



Speech by

**JOHN MICKEL**

**MEMBER FOR LOGAN**

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Hansard 8 December 1999

**WATER RESOURCES AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr MICKEL** (Logan—ALP) (11.06 p.m.): I want to comment on an issue that is vital to the residents and businesses within Logan City. I refer in particular to the Logan City Council's water policies, which have just been rejected by the Supreme Court. This whole action was brought about, I believe, because of the arrogance of one of the councillors, who should accept responsibility for his refusal to meet with businesses. By refusing to meet with businesses, he forced them to take action in the Supreme Court. As a result of that, the Logan City Council's water policies have been thrown into doubt. I believe that the only way that councillor can accept responsibility as an elected official is to resign.

Logan City Council businesses have been concerned about this issue for a number of months. They approached me in early July, and we convened a meeting at which they voiced their concerns to me about the water pricing policy. As a result of that meeting, I spoke with an officer from the Department of State Development in the local area who agreed to act as a mediator to try to resolve the impasse that had been created, namely, that some Logan City Council businesses had been faced with massive rate increases.

One fellow was using \$2.40 worth of water but was faced with a massive rate bill of thousands and thousands of dollars. This was at a time when neighbouring shires and councils had not been impacted upon by such water policies. Those businesses told me that this meant that they would leave Logan City, uproot their businesses and set up in neighbouring shires. That was potentially disastrous for Logan City, given the nationally high unemployment rates there. Unfortunately, because of the Federal Government's policies, unemployment levels in Kingston and Marsden reach 25%. It would have been intolerable to put up with that. The business houses could not have faced those massive rate increases. Therefore, they were left with no option other than to take legal action—very expensive legal action—but that demonstrates the level of frustration that they felt with the water policy of the Logan City Council. This two-part tariff policy was introduced by the council in a rushed fashion. Businesses were charged not so much on the water that they used but on the infrastructure that was in place. Some of those businesses faced rates bills of thousands and thousands of dollars.

Recently, I have learned that there have been unintended consequences for some of the local sporting clubs—the clubs that provide so much of the recreational activity in the eastern part of Logan City, such as the Rochedale Rovers and also near my electorate, the Logan Scorpions. Previously, they used to get a bit of a discount on their rates. They are now faced with paying 100% of their rate bills. Anybody who has anything to do with sporting clubs would know how hard they work for their members. Particularly in Logan City, they are working hard to provide sporting venues and sporting activities. This massive rate increase would have been felt by them.

I must say that, in the early days, it was the same with the schools. Suddenly, we found that this water policy was in place. We were out there fighting to get more money for the schools and P & Cs were actively fundraising, yet they found that their efforts were going to pay for increased water bills at a time when they had been given no warning and could not put in place water-saving devices. So I had to go to the Minister for Education to get an assurance that the schools, in my electorate particularly, would be given a reprieve from that water policy. As I say, it was a rushed policy and one for which businesses particularly, but residents as well, had been given very little opportunity to prepare.

Rather than go back into history, today I am pleased to hear that the Minister for Local Government has indicated his desire to treat the matter expeditiously. However, because the decision of the Supreme Court is quite a complex one, I understand that it is not possible to bring in amending legislation by Friday afternoon to address all the issues raised by the court. I hope that the Logan City Council can get its house in order. So far, the reaction of some of those councillors has been to resort to banal excuse making rather than to face up to the real issue at hand. They need to alter the criteria used to determine water charges.

Above all, Logan needs to attract more businesses. I want to commend the businesses that have moved into Crestmead and the ones that are moving into the Logan West area. There are some very, very exciting business opportunities there. They can get on with the job of attracting more businesses. However, all we need is for the Logan City Council to get that water pricing policy in order. If legislation is needed, I have spoken to my colleague the member for Springwood and he is ready and willing to meet with businesses and councillors to make sure that every effort is being made with the Local Government Minister to get the water pricing policy right and to get a better outcome for residents, for sporting clubs and for businesses. All we are asking for is a fair go. I urge the Minister for Local Government, who is listening to my contribution, to make sure that we can get that positive outcome and a better water charging policy in Logan City.

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