



Speech by

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard 9 December 1999

WATER RESOURCES AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (2.30 p.m.): As has been said by other speakers today, water is an essential element of any community's existence, let alone survival. In an electorate with a mix of urban, rural and industrial sectors, the demands for water are high. This Bill intends to reconstitute a water board in south-east Queensland. The Gladstone Area Water Board in my electorate needs to be acknowledged for the job it does in supplying domestic and commercial water for our community. Currently it is conducting an environmental impact study of augmentation of the Awoonga Dam. The planning for additional water storage has been in train for a number of years. Six or seven sites were initially investigated, with the current Awoonga Dam proposal having second choice to damming the Calliope. That was later amended and the raising of the Awoonga is now the preferred option.

Irrespective of where the water board is located, there must be recognition of the fact that demand for new water should not be the only criteria for additional dam storage. Consideration should be given to alternate uses of water and the re-use and recycling of water, particularly in industrial areas. As the cost of desalination reduces, the options for desalination—particularly in the coastal regions—should be considered. Consideration should also be given to technological changes to reduce the quantity of water that is necessary in the industrial sector.

The Queensland Cement plant in my electorate changed its technology. It has doubled its capacity and significantly reduced the demand for water in its process. It is hoped by people who live in the Yarwun area that some of the capacity in the pipeline to Queensland Cement can be used as irrigation water for their farms. Their production is restricted by a number of things, but particularly by the lack of a reliable water supply. They have been speaking with a number of Ministers over several years in an attempt to get an irrigation supply at a reasonable cost. They are not asking for irrigation water at no cost; they are just asking for it at a reasonable and affordable cost.

As I said, the Gladstone Area Water board is currently conducting an environmental impact study into the raising of the Awoonga Dam. The dam has served the community very well. However, it has had some disadvantages. One disadvantage is a lack of efficiency in terms of the release of environmental flows. The Boyne River is a prime example of pre-damming and post-damming impacts. Downstream from the dam, the river disappears to almost a puddle. Currently, the structure of the dam does not provide sufficient allowance for the release of good environmental flows. That can be addressed when the dam is raised. It is to be hoped that that will occur and that an obligation will be placed on the water board to ensure that there are sufficient releases to ensure a better life for the river and the river ecosystem. Additionally, no mechanism has been provided for fish ladders on the current dam. It is hoped by many people in the community that that will be addressed in the structure of the new dam augmentation.

Of primary concern in relation to the raising of the Awoonga Dam is the impact that it will have on the Boyne Valley residents. Many of them feel that their treatment to date has been less than acceptable. I would have to agree that in many instances the representatives of the Gladstone Area Water Board who have interfaced with the community have not treated them with the respect or given them the attention that they deserve. Many feel aggrieved by the attitude of the representatives and by

the manner in which land has been purchased. As far as I know, there have been no compulsory acquisitions to date; it has been by negotiation.

In December last year, the water board changed its policy just prior to announcing the preferred option of Awoonga Dam. That change in policy disadvantaged quite a number of people who live in the valley. The board is proposing to have storage agreements with landowners. If landowners are partially inundated in a 1 in 100 year event, it is proposed that under a storage agreement with the water board they will be paid a fee for the use of their land as storage until that water supply diminishes and the land is again released for farming. Those of us who have spent most of our lives in Queensland know that there is no such thing as a 1 in 100 year inundation. Three or four inundations might occur in five years and there will not be another for 100 or 150 years. Those people could be significantly disadvantaged. The purchasing policy of the Gladstone Area Water Board has left several families significantly disadvantaged. The attitude of the water board has been very poor. The McGregors have been treated if not illegally, certainly without any moral regard. There needs to be a review of that situation.

As I said, water is the lifeblood of the community. Water boards similar to the one that is proposed to be reinstituted under the Bill do a magnificent job in supplying water to communities. It is essential in any dealings that these boards have that they remember that they are dealing with people. It is not just a commodity or statistics that they are dealing with; it is human beings. In making decisions regarding water supply, land acquisition for inundation and water pricing, these boards have to remember that people are important.
