has probably—

**Mr Hamill** interjected.

**Mr HOBBS:** I ask the Treasurer to listen for a minute. Probably half a billion dollars has been invested in that region, generating in the vicinity of 500 jobs. A power station, which may cost \$1.2 billion, will generate 100 jobs. The power station is obviously very important, but irrigation is probably a better employer in terms of money invested. The development incentive scheme is a good way to get regional development going. The Government should look at that and try to get things going.

No doubt the member for Western Downs will talk about a couple of weirs that probably should be built. Everything is right to go. There is no reason they cannot be built. They are just being held up. I am sure the member will touch on some of those issues.

We also looked at the Comet River dam. We were very keen to build that dam. At the end of the day, it was quite evident that the environmental issues were fairly significant. I felt that showed our genuine commitment to the environment and the fact that we were fair dinkum about water development. We would not allow water to be sold to people who had unsuitable soils. We did not want to build dams that were unsustainable. We wanted to do it properly and efficiently, with world's best practice. I was disappointed that we had to let it go, but the figures came in not as good as they should have. Rather than do the wrong thing, we did not proceed with it. I could mention quite a few other projects.

An area that desperately needs to be worked on is the Burdekin region. It needs further development. I was able to fast-track some of the studies into the Elliott Main Channel. Obviously we do need additional water coming in from either the Burdekin Stage 2—

**Mr Knuth:** Urannah dam.

**Mr HOBBS:** There is Urannah dam at Collinsville or Hell's Gate. The options are there. Two of those three dams can be built. It is really a matter of the Government working out what it wants to do. It can have Burdekin Stage 2 and have all the water in one area and all the development from Ayr to Bowen. Alternatively, it could have the dam at Collinsville or Hells Gate and distribute further the opportunity for development in those regions. That is something for the Government to work out. It really will depend on how the figures stack up. The reality is that the Elliott Main Channel, while very expensive, will allow many people in that region to get into more horticulture and aquaculture and better activities in relation to—

**Mr Knuth:** Industrial sites?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes. Industrial sites.

The reality is that there is an enormous amount of work still to be done in that area. I do not believe that this Government is fair dinkum about pursuing those particular issues. There is a lot more that can be done. There is huge potential in that region. It can be done. We will do it. It is as simple as that.

The blueprint of how to undertake development in Queensland has been set out. It is very, very simple. It is like following a trail of breadcrumbs. All one has to do is pick up the Water Infrastructure Task Force report and the implementation plan, and there it is: step one, two, three, four, five. It sets out the years and the money, and one can do the assessments. The priorities are set out, as well. The Government does not have to try to satisfy everybody's needs at once. The priorities are there. It is purely and simply a matter of following the steps. There is nothing hard about that. The Government just has to put its mind to it. Of course, the big problem for this Government is finding the money. The money was available, but it now appears to have been allocated elsewhere. That is typical of what we have come to expect from this Government.

The member for Keppel spoke about the Flinders dam at Richmond, which has been axed. I have not seen the final assessment of that particular dam site, and perhaps I should do that first. But from what I have heard, it is okay, although the Minister has said that he does not think it is worth while. He could be right. But no dam in Queensland would have been built under the sorts of rules that we

have today. Yet we know their huge development potential for a region. Emerald, St George, Bundaberg and the Burdekin area would be nowhere near what they are today if it were not for water.

I turn now to the pumping of effluent for agricultural use in the Lockyer Valley and up to the range. This is an interesting issue, and I recall when it was first raised. It was raised by members of a National Party branch who wanted to engender a bit of enthusiasm for this project. We had a look at it and discussed all the suggestions. The then member for Inala, who is now the Minister for Primary Industries, asked a question of me in the House, suggesting that there was some sort of pork-barrelling going on and asking why that particular National Party group would be getting all that money to develop a pipeline to send water to the Lockyer Valley. I hope that those particular political days are gone and that the Government is genuinely looking at that scheme. I believe that it is. There is no reason why we cannot utilise water schemes in many regions.

I could say more about further development, but I want to discuss particular parts of the Bill. The Minister really needs to explain some of the mechanisms that will be put in place with this Bill. His second-reading speech was very short and simple, but there is more to it than meets the eye. In particular, I would like the Minister to explain overland flows in relation to the proposed drainage areas. Are we talking about a water supply area? Are we talking about, for instance, a water board? Or are we talking about a larger area? What exactly does the Minister mean, and what implications will that have for land-holders in that particular region in relation to water access and general drainage issues?

The Minister also mentioned the constitution of a board or the establishment of a board. Perhaps he should explain the difference. I would appreciate the Minister's comments in that regard.

Time expired.

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