



Speech by

Mr J. HEGARTY

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

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WATER RESOURCES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HEGARTY (Redlands—NPA) (3.47 p.m.): In taking part in the debate on the Water Resources Amendment Bill, I wish to follow the lead of the member for Toowoomba North and the member for Lockyer and speak about the proposed renewed water pipeline from Brisbane and Ipswich and their environs to the Lockyer and possibly the Darling Downs. That waste water would be used to irrigate crops in both of those areas. At present, that valuable resource is pumped into Moreton Bay and wasted. It also pollutes the bay. The eastern boundary of my Redlands electorate is Moreton Bay and I do not believe that the bay should be polluted by sewage water from Brisbane and its environs. I believe that conservationists should be appalled that we waste that valuable resource. It is time that we used that resource. As a member of the Opposition, I offer the Government bipartisan support for the pipeline to the Lockyer Valley.

The piping of waste water for reuse for agricultural purposes is happening in other places in Australia, and the concept is widely used overseas. The Lockyer Valley not only produces the majority of fresh vegetables for south-east Queensland but it also supplies the export market. If that export market is to grow and produce much-needed dollars for Australia, it will have to be provided with a reliable water supply. Overseas buyers want quality and quantity, and to achieve that a reliable water supply is needed. The underground aquifers supplying the bulk of irrigation water for the Lockyer Valley are being used beyond their safe level. The shortfall of water for irrigation is up to 40,000 megalitres per annum. This is based on current irrigation levels of about 15,000 hectares of farmland. This pipeline would benefit the environment because it would open up the opportunity to encourage value adding industries to the Lockyer and Darling Downs areas and also clean up the bay in my electorate.

Dr Prenzler: Plus another 5,000 hectares of irrigation.

Mr HEGARTY: I take the interjection of the honourable member for Lockyer. That is a valuable contribution, to put the record straight.

On the ABC Landline program a few weeks ago, there was a story of the Bolivar-Virginia pipeline project in South Australia, which has already been mentioned. I have a copy of the video of that program, and I invite any interested members to view it. In fact, it should be compulsory viewing for the sceptics.

In South Australia sewage water from Adelaide is upgraded to just under drinking water standard and piped to the Virginia irrigation area where it is now used to grow all sorts of vegetables. For the past 20 years, many farmers in Virginia have used secondary treated water for many crops, but it had to be used on such crops as capsicums, etc. and the irrigation had to be drip fed. Now that this sewage is being treated in a "daff system", the upgraded water is just under drinking water standard and there are no restrictions. The crops can be irrigated by the sprinkler system and it is used on all crops, as the member for Lockyer mentioned. Carrots, sweet corn, tomatoes and lettuce are now being irrigated with that water.

In common with the pipeline to Lockyer, the idea of the Bolivar-Virginia pipeline was talked about for many years but was always put in the too-hard basket. There was never money to do a feasibility study or some particular bureaucrat did not like the idea because it was not their pet project. Then a couple of years ago the Government decided that the pipeline was a necessity for two main reasons: the Virginia area needed water if it was to remain in business and the people of Adelaide were

sick of their gulf being polluted by sewage, which mirrors exactly the situation here in Brisbane. Three years later, on 22 October this year, the Premier of South Australia opened the pipeline.

The suggested pipeline has advantages over a weir or a dam. Dams and weirs are subject to silt build-up, whereas the pipeline is not. Dams and weirs also deprive downstream users of supply and are subject to the effects of drought. They are also designated for a 90% to 95% delivery, whereas the waste water pipeline can deliver 100% absolutely reliable quantity of water. The pipeline can supply a given quantity continuously. It should also be noted that, with the population expansion in Brisbane and the surrounding areas, this waste water supply is expanding as the population increases.

The project to pipe waste water from Brisbane to Lockyer received a Category 1 priority listing from the Water Infrastructure Task Force when the report was presented to the Minister in February 1997. It is interesting that this independent task force received 350 submissions for all sorts of water projects and this project was one of the 16 it gave a high priority. A quarter of a million dollars was set aside for the feasibility study, but to date only a scoping study at a cost of approximately \$60,000 has been completed.

According to the Water Infrastructure Task Force report in 1994-95, about 420,000 hectares of land in Queensland was irrigated, which generated 52%, worth \$1.2 billion, of the State's crop production. In the renewed water from Brisbane being piped to the Lockyer Valley and possibly the Darling Downs, we have a resource for irrigation twice the combined yield of surface storage and available ground water in the Lockyer Valley. That is a very significant increase. According to the scoping study for DNR, Kinhill said that up to 100,000 megalitres for renewed water could be available to pump to Lockyer. It has been estimated that, if this water was available for the Lockyer Valley/Darling Downs, the increased crop production would be worth about \$130m per annum.

On 21 October last, a seminar was organised at Gatton College to impart information about this scheme to anyone who was interested. This low cost seminar was attended by 325 people. That is quite a contrast to the recent Technomart fiasco, which cost a fortune. The speakers covered a wide range of topics. The interstate speakers included Dr David Cunliffe from the South Australia Health Commission. Dr Cunliffe was responsible for signing off on all of the health issues involved in the Virginia project that I mentioned earlier. Robert Thomas from South Australian Water, who is in charge of all the water, was also a speaker, as was a farmer who was actually using this renewed water source. These people have offered all the information and help that our Government requires. The message from them is: get on with the job; stop talking about it; and use their knowledge, but do not reinvent the wheel.

Dr Prenzler: It was a great seminar, too.

Mr HEGARTY: I have had good feedback from several sources and it was very well received.

Mr Lester: Absolutely!

Mr HEGARTY: I know that the member for Keppel was wholeheartedly involved in the project and supports it.

Other speakers included the Macquarie Bank, which is interested in getting private finance for the project, but it needs a completed feasibility study to be able to get on and sell the project to private funding sources. Euratech, the BOOT operators of the Adelaide scheme, also spoke at the seminar and it is interested in the Lockyer pipeline. Other speakers did talk about the salt problems being experienced in many irrigation areas at present. I understand that, from all the studies done on soils in the Lockyer area, particularly by DNR, provided correct management of this water is put in place, salt inclusion will not be a problem.

I understand that an interdepartmental committee, with the Department of State Development as the lead agency, was set up to look at the economics and other issues of this pipeline. Unfortunately, the people in Lockyer and the Darling Downs feel that everything is moving at a snail's pace. The last I heard was that there were no local people on this committee. I know there is a reference panel at Lockyer, but local representatives should be on this interagency committee.

I say to the responsible Minister: please do not reinvent the wheel; get the information from South Australia; talk to funding experts who could provide private funding from the banking sector; and talk to companies who are interested in being the BOOT operators of such a scheme. As I have just said, the company which is the BOOT operator in the Virginia scheme is interested as well as at least one other company. I also believe that a consortium here in Brisbane is interested. The engineering is possible. The health issues have been covered by South Australia. So now it is time to get off our butts and actually do something.

As was mentioned, the Brisbane City Council is facing a cost of about \$200m to upgrade its existing sewerage facilities to comply with the new EPA legislation. At the Gatton seminar, Lord Mayor Jim Soorley pledged this money towards the pipeline instead of spending it on the upgrade. I ask the Minister and the Premier in particular to talk to Lord Mayor Soorley and to Bernie Sutton, the Mayor of Gatton, about this pledge. Lord Mayor Soorley also said that there is only a small window of opportunity

available, that is 18 months, and then that opportunity will close. If no decision is made—no commitment—that money will have to be spent by the Brisbane City Council on upgrading its own sewerage facilities.

Dr Prenzler: \$200m!

Mr HEGARTY: \$200m! We are talking about the Premier asking for \$100m from the Federal Government to get on with his vegetation management legislation and here he has \$200m being offered to him and he is dragging his feet. Unbelievable!

Another interesting development in South Australia is its pilot system of injecting sewage water into the aquifer system. This is being closely monitored by South Australian Water. I understand that the water used this way is not treated to anywhere near the quality that is used in the Bolivar-Virginia pipeline. Of course, other countries are putting waste water into their aquifers as well. Here I am talking about countries such as Israel. I believe that it is time that Queensland talked to South Australia and formed a close partnership with South Australian Water and Health on sharing knowledge so that the Lockyer pipeline can become a reality and get off to a quick start.

In concluding, I would just like to encourage the Minister to seize this opportunity. There is plenty of information there for him. I know he is aware of it. I just ask him to move quickly on any impediments that he sees at present and perhaps make this a project for the millennium. It could well be his Queensland 2000 project that will get his name into the history books. This would be just the one to achieve that for him. I commend the project to all honourable members and add my support to those members who have electorates in or near, or would be serviced by, such a project.
