



Speech by

**Tony ELLIOTT**

**MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM**

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Hansard 8 December 1999

### **WATER RESOURCES AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr ELLIOTT** (Cunningham—NPA) (12.32 a.m.): In rising to take part in the debate, I wish to support the shadow Minister's comments in relation to the ability to trade allocations throughout this State. If we are to bring our water resources and irrigation industries up to best possible practice and allow them to operate with the greatest efficiency possible, we must allow water allocations to be traded and transferred. I know that that happens in some instances. It happens on the border. Allocations are traded in the Dumaresq and Macintyre areas. People sell their allocations to others who need extra water to finish their crops.

For example, one farmer may still have 10, 15 or up to 50 megalitres of water left over from his allocation from a particular dam. Another farmer may have used up all of his allocations and is just a bit short. He may need a little extra water to finish off his crop, whether it be cotton or something else. There is a great need to trade the allocations and, for that matter, to buy allocations so that farmers who are prepared to really take the bit in their teeth and work seriously to ensure that their irrigation system is the most efficient are not stymied. They should be allowed to increase their water allocations slightly—within reason, of course. I have always believed in that practice. We need to ensure that that can happen. We ought to be working on that.

**Mr Pearce** interjected.

**Mr ELLIOTT:** It seems to have reached a market price that people agree on. There does not seem to be a lot of disagreement. It has been market driven. I think it probably really started at St George when there was the sale of farms and the water attached to them. That seemed to set some sort of price on water. Certainly a price has been set on water in the border regions. I forget what they finished up at in terms of permanent allocations. Some probably made \$1,000 for the use of the water forever and a day. The temporary transfer of water certainly has not made anything like that, of course. That practice has been of great assistance to many people who were trying to finish off crops. It is very important.

The other subject that I would like to touch on tonight is the use of tailwater return systems. There are many good reasons why we should look very seriously at the reuse of water, particularly in relation to flood irrigation as happens on the Darling Downs and many other areas. Regrettably, many people waste water. If we do not have a tailwater return system, it is terribly difficult to be efficient with water.

It is ironic to read the Bill that the Government has introduced in respect of tree clearing. I challenge anyone who wants to have a little bet for a casket ticket or something like that that the Government will run foul of people who, by law and by necessity, are going to be required to have a tailwater return system, particularly in the cotton industry, for the containment of chemicals and pesticides that are sprayed on to crops. Those substances are then caught up naturally in the water. Those people must use a tailwater system. If they do not, they run the risk of those chemicals running into streams, creeks and rivers and doing terrific damage to the fish populations.

On the one hand, the Government is saying that those farmers must use tailwater return systems. We all agree with that. However, say a farm is in an area where long ago they took far more than 30% of the trees away, so now they have 25% vegetation cover. The Government says, "No, you can't remove one single tree", yet the farmer is required to build a tailwater return system. Although in most instances building such a system would not involve removing a lot of trees, some trees would have to be removed.

**Mr Pearce:** I'll have a casket ticket with you on it.

**Mr Sullivan:** Take him on.

**Mr ELLIOTT:** I do not think that we should be talking like that across the Chamber. It may be frowned on. Perhaps I will talk to the member later.

We owe it to the people who have water or those who would like to use more water to ensure that we do not waste water. We all need to work on finding greater efficiencies within the systems that we use. I have found it very interesting to follow trials of drip systems and various other upmarket systems, many of which have come from Israel. Some of my colleagues who use irrigation to grow vegetables and fruit of various kinds would be well aware of the benefits of trickle and drip irrigation systems. Some of those Israeli systems have proven to be very efficient. In the longer term, we need to look at those.

The shadow Minister, the members for Toowoomba North, Toowoomba South, Warwick and Crows Nest and I have been working together as a committee to try to find solutions to the problems involved in the disposal of treated effluent from Toowoomba City. We have also been investigating the suggestion to bring water from the Brisbane area up to the Lockyer Valley and the Darling Downs to augment the lack of water in those areas.

As we project forward into the next century the supply of water is going to be a very real problem on the Darling Downs, and in Toowoomba in particular. If Toowoomba is to continue to grow—if that whole resource area is to continue to be efficient and able to support more and more people—we really need to solve the problems of water supply. Lots of people are wanting to come to the area. We are seeing a great deal of net migration from other States to Toowoomba and the surrounding areas.

One of the real problems is the disposal of the effluent because it goes firstly into Gowrie Creek, then into Oakey Creek and down into the Condamine which, of course, is part of the Murray-Darling system. The solution in my opinion is to try to get the support of the Federal Government, which has expressed some interest in this. It is not as though it has wiped its hands of the whole thing and said, "We are not interested. You go and paddle your own canoe and look after your own problems." It has expressed an interest in it.

I believe that the most practical solution is to use the whole ecology that has been developed around the disposal of effluent water from the Toowoomba sewerage area. That is so because the system is already there; a microclimate, if you like, has been created. The quality of the water at the most up-to-date sewerage treatment plant is pretty good, but at the older plant the quality of water is not as good as it should be. We need to give the Toowoomba City Council some assistance to upgrade its sewerage works and continue to use the creek for effluent disposal.

At good flow of quality water into that creek would ensure there is no detriment to the riparian rights of all of those people between Toowoomba and Condamine River. It is not just a problem for irrigation; it is a problem for the riparian holders who have a right to use water for stock and domestic purposes. In many cases the creek is, in fact, a boundary between properties. If all of the water is suddenly taken out of the creek, as was suggested by the Toowoomba City Council, and sold off, those land-holders will have to fence all of that land. That will cost them money. That would remove a whole lot of water from people who are now utilising it for profit. Quite frankly, it will have a devastating effect on the economy of the whole area.

We do need to look at this and say, "How do we best solve this problem?" I have been working here for 10 years, trying to get a thing called the D'Oliveira methane program in place. It is technology which, in fact, has been run through the Uniquest part of the University of Queensland. Uniquest has actually done a computer model study on it and has said that it works. The Griffith University and CSIRO have done that as well. It is interesting that suddenly we have had a breakthrough in this area. D'Oliveira himself has actually just gone off to America. There are some really interesting connections among the people involved in it. There is George Bush Jr and a few other fairly heavyweight people over there, together with the American Environmental Protection Agency, all of whom are going to use the NASA computers. The NASA computers are probably the most powerful computers in the world. They are the ones that control all these satellites into outer space.

**Mr Sullivan:** And lost them.

**Mr ELLIOTT:** They lost the last one. I do not think it has too much to do with the way the computer was able to control it getting there. Something went wrong with the landing, I would say.

These computers make three dimensional models. They are able to design this whole thing. It is like a refinery; it is very, very different. In most anaerobic plants around the world, the digestion and anaerobic reaction takes place naturally and how long it takes depends on the ambient temperature. The anaerobic reaction in most of these plants takes anywhere from 7 to 10 days. The D'Oliveira scheme is all about super heating and using technology from both urea plants and petroleum industry refineries. This technology has been combined in a unique way which is patentable. In fact, the anaerobic reaction can be made to take place in four and a half hours. The whole thing is very, very different in respect of everyone's idea of a methane plant. The Chinese have been using methane for about as long as modern man has had any idea of technology. It is definitely a much superior scheme compared to what one normally thinks of with the use of methane.

If that scheme proves to be successful, which I believe it will, we can then use that process. The Toowoomba City Council has already expressed interest in using D'oliveira scheme. I have been in there with D'oliveira and discussed it with the council. It is interested in using the process at Toowoomba. If we were able to do that, because the whole electricity grid comes right down to the Wurtulla sewerage works, the sewage could be treated there and electricity could be taken straight into the grid while at the same time the water could be cleaned up to a high standard and directed into Gowrie Creek, Oakey Creek and into the Condamine River systems.

To me that would be a far better solution than all of the ideas of piping water here and there and using some of it on farm. Quite frankly, we want that water in the creek, which has developed a very successful ecosystem. The community has stocked fish into all of those creeks. The whole thing relies on that water. The minute that water is taken out of the creek, the watercourse will revert to what it was before white man turned up—a series of muddy waterholes like a lot of other western creeks in dry times. That would be a disaster for the area.

I do hope that the Minister will take it on board and take an interest in it. I hope that he will also give us an update on where we are— and I ask the Minister to take some interest in this—with the cross-Government task force. I think some of the other Ministers in the House are probably interested in that particular task force as well. I know that the Deputy Premier is interested. Perhaps the Leader of the House might be as well. It is very important for all of those Ministers and their departments to look at this because that relates to piping water from Brisbane up to the Gatton Valley and then up the range to Toowoomba to augment the water resources of that area.

There is some very real potential there, but there are also some problems. We have to look at them and decide whether or not they are insurmountable, whether they are too difficult and whether we can utilise that water. At the moment it is going out through Luggage Point. It is a problem for Moreton Bay. It is a problem with all of the greenies. I know that, when I was shadow Minister for Environment, I had the absolute support of a lot of the green groups, from Drew Hutton and the Surf Riders Association. They were 100% behind what we were trying to do with the D'oliveira methane process. They could see the commonsense in it. They were pushing for it as hard as I was.

I call on the Minister to look at all of those areas to try to put in place some of the various water projects that the task force identified throughout the State. A lot of the planning work has been done.

It seems a great pity that we are not continuing with many of those resource projects. We live on the driest continent on earth. As such, it is important that we do something about those projects and we do not just let them slide sideways, with people just talking about them and not doing anything. Our children and grandchildren will not forgive us if we do not do something constructive about the water resources of this State. With those few words, I have much pleasure in supporting the Bill.

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