



Speech by

Mr S. ROBERTSON

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

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RAINWATER TANKS

Mr ROBERTSON (Sunnybank—ALP) (5.37 p.m.): It is with great pleasure that I second the motion moved by the member for Nicklin and congratulate him on bringing to this Parliament an idea which has attracted the support of members from all sides of politics. It is a measure of the member for Nicklin's commitment to the environment that he uses this place to bring members of all parties together to discuss an idea which will, in my view, be of enormous benefit to Queenslanders, no matter where they live.

Pollsters will tell us that the most important issues in the minds of voters are crime, health and education. They claim that the environment is of declining relevance among large sections of the community. As a result, politicians need to concentrate on those issues in order to reflect the wishes of the people. It is a view that I have always treated with a healthy cynicism and suspicion because it suggests that politicians, as representatives of the community, have no role to play in leading important debates. It suggests that we do not have a proactive role to play in shaping community opinion through education on vital issues affecting our city or town, our State or our nation. It suggests that a politician's role is simply to respond to so-called hot button issues.

No-one can disagree that the environment is one of the most important issues facing our country today. In the late 1980s and early 1990s it rated as one of the top three issues in the community, but pollsters tell us that that is no longer the case. As a result, the substantial gains in educating the community and enlisting their support around slogans such as "think global, act local" have, in my opinion, stalled.

In order to maintain that support and involvement, we need to provide the community with the tools to maintain their level of consciousness and activity on environmental issues. Participation by the community in household recycling continues at high levels, driven largely by young people who want to do something about protecting their local environment and the fact that as a result of local government recycling schemes it is convenient for people to maintain their participation.

Similarly, the use of solar power in hot water systems continues to rise steadily and the level of interest in innovations such as energy efficient housing design suggests that the community's thirst for new ideas to contribute to environmental sustainability has not abated; it has not been a passing fad. As representatives of the community, we have a responsibility to nurture that enthusiasm. Tonight's motion moved by the member for Nicklin is a positive initiative to achieve such an outcome.

Of course, for this initiative to be put into effect, a number of issues have to be addressed. These include a range of important health-related matters, particularly in relation to the quality of rainwater in urban areas. However, as the member for Nicklin has demonstrated so capably tonight, we are extremely innovative people. Those issues have been and will continue to be addressed by our own resourcefulness. Currently, there are numerous products on the market and research and product development continues to ensure that we can offer incentives for the community to participate in water conservation programs in both urban and rural environments without threatening health standards.

One matter about which I would take a minor issue with the member for Nicklin is his assurances about the use of chlorine. In fact, some constituents in my own electorate of Sunnybank have developed technology whereby the use of chlorine to purify water is no longer necessary. That technology has wide application, particularly in community swimming pools. Through this affordable

technology, chlorine is no longer needed to be used to purify the water in pools. Of course, that technology has myriad other applications, even in the area of purification of rainwater.

There are many less obvious benefits to schemes such as those suggested in the motion moved by the member for Nicklin. The obvious benefits are environmental, but there are also economic benefits. Too often, innovative technologies fail in Australia because of the relatively small size of the domestic market. Yet Australians have an enviable record in the development of new technologies, particularly in the area of environmental management and protection. By increasing the domestic market share of products which have an environmental benefit, companies involved in the development and sale of such products achieve production levels which allow them to attain the critical mass necessary to allow the exploration of export opportunities at internationally competitive prices. There are sufficient export opportunities in environmental technology and services on Queensland's doorstep, and the challenges faced by many of our neighbouring countries in providing water to their populations are immense. I support the motion.

Time expired.
