



Speech by

PETER WELLINGTON

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Hansard 6 September 2000

WATER BILL

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—IND) (3.28 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Water Bill 2000. When the Minister introduced this Bill into the House, he indicated that one of the objects of the Bill was to establish a sustainable management framework for the planning, allocation and use of water and other resources. In his second-reading speech, he spoke of the need to ensure, amongst other things, that consumers' interests were protected. Nowhere in any of the 500-odd pages of this Bill and Explanatory Notes could I find one word requiring or calling on all Queenslanders to share in the responsibility of conserving the valuable resource of water. Time and time again during debate on this Bill speakers have acknowledged the increased demand for water to support the rapidly increasing Queensland population. However, this Minister requires only the rural communities of Queensland to carry 100% of this responsibility, to carry 100% of the cost of this over-the-top legislation which takes away farmers' rights and leaves them with no right to compensation.

The Minister claims that this Bill represents only the sixth time in more than 100 years that State politicians have sat in this place to discuss in detail the future of our water. Reference has been made to parliamentary debates in 1891, 1910, 1922, 1928 and 1989. I do not believe the Minister's statement accurately reflects when members of this House have debated the important issue of water usage. Only last year, on 25 March, members debated a simple and all-inclusive program for water conservation in Queensland. That program sought to include all Queenslanders in water conservation and did not take away Queenslanders' legal rights, as this legislation does. It was about giving all Queenslanders an incentive to be involved in water conservation. The motion I moved on that occasion, which received unanimous support from all members of the Parliament, states—

"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."

During that debate, the Minister stated—

"One of the things that the proposition put up by the member for Nicklin would impact on is reticulated water, because that is the highest cost water in the State. In terms of how strategic we need to be, it is my view that we need to start where the water is most expensive, because that is where the greatest gains of this kind of investment would be captured. One would start in those areas where the cost of delivering water is the highest. One would provide incentives for people to use the untreated water that is caught in rain tanks. Lots of people in rural areas use it for everything already, including drinking, and do so in an entirely healthy way."

The Minister spoke about starting where the water was the most expensive because that was where the greatest gains of that kind of investment could be captured. In a little over 18 months the Minister has moved his focus from densely populated urban communities being involved in water conservation. Now he is placing all of the water resource responsibilities on rural Queenslanders, on Queensland farmers and on isolated Queenslanders.

The Minister's actions and this Bill, which takes away farmers' rights, speak louder than his words. The Minister had a clear mandate of support from all Queensland State politicians to introduce a rainwater tank rebate program which would have provided the opportunity to touch all Queenslanders.

He had the opportunity to include all Queenslanders in water conservation. Instead, he has introduced this over-the-top legislation.

I do not agree with the Minister's claim that this legislation reflects modern day practices. This legislation is not inclusive of all Queenslanders. There is nothing modern about taking away farmers' rights to water. There is nothing modern about taking away farmers' rights to compensation. There is nothing modern about taking away farmers' rights to appeal against adverse decisions. There is nothing modern about justifying this over-the-top legislation because some people with businesses in Queensland are simply not doing the right thing. I believe modern day practices are about drafting legislation and limiting the scope of the legislation to respond to specific problems.

The supply of electricity has similarities to the supply of water. They are both very valuable resources. By way of comparison, I invite members to look at how the Minister for Mines and Energy has responded to the ever-increasing demand for electricity. The Minister for Mines and Energy, the Honourable Tony McGrady, has a program available to all Queenslanders known as the Solar Hot Water Rebate Scheme. Under that program Queenslanders are encouraged to diversify their source of electricity to include the generation of electricity from the sun. This is an amazingly successful program. I understand that, since October 1998, 6,954 applications under the scheme have been processed and that Queensland electricity consumers who have diversified their electricity source come from both rural and urban Queensland. I believe this is an example of a Minister using the modern day practice of diversification to respond to a growing demand for energy. I am disappointed that the Minister for Environment and Heritage has not followed this lead by including all Queenslanders in water conservation strategies through incentives to install rainwater tanks.

I do not intend to go over issues that have already been covered by other members in this House. Suffice it to say that I believe this type of legislation should have been limited to high-risk water catchment areas. If the Government legislates to take away someone's right to water, the Government has an obligation to provide appropriate compensation and appropriate appeal rights. This Bill certainly does not have my full support.
