



Speech by

**Hon. V. LESTER**

**MEMBER FOR KEPPEL**

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Hansard 8 December 1999

**WATER RESOURCES AMENDMENT BILL**

**Hon. V. P. LESTER** (Keppel—NPA) (9.25 p.m.): Water is one of the most significant issues in Queensland, and I believe that it will only become more significant in the coming months and years ahead. Unfortunately, I think that in the future wars will be fought over water. To some extent, minor wars are being fought over water at present. As I travel the length and breadth of Queensland, the most significant issue that continues to be raised with me is the need for more water. Even where a supply is not fundamentally sound, people still seem to need more water. In the future, we will have to pay very serious attention to this issue to work out how we can provide more water in this State in an environmentally sustainable way. We are just running out of it. It is as simple as that.

Water is fundamental to the continued development of our great State of Queensland. There will be no development if we do not have the water to support it. One need only go out to places such as St George to see that. I recall visiting St George and Dirranbandi a few years back. At the time, those towns were not too clever—and I think that is being fairly polite. Those towns are now absolutely vibrant, with new employment and business activity. We saw the development of new mining, industrial and agricultural industries, rural and regional development, job creation and export growth.

Unlike other States, in particular Victoria and New South Wales, the vast majority of Queensland's river and underground water systems are in good environmental shape. Again, unlike those in other States, our river systems have not been overdeveloped. In fact, in many instances they are not totally utilised. As I said a moment ago, we have seen that, where water infrastructure has been constructed, enormous benefits have flowed directly to the regional community and to the State economy. For example, the construction of the Fairbairn Dam at Emerald sparked mining developments, irrigation, and encouraged the cotton and horticulture industries, providing jobs, income and services to that community. Having represented the area, I know that Emerald was seen as a fairly significant sheep and cattle centre. In those days it was a pretty dusty place. Then people suddenly became excited about the proposed dam.

This was all brought about by a Labor man, Tom Foley. He was ridiculed for suggesting many years ago that there should be a dam built on the Nogoia River near Emerald. They used to call it Foley's Folly. When he left the Irrigation portfolio there was certainly no dam, but ultimately commonsense prevailed and that dam was built. It was opened in 1972 at a cost of \$23m. It now provides water for a large number of mining towns and mine operations, the cotton industry and the citrus fruit industry. The benefits of that dam go on and on. The population of Emerald has increased from about 4,000 people to between 14,000 and 15,000 people. Although that dam is environmentally very sensitive, it still supplies water to the likes of Blackwater, Tieri and Capella. Thousands of people attend the Easter Festival held on the beautifully maintained lawns that surround the dam.

We should look at the benefits that the Federal Government in particular is reaping from that dam. Some of the mining companies in the area are making profits of up to \$100m a year. All the mines in the area are looking at profits of several hundred million dollars. If we add the profits of the citrus fruit growers and the cotton growers, probably for that \$23m investment the Federal Government is netting revenue in the order—and I do not think I really want to put a figure on it—of many hundreds of millions of dollars. That has been one of the truly great developments because somebody had the courage to say, "Yes, let's make it work." I do not believe that there is one ounce of environmental damage there. In fact, the trees, the shrubs and the other vegetation that has been able to be grown as a result of the building of that dam have indeed made the place environmentally friendly.

I mentioned earlier other areas such as St George and Dirranbandi. It just amazes me to go out there to find these great seas literally in the desert—not quite desert but close enough—and what that has done for those towns. Then there are places such as Mareeba on the Atherton Tableland. We do not need to talk about the tablelands, but I would like to know where it would be if it were not for the Tinaroo Falls Dam. It is amazing, though, that most people in that area are not satisfied because they would like more water from that dam. Whenever I go up there, all sorts of schemes are put to me about somehow or other harvesting more water. I dare say that there are opportunities there if we think carefully about them. Bundaberg and the Burdekin have boomed with the construction of water storage schemes and the development of irrigation industries.

The former Borbidge Government recognised the wealth of opportunity offered to this State through sustainable water infrastructure development and commissioned a massive report to identify and prioritise potential water schemes. They did not throw a few darts at a map of Queensland to see what they could hit. They worked it out scientifically. Had we continued along that line, we would have been in a position today where perhaps some of those dams and weirs would have been under construction. Again, we would be providing more opportunities for people to carry on that great Australian tradition of going out and making their fortune. That is not such a terrible thing. If people make a fortune, they spend it and they employ people. So "profit" is not such a dirty word.

Unfortunately, with the election of the Beattie Government 18 months ago that work has halted and at least seven major water projects across regional Queensland have either been axed or stalled. That is a pretty unhappy state of affairs. I do believe that some of these dams could now be in the throes of construction. We could be using our construction and environmental expertise to set Queensland up as a showplace to the rest of the world, to show it that in Queensland we do things better. The Premier often says we can, so here would be an opportunity to do that.

The proposed \$123m St Helens Creek dam at Mackay with a capacity of 200,000 megalitres was axed in December 1998. I am at a loss to know why that happened. I do not believe it should have happened. The additional jobs it would have created would have meant an enormous amount to the Mackay area, which is doing pretty well as it is at the moment with mining in the hinterland, sugar, the expansion of the University of Central Queensland and so on. It has developed well, but this would have been yet another way to develop Mackay and the surrounding area. I am sure the environmental sustainability would have been proven to be correct and up to the task. The proposed \$42m Finch Hatton Creek dam near Mackay with a capacity of 36,000 megalitres was also axed in 1998. I really do not know what the Mackay people have done to this Government, but they have got the axe fairly and squarely in the neck.

**Mr Welford:** They asked us not to do that one.

**Mr LESTER:** I do not think so. That is not what I have heard. This Government is giving all the reasons why something cannot happen rather than looking at the issue and saying, "How can we make this happen, even if we might have to delay some of these structures to work more on the environmental side of things?" I am quite sure this could have been done, and done well.

The raising of Walla Weir in the Burnett district has been placed in perennial limbo. It is like it is between heaven and hell. It does not know which way it is going. A commitment by the Borbidge Government to raise the weir has been reversed by the Beattie Government, even though the facility was designed to take that addition. It was designed so it could be improved in the future. We have seen no action there at all. I also mention that the much needed Cooranga Weir has still not been funded and no plans have been released by the Minister as to when it will be funded.

The proposed 620,000 megalitre Flinders dam was axed in 1999. That was an outstanding project. I have been up there and looked at it. One would have felt really good to go there to see the unbelievable excitement of the people of Richmond. They took me out to where low loaders and those sorts of things were scooping up ground ready to grow crops when this dam was built. The shire council talked to me at considerable length. They were excited. They believed it could happen. Then, all of a sudden, it was announced over ABC radio that it would not happen. It was very devastating to those people that they did not really mean any more than a radio news bulletin. They were not even told what would happen.

**Mr Seeney:** Arrogance—absolute arrogance.

**Mr LESTER:** I believe so. I did not ever really believe that the Government would act in that way. I actually tried to reassure these people that the Government was genuine and that it was going to really try to help them. A few weeks later, of course, we saw this rather extraordinary act. These days I am not quite so willing to sell the present Government's good tidings, because I am not sure they will come to pass. That sort of thing leaves one a little embarrassed.

Construction of the proposed \$150m Nathan dam in central Queensland with a capacity of 1.1 million megalitres, approved by the Borbidge Government in 1998, has been frozen.

**Mr Seeney** interjected.

**Mr Welford** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Reeves): Order! I think it would be appreciated—

**Mr Welford** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Callide and the Minister! I think it would be appreciated if we listened to the member for Keppel.

**Mr Seeney** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Callide!

**Mr LESTER:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. That gave me time to pause and reflect on what has not been happening under this Government. I really believe this is a tragedy. While it could be argued that the dam might go ahead one day, every day that passes it is less and less likely to go ahead. I know that there are issues about privatisation and so on, but there was a lot going for this dam.

**Mr Seeney:** Wayne Goss thought it was a good idea.

**Mr LESTER:** He did. In fact, I got taken on by one of the media in relation to this particular dam because I indicated all the jobs that would be created through its construction. The media took me on—

**Mr Seeney** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Callide will be speaking very shortly. I think it would be most appropriate if he listened to a member from his own side, the member for Keppel.

**Mr LESTER:** I think the member for Callide is so distraught about what has happened to his proposed dam that he cannot help himself.

**Mr Welford** interjected.

**Mr LESTER:** It is true. Actually, I held a public meeting in Rockhampton which some 500 people attended. The member for Callide was extraordinarily vocal at that particular meeting. He was so vocal that it probably got him over the line at the election. If people did not know him beforehand, they knew him after that meeting. I am of the belief that they knew about him beforehand, too. I understand that he once got in front of a train to make a point with the railways when the Labor Government was trying to shut them down.

**Mr Seeney** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Callide can have this conversation outside. If he keeps it up, he will be warned and then he will not have a chance to actually say what he wants to say.

**Mr LESTER:** It created a bit of a problem for me in my own electorate when this was announced. Some of the conservationists were carrying on. They were suggesting that all of the pollution from this dam came from "those awful cotton growers". That is a quote; they are not my words.

**Mr Mickel:** I hope not. I hope you have not denigrated those cotton growers.

**Mr LESTER:** The member understood what I said. I said I was quoting. I would never denigrate those people, who do so much for our State of Queensland—in terms of money and in other ways. I hope that when the appropriate votes are to be taken good people such as the member for Logan will vote for what we are doing to help them and not vote against us.

I was able to convince the conservationists that with this particular dam very modern methods of environmental control had been used perhaps for the first time. Much of the water that would normally be running into the stream after it was used for irrigation on the cotton fields actually would be channelled back on to the farm.

**Mr Littleproud:** Tail draining.

**Mr LESTER:** Yes, it is tail draining back on to the farm. This was very significant. It meant that the water that would go down through the city of Rockhampton would actually be quite safe. Of course, the conservationists got it a bit wrong. Not too much water from the Dawson River goes through Rockhampton anyway. Most of it comes from the Isaacs/Mackenzie. They held a couple of demonstrations outside my office in the couple of weeks before the election. It did not do them much good. I think they got about 1.2% of the vote. There is a problem with saying why something is crook, why it will not happen or why it should not happen rather than getting on with the job and saying, "How are we going to do it? If we've got a problem, let's fix it. I am sure we can do it."

Construction of the proposed \$247m Paradise dam in the Burnett has also been frozen, despite the Premier's promise. He made a promise. Mr Beattie actually went up there and said, "I promise you the Paradise dam." Members can understand that the member for Bundaberg, who is a nice lady, gets very cranky whenever that dam is mentioned. She gets a bit cranky with the member for Burnett. He

seems to stir her up a bit about that dam. There is also something about an electorate office, but I will not go into that. It would be a bit off the subject of this Bill. Despite the Premier's promise at the last election to match the Borbidge Government's commitment to build within five years, he conned those people a bit. He smiled nicely at them.

I went up there and had a yarn with the sugar growers, various other people and the member for Burnett. I know that I got into trouble with the Minister. I got in a plane, went up and had a good look for myself, just to see what could happen and so on. He thought I was trying to pull a bit of a stunt, but really I was not. I had been over a lot of that area on the ground as well. I just wanted to get a total visual effect. I think what upset the Minister was that I did get very good press out of that trip to the Burnett.

We made it very clear what we thought about the whole issue. We had the backing of everybody of any substance in that city of Bundaberg. We were quite pleased with what we achieved there. At least we got people thinking about the issue. Bundaberg does need this dam. A \$247m dam is a very important asset for that area. I would like to see the member for Bundaberg being a bit more vocal about it, but she has probably been hit across the knuckles and told to quieten down a bit.

The list of broken promises and non-events goes on. In fact, a host of other smaller projects have been stalled or axed under the Beattie Government. This is quite a shame, because this State has so much going for it, but the old axe is out and these dams are being stopped. Yet the Government is bringing in other legislation at the moment to axe the harvesting of a few trees. I cannot quite work out the Government. I thought it would be a bit more considerate.

To top it off, the Minister has reneged on his commitment to amend the guidelines to make it easier for primary producers to access assistance to build on-farm water storage under the Water Development Incentive Scheme. The other day in the Parliament I asked a question about that issue. The Premier got a bit cranky and upset with me, but I think I hit the mark. I understand from public servants that they were starting to see some action. I did not pursue it any more, but I think I hit a nerve. I believe that there was some substance in my question. And although I would never suggest that the Minister tried to mislead the Parliament, I know that there was some action after I asked that question, so I am very pleased about that.

The Water Development Incentive Scheme provided a great incentive for people to build on-farm water storages. Provided that all the levels and flows are right, there is nothing wrong with on-farm water storage. In fact, it is far better that water be stored than wasted. We should never forget that. I believe that the more incentive schemes we have to actually assist people, the more they will do something.

This Government is going about things backwards. Why it is doing that, I will never know. The numbers of inspectors and people like that are being increased. With all due respect to many of those inspectors, who have been through university—particularly the young ones—they have not had the experience of trying to make a farm profitable or even working on a farm. They have their little black books, and if they go back to the office without having booked a farmer for this or that or put some sort of imposition on a farmer, then they get into trouble with their superiors. Those inspectors are trying to get ahead by studying at university for another degree. But it is a great pity that they are putting impositions on people.

Some of the people involved in aquaculture have had extraordinary trouble trying to get ahead and do their jobs. One fellow had a 20-part scheme, but the scheme was stopped on the first part because it was suggested—and only suggested—that there might be mahogany gliders on his property. There is no proof of that; nobody has found any. But his whole scheme has been stymied, and he is losing heart. One inspector even had a go at that fellow because some of the effluent from his property was running into the mangroves. The inspector said, "You're in trouble, mate, because that effluent is making the mangroves grow bigger than they should be." I thought that people got into trouble if they chopped mangroves down, but that fellow got into trouble because the moisture from that effluent was making the mangroves grow bigger than they should be.

People are losing their marbles over this issue. In the past, the DPI person, the DNR person or the environmental person would visit a farm and give the farmer a hand. They would show him how to plough contours and control erosion. The farmer would be given a list of things to do, and it all worked out pretty well. Those people had a great relationship. But all that went with the Goss Government. Now we have this new breed of inspector. And God help us with the tree-clearing guidelines! There will be so many inspectors on people's properties that they will be like white ants and nobody will be able to move. But that issue relates to other legislation before the Parliament, so I will not talk about that.

In recent days, we have learnt that the Minister has directed his department to cease processing existing applications under the Water Development Incentive Scheme and is currently working on a recommendation to Cabinet not to pay those existing applications. I hope that I have got that wrong, and I do not mind being corrected if I am wrong. It would be terrible if, all of a sudden,

those people who have set up the machinery and are prepared to start work on their schemes found that they could not commence that work. That would be pretty dreadful, to say the least.

The Beattie Government talks about jobs. But with the non-construction of dams and the difficulties that people are facing in developing their farms, their situation will be made worse with the tree-clearing guidelines. This Government is anti-jobs and anti-regional development. So it is somewhat fitting that, on one of the first and few instances when this Minister has introduced legislation regarding water, it is simply a procedural or administrative Bill. Even the amendments that the Minister was kind enough to explain to me appear to be just that.

The Opposition is not going to oppose the Bill. However, there are some issues that I would like to raise with regard to it and to the Water Resources Act. Firstly, with regard to the Act, I have been made aware of some of the problems that are causing serious concerns among primary producers on the Atherton Tableland. The Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Rob Borbidge, and I went up there. Russell Cooper went up there on another occasion, and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Mr Springborg, has been up there, too. We have spoken at length with those primary producers. There is a fair bit of brain power on the Atherton Tableland.

**Mr Springborg:** The Minister is not interested.

**Mr LESTER:** I have not really touched on that. The Mareeba and District Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association has brought these concerns to my attention, and I acknowledge their efforts. They do a great job on behalf of their members. When I went up there, I could not believe how organised they were. They had all their representatives there, and they arranged to take me around within a specific time and show me all of the various areas that were of interest to them. Their ideas are futuristic, and they told me about what they thought they could do in the future and how their expertise could make products from the Atherton Tableland more competitive on world markets.

The Labor Party really needs to understand that we have to be more competitive on world markets. If we do not provide water and the capacity for our producers to utilise as much land as possible and to produce in the most economical manner, members know what will happen; not only will we lose out in the international market, but we will lose out in the domestic market as well, because we will not be competitive, and it will be cheaper for Woolworths or Coles or some of those so-called great Australian companies to import from Taiwan, South America and other countries the types of goods that we should be producing ourselves.

One needs only to talk to people at the Golden Circle pineapple factory—a great company—about economies of scale. That factory has to compete continually with the rubbish that is imported from other parts of the world and which is stocked mainly by supermarkets. Unfortunately, some Australians are silly enough to buy that rubbish, even though it might contain mercury or other toxic substances. I would be surprised if the Minister was not aware of these problems. I would also like very much to hear his views about this issue and what he can do about it. I also urge the Minister to act on these concerns and move promptly to address them through an amendment. There is no reason why he cannot do that.

Following the introduction of the water resources regulation in 1999, which introduced tradeable water allocations, concerns have arisen with the trading process. This is important. Currently, there is no obligation for the buyer of a water entitlement to be made public, only for the name of the seller to be made public. Irrigators on the tablelands hold concerns that the transfer of water from one person to another has the potential to impact negatively on other irrigators. If we really think hard about this issue, we realise that there is a problem with only the name of the seller of a water entitlement being made public, and not the buyer. Irrigators hold concerns about this issue and, obviously, it needs to be given a fair amount of attention. Given that the notification process does not require information regarding the buyer to be disclosed publicly, growers may not know of the potential impact that that transfer will have on them until it has taken place, and then it will be too late to do anything about it.

I am referring to the actual impact of that water trade on others. I believe that that is an environmental issue. We have to make sure that, when this happens, nobody is impacted upon adversely. Irrigators should be advised of the seller's location. I think that is important. They should also be advised as to where the water allocation is to be transferred. If that is done, everybody knows where they stand and they will know whether or not they are impacted upon negatively. There should be a process in place by which this issue can be dealt with. Adding to this problem, as it stands there is also no provision for an appeal process if other irrigators in the scheme are disadvantaged through the transfer of a water allocation.

So the issues are the identity of the buyer, where the water allocation is to be transferred, and no appeal process. They are all pretty serious. I believe that the Minister should really take note of them and, if he does not mind, try to address them. He should talk to the people on the Atherton Tableland and see what can be done to overcome the problems. Certainly, what they are suggesting sounds reasonable to me. They are not people who just try to cause bother; they have thought all of this out.

They know how things work. Those are some of the concerns that they have put to me and, no doubt, have probably been put to the Minister as well. I think that they would like some answers and, more importantly, some positive action.

Given the potentially significant implications of the transfer of water allocations on the viability of a system and other irrigators, it is essential that an objection process be provided and that industry has some involvement on how the transfer takes place. These people are saying that they would like their industry group—their representatives—to be involved in this process. That is not a bad idea. If we can have some of the local people involved in their own processes, then they will all be out to help the area and to help one another. If that occurred, I do believe that we would see a pretty tidy system.

A further deficiency in the existing arrangements is that there are no guidelines for the transfer of water within an irrigation scheme. Again, that is a concern to these people. As I have just alluded to, the transfer of water allocations from one channel to another, or from a channel to a creek, or vice versa, can potentially have enormous impacts on other irrigators in that part of the scheme from where the water allocations have been transferred.

So often we see problems occur outside the immediate area, such as the enormous problems that can occur when due care is not taken during the construction of a road. I think of those poor Ahern people in the Ayr area. Because of what some other people have done up the line and because a road was built through the middle of their area, every time it rains those poor people get flooded. I have been out to their farm, too. They showed me photos of their beautiful farm with them rowing from paddock to paddock in a boat. That should not happen. Now nobody wants to do anything about it. It is too big a job for the council. I think that millions of dollars would be needed to fix it. There have literally been all sorts of wars between the growers who are the beneficiaries. Obviously, had some care been taken in the first place, this whole sorry situation would never, ever have happened.

As I have explained in the Ahern incident, there is little value in introducing a system of transferable water entitlements if it potentially leaves part of an irrigation scheme short of water. There is not much point in that at all. There are very good people within the system who really know what it is all about. They could be involved and could do the job very, very well. The current regulation is the pilot for what I envisage will be a roll-out of similar water trading across the State. Therefore, it is vital that we get the framework right before that takes place. I believe that that is very, very important.

The Minister should really be very aware of the concerns on the tablelands over tradeable water allocations. I think that it would be in the interests of not just those growers but others throughout the State and also, indeed, the Government to rectify those problems before that roll-out takes place. I reiterate my call to the Minister to fix these problems for the benefit of those growers in the tablelands irrigation scheme. As I say, we should really be getting something into line that comes into being right across the State.

On a related issue, I also hold concerns that the introduction of tradeable water allocations has the potential to allow the big to get bigger and the smaller to be, for want of better terminology, droughted to death. Of course, it is a fact that some of the bigger operators think that it is their right to have water. That then creates one heck of a problem for the little people. I believe that there is a place in the world for those little people. Sometimes small farmers have to try to purchase water from the bigger operators, who sell it at some extraordinary price. Those issues certainly need to be dealt with. There is a problem in the St George area that I believe needs attention. I am led to believe that some of those problems would have been alleviated by the building of a new dam.

**Mr Hobbs:** Off-stream storage.

**Mr LESTER:** Off-stream storage is an answer, but I am led to believe that that has been put on hold. There is some suggestion that the Commonwealth should be paying for that. That might help solve some of those problems in the St George area.

In any market situation, it is important that there are checks and balances in place to ensure that fair competition occurs while the interests of the smaller operators are safeguarded. Part of our problem, not only in Queensland but in Australia generally, is that we appear to be focusing too much on the big people. We must remember that it is little people who really keep our State afloat.

To give an example, many years ago a huge British grazing company owned all of the land around Capella and Clermont. It was a huge show. It was inefficient, it did not employ a lot of people, it made a loss and generally it was hopeless. The land was split up into smaller properties and now it is one of the most vibrant areas that one could ever think of. Sometimes the area suffers from drought, but all in all that has been a magic solution to an enormous problem that was created by a huge combine. I think it was the British Food Corporation that was causing the problem. Once they got rid of that combine, the whole area became very vibrant. It now has its own high school, a beautiful cultural centre and so on. It also has a huge swimming pool. Many of those facilities were built during the time of the member for Peak Downs, who is the current member for Keppel.

**Mr Littleproud:** When the member for Condamine was Minister for Education, he gave you a high school.

**Mr LESTER:** When the member for Condamine was Minister for Education, he approved the high school. I take this opportunity to thank him very much, before I get into trouble with the Deputy Speaker for getting off course.

**Mr Welford:** It sounds like a pork barrel to me.

**Mr LESTER:** It was very much needed.

**Mr Welford:** A very much needed pork barrel.

**Mr LESTER:** No, it was not a very much needed pork barrel. It was not a pork barrel at all. This proves my point about the Labor Party. Even though outside this place Mr Welford is a good friend of mine, he cannot help himself. When we are trying to help country people, he says that we are pork-barrelling. He will not let them chop down trees and he will not give them any water, and when they get a high school he says that they are being pork barrelled. That is an awful thing to say.

**Mr Welford:** Get back to the Bill.

**Mr LESTER:** I know that the Minister wants me to get back to the Bill because I am a little too good for him. As I read it, the protections are not in place at present. I do not want to see situations develop where large multinationals or corporate farmers, which have enormous resources at their disposal, buy up the majority of available properties and, therefore, all the irrigation schemes. I have just mentioned the British Food Corporation, and the same thing can happen with large irrigators. They can buy up all the land, knock out the little people and become highly mechanised. The little towns will suffer because there are not so many people about. Indeed, it will probably get to the point where the big corporations will fly people in and out. Indeed, I have been on a farm that does just that, but I will not go into that.

**Mr Purcell:** Give him a kicking if he is doing the wrong thing.

**Mr LESTER:** I thank the honourable member for that interjection. I might get him to give me a hand. I believe that in previous years he was not too bad at that. I will withdraw that comment if the member wants me to.

This is not in the interests of regional development or social justice. I hope that this Government shares my concerns and acts accordingly. I ask the Minister whether he has considered introducing such safeguard measures and, if so, what shape might they take. I believe that that is very important. The Minister might be kind enough to respond on that point in his reply.

I understand that the amendments proposed to the Bill will enable the remaking by one regulation of more than 100 instruments under section 129, which were due to expire on 1 July 1999. The amendments also provide for the consolidation of all existing instruments under section 129 without the necessity to repeat the advertisement and objection process undertaken when each instrument was made.

I have perused the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's report on this Bill, which raises a number of issues. In the main, it would appear that the committee is satisfied that this legislation does not adversely affect rights and liberties or impose obligations retrospectively. Certainly, we do not want that. That deals specifically with clause 9, proposed section 257. Retrospectivity is one of the worse things that can ever happen. The Scrutiny of Legislation Committee has referred the issue of whether the legislation has sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals under proposed section 258 to the Parliament.

The committee noted that while Part 7 of the Statutory Instruments Act established a general mechanism for the staged automatic expiry of subordinate legislation, the legislative intent underlying Part 7 is to regularly expose such subordinate legislation to the question of whether it is still needed. The committee also noted that applying that provision in this instance to such myriad regulations would be a mammoth and onerous task.

I read the Minister's response to the issues raised by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee. He pointed out that the Department of Natural Resources has already undertaken comprehensive reviews of all subordinate legislation relating to the water boards and many of the instruments will not be remade. Indeed, from his reply I understand that some 110 of a possible 500 instruments will be remade and consolidated pursuant to the amendments to the Bill that we are debating. Basically, that is necessary to continue the existence of each water board and to maintain their lawful authority to construct and operate specified works and divert water.

I wish to comment on the Burdekin South Water Board and the Burdekin North Water Board. If one takes the time to inspect those boards and meet some of the people who are associated with them, one will be quite taken with the efficiency, honesty and the lack—fortunately, so far—of

Government regulation that enables them to do as they wish, within reason. One sees from the reports of these water boards that they continue to have elections of officers every so often and if somebody is not performing, they get voted out, just as we do. I think that the system works particularly well.

**Mr Malone:** They are under a lot of stress because they are unsure of the Government's intentions.

**Mr LESTER:** When I was talking to them, they told me that they are very, very concerned that the Government is going to come in and totally regulate them. It is true; that is what they are telling me. The Minister might like to go up there and tell them that it is not going to happen.

**Mr Welford:** Regulate what?

**Mr LESTER:** Water boards—put heaps and heaps of regulations and legislation on them and take away the authority that they currently have at the current time. They are awfully worried that they just will not be able to operate the way they do at the moment. My suggestion to the Minister is to leave them as they are. They are doing a pretty good job and they are not hurting anybody. All they are doing is the right thing.

**Mr Malone:** What about increasing the charges for bulk water?

**Mr LESTER:** They have heard about that, too, and they are very, very concerned that that might happen. They tell me that the Government is going to charge us for the drains.

While it would appear that the task as envisaged by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee may not be as onerous as first thought, it would also appear that at least to some extent the task has been carried out already by DNR. Accordingly, I would like the Minister to outline the process used by his department to conduct these reviews and whether that included public consultation. Sometimes this Government is a bit short on public consultation. It has certainly been a bit short on public consultation in relation to the prison that they are going to build at Glendale.

**Mr Springborg:** And tree clearing.

**Mr LESTER:** And tree clearing and a few things like that. Accordingly, I am tending to lean towards the view that to remake these 110 instruments in accordance with the advertising and objection process that was undertaken when they were first established is unnecessary, but I would like to hear the Minister's response regarding that review process that has already been conducted. Governments, particularly this Government, have a habit of generating an enormous amount of red tape. I think the Parliament should be very wary of any more being generated. It cannot help it; it generates heaps of red tape. It just does not do things simply.

**Mr Welford:** I'm with you.

**Mr LESTER:** Thank you. It is about time the Minister woke up.

At the same time it is important that people are afforded ample consultation regarding Government decisions and activities. Sadly, since the election of the Beattie Government, all too often we have witnessed a dearth of genuine consultation with all stakeholders on issues of vital importance, such as the regional forest agreement, tree-clearing guidelines and water management and use.

**Mr Hamill:** I am not a gambler.

**Mr Springborg:** I know that; not any more.

**Mr LESTER:** Not any more! I would not talk too much about that if I were the Treasurer.

The final issue raised by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee was the shortcomings in the Minister's Explanatory Notes which accompanied the Bill. The committee highlighted that the Bill was introduced back on 21 July. However, on 25 June a regulation was made under the Statutory Instruments Act of 1992 extending the automatic expiry date of the relevant regulations to 30 June 2000 on the basis that the Water Resources Act is subject to review. Accordingly, the committee was of the view that these matters were sufficiently serious for it to recommend that the Explanatory Notes are inaccurate and they are inefficient. There appears to be little excuse for what could best be described as incompetence, and I look forward to the Minister's statement regarding the shortcomings in his reply.

**Mr Hobbs:** They must be explained.

**Mr LESTER:** Absolutely! In conclusion, believe it or not, the coalition will not be opposing the Bill. However, I do ask that the Minister address the issues that I have raised regarding the administration—

**Mr Hamill:** Which one in particular?

**Mr LESTER:** Tradeable water allocations. He should explain it all.

Time expired.