



Speech by

Mr LEN STEPHAN

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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WATER RESOURCES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr STEPHAN (Gympie—NPA) (11.30 a.m.): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to join in this debate this morning on the Water Resources Amendment Bill. Wherever we go throughout this State, particularly in country areas, a water supply is very important. It is also very important to have a sufficient water supply from one year to the next but, unfortunately, that is not always the case.

During the fifties, there was a major drought in the Gympie area. At that stage Gympie was relying on the Mary River for its water supply, and when the Mary River ran dry, so did Gympie's water supply. Under those conditions, the decision was made to build the Borumba Dam, which has stood the test of time from the mid fifties until now. Additions have been made to the dam, but the amount of water that it captures is no more than it was when it was built, and many people tap into the water supply from that reservoir. We had hoped that the dam would be extended but, unfortunately, that has not been the case.

It would be at least five or six years before another dam could be built to ensure that there is a sufficient water supply in that area, that is, the area from Tinana to Maryborough, down the coast to Noosa, Maroochydore and Caloundra. A large number of people rely on their water supply from that area, and they cannot live without that. I look forward to the day when another dam will be constructed in that area to ensure that those people have an adequate water supply. I feel sorry for the primary producers who rely on that area for their water supply. They cannot get water from any other irrigation area; they have a set allocation, and that is it. During dry periods in particular, it is very important that those producers are looked after so that they can maintain their viability.

I note that the Water Resources Act provides for the constitution, by regulation, of a part of Queensland as a water supply or drainage area. A board for an area may be constituted in respect of works for water conservation, water supply, irrigation, drainage, flood prevention, flood control or the replenishment of underground water supplies in order to benefit that entire area. I am talking about areas that are used for grazing cattle and growing fruit and vegetables. Those areas get their water supply from small streams or underground sources. But during dry periods, those primary producers run short of water. The fruit and vegetable industry in my area stretches between Laidley and Maryborough. If work is not done to capture more water for agricultural purposes in that area, that production will cease.

It is all very well to look at that area now, because it has had a reasonable season, but the rainfall that it received in the last five or six years was only 20 inches a year. Usually, it is around 40 or 45 inches. So the rainfall in that area in the past few years has been very low. We look forward to better seasons in the future. However, we must not assume that we will always have a sufficient water supply in that area, and if we do not put in place a process whereby we ensure an adequate water supply for the future, we will run into trouble.

At the moment a lot of the food that we eat comes from the coastal areas of Queensland and New South Wales and a bit further to the south in the summertime. A lot of fruit vegetables are also coming from other areas, such as the Ord and surrounding areas. Producers in Queensland have to compete with growers who are able to tap into an enormous volume of water that is readily available right throughout those other grower areas. We have the knowledge and the expertise. What we really need now is to put them together, and I know that will happen.

I turn to the current dam situation. For some reason the Government has decided that it is not going to build any more dams. If it is going to build dams, it is certainly hiding that fairly well. I notice that the Minister is frowning at me. To my knowledge, no programs have been put in place that will see the construction of a dam in the next 12 months, or even two years. It is disappointing that we have to wait at least that long before programs can start. The benefits from dam construction are derived not only by people living in adjacent areas but also growers who utilise the water that flows to other parts of Australia. It is important for each and every one of us to consider those benefits so that everyone can look forward with confidence.

Another project to note is the possibility of pumping water from Brisbane and its surrounds up to the Lockyer area, and hopefully farther west than that. I am looking forward to that as it will utilise the grey water that currently flows into the ocean. It would have two notable benefits. First, grey water that flows into the ocean is going to contaminate it. Secondly, if primary producers, secondary producers and others can utilise that grey water, the whole country will benefit. Comments have been made from time to time that it would be very difficult or very expensive to pump that water into the production areas of the Lockyer Valley and surrounding districts. When we look at the prospects—the possibility of running short of water as we have done in the past 12 months—there is no alternative.

We look forward to the possibility of that program being put in place so that generations to come can utilise that grey water. With those few comments, I repeat that I hope that that process will be put in place.
