



Speech by

## PETER WELLINGTON

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Hansard 25 March 1999

### RAINWATER TANKS

**Mr WELLINGTON** (Nicklin—IND) (5.30 p.m.): I move—

"That this House calls on the State Government to investigate and, if possible, make provision in this year's budget for a rainwater tank rebate program to encourage water conservation."

Rainwater tanks could solve one of the most difficult problems we have in this State today, and that is providing water to our ever-increasing population. We live in one of the driest continents in the world and water is our most precious commodity. Every day we are washing, flushing and pouring millions of litres of water away. That is right, millions of litres of water go literally down the drain and out to sea—wasted.

I have been informed that the average Queenslanders uses about 635 litres of water every day. As our population increases so too does our need for water. In order to keep up with this demand we are forced to construct new dams, and these in turn have a devastating effect on our environment and on the people living downstream.

If we have learnt anything over the years it is that we must preserve and protect what we have. To counteract the population growth and the consequent strain it is putting on our water supply systems we must look to alternatives. This is particularly the case in my own electorate of Nicklin, one of the fastest growing areas in the State.

Demand for water is high and water tanks could alleviate that demand. If every household had its own water tank I believe we would not need to build more dams. What we need to do is to encourage people to install water tanks and I believe that the way to do this is via the hip-pocket nerve. We must offer people an incentive to install a tank—something that would make it worthwhile—and we could incorporate this with an advertising campaign pointing out the advantages of having a tank.

Rainwater tanks have numerous benefits: they reduce water rates paid to local authorities; they reduce the need for new dams and storage systems; they alleviate and reduce flood damage by reducing the volume of water entering stormwater systems in urban areas; they provide extra water for firefighting; and they decrease a householder's dependence on town water.

In the past, the greatest obstacle to rainwater tanks was one of health and water quality. The argument was that lead and other pollutants from cars and industry settled on the roofs of buildings with tanks and contaminated the water making it unsafe for human consumption. Experts say that generally the quality of tank water is much less than that of reticulated town water.

Tank water quality can be affected by many things including: atmospheric pollution, animal droppings, roofing materials and paints, trapped insects and small animals, decaying leaves, dust and pollution on roofs and installation procedures. The advice is that people drinking tank water usually develop a form of immunity because the various micro floras and fauna counteract the bacteria in the water. But people, particularly those with low immunity, visiting homes using tank water may have problems.

There are, however, effective methods of improving the quality of tank water, including water that is contaminated with harmful bacteria. This can be done by using a range of methods including disinfecting with chlorine. I have been informed that, once done, routine chlorination is generally unnecessary. But a sure way of knowing that disinfection has been achieved and the necessary free

residual chlorine level is present is by testing the water with a suitable chlorine test kit. I have been informed that the same test kits used to test chlorine levels in swimming pools are acceptable.

Previously, the only barriers to debris and pollutants entering rainwater tanks were a simple fly screen mesh and perhaps a drop of kerosene. Today, there is a range of appliances on the market, including water diverters, tank sack filters and many others that are able to significantly reduce the level of debris and pollutants entering the tanks. I have here today an example of a water diverter and a tank filter, which is the piece that is hanging down. I have been informed that Mr Speaker has agreed to set up a display in the grounds so that interested members can examine the appliance and the sack filter if they so desire.

I have been further informed that the diverter plays a part in preventing quickly dissolved chemicals which have collected on the roof from getting into the tank. The filter, which is like a synthetic bag, fits over the inlet of the tank and prevents any debris from entering the tank. In relation to the demonstrated sack filter, I am informed that it has filtered approximately 200,000 litres of water. I make this available for members to look at. Members can see that there is some debris inside and they can appreciate how effective the filter is. I have been informed that these filters will remove particles down to 10 microns in size: in other words, that is smaller than what the human eye can see.

We talk about pollutants in our rainwater tanks. Last year, Sydney suffered one of the worst water pollution episodes in this country's history. Many hundreds of residents were infected when the city's water supply became polluted. Since then, there has been a huge rise in sales of bottled water and many Sydney residents have opted for a return to water tanks. In South Australia, a recent survey found that more than 42% of all households used rainwater for drinking. Even in the metropolitan areas the rate was 25.6%.

In Australia generally, 12.6% of all households use rainwater tanks. Naturally, the figure is higher in country and farming areas. My own Shire of Maroochy has led the way over the past years by encouraging its ratepayers to install water tanks by offering rebate incentives which range from \$20 to a maximum \$250 for each tank. There is another side to the argument. When Maroochy Shire introduced water meters, water consumption dived rapidly. This can be attributed to the hip-pocket nerve.

This backs my argument that the way to encourage water conservation through the provision of tanks is to give a cash incentive. Make it easy for people. There will always be some people who, for whatever reasons, do not want to use tank water for drinking or cooking. They could still use tank water for other household purposes such as washing, flushing and for the garden. All I am asking is that the Government investigate the advantages of offering an incentive to people to install rainwater tanks and, if possible, make provision in this year's Budget for a rainwater tank rebate program.

We, as responsible leaders, should be encouraging people to install water tanks because it is a win-win scenario for both the State and for the people who live in it. I commend the motion to the House.

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