



Speech by

## **Hon. V. LESTER**

### **MEMBER FOR KEPPEL**

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Hansard 4 October 2000

#### **WATER ALLOCATION AND MANAGEMENT PLANS**

**Hon. V. P. LESTER** (Keppel—NPA) (5.59 p.m.): I move—

"That this Parliament recognises that secure water entitlements are essential to irrigators and their communities and directs the Beattie Government to develop an adjustment package, in consultation with rural industry, to assist those irrigators adversely affected by the introduction of Water Allocation and Management Plans."

In the few short weeks since the Beattie Government guillotined debate and used its one-seat majority to force its new water legislation through this Parliament, the uncertainty and the anger in catchments right around Queensland has been growing. Water users in rural and regional communities have been stunned that this Beattie Labor Government could so callously disregard their interests and their concerns.

On top of the uncertainty generated by the new Water Act and what it contains, just a couple of weeks ago the Minister issued a series of moratoriums on new developments or work on existing developments in water catchments throughout the State— moratoriums in the Barron, the Border, the Burnett, the Pioneer, the Condamine-Balonne and the Logan catchments.

These moratoriums are based on the water allocation management planning process in those catchments which, in most cases, is completely open ended and in a number of cases has already blown out well in excess of the original time lines for their completion. We know that the Minister is completely anti-development—is completely against any development of water resources. We know that the Minister has presided over the greatest freeze on new water development that this State has ever seen. These moratoriums serve only to turn the temperature down even further.

I simply say that, if the Minister were at all sincere about the new planning process and helping people to adapt to the new system with as little pain as possible, he would impose some strict time lines on these WAMPs. If the Beattie Government were even half serious about doing anything, it would direct this Minister to impose some deadlines and crank up some results out of his department. However, we know that it will not, because it is a can't do Beattie Government.

According to media reports in the past week, Queensland's leading farm organisations have simply run out of patience with this Government. They were prepared to make every effort to work with the Minister and his department to negotiate the contents of the Water Act and to negotiate the arrangements for the water resource planning process. Those organisations have even been prepared to work with the Minister to introduce new water resource planning processes. Now they have grown sick and tired of revolving consultation and getting nowhere. I simply say that, when the Minister had the opportunity to work with the farmers, he scorned it.

This motion seeks to provide some direction to the Minister in managing the water resources aspect of his portfolio. With this motion, the Opposition is seeking that the Parliament recognise the cost and uncertainty that people are experiencing with the new water resource planning process and do something positive to relieve it. The Minister himself has acknowledged that the introduction of these water allocation management plans will not necessarily be easy or painless for some communities. The Minister himself has acknowledged that it will be necessary for the Government to assist people with the adjustments that they will have to make when the WAMPs are introduced. He could not have said it any clearer in reply to one of my questions in the Estimates committee last year when he said—

"As I have done in my discussions with rural industry in relation to water resource issues and the outcome of the catchment planning and water allocation management planning process, we intend to put together a substantial industry package in consultation with industry to ensure that any adjustments under any changed guidelines that impact on the business viability of rural primary producers will be addressed. We acknowledge that a decent incentive package is required and our State will play its part."

I have quoted that statement before, and I will quote it again until such time as the Minister delivers on his commitment. At that time, rural industry and I took the Minister's statements in good faith. The Parliament has passed this legislation, yet the Government still has not delivered that incentive package—not in full, not even in part. Nothing has changed at all. The impact is going to be the same. People are going to need help.

I have heard that the Minister has made some guarded comments that he wants to now wait and see what the impact on the Condamine-Balonne will be before committing to any sort of assistance package. Why? Is the Beattie Government going to weigh up whether or not to deliver on the Minister's promise based on how much it is going to cost? It sounds suspiciously like it. If that is the case, that would be a callous and mean-spirited decision. No matter what the impact, if the Government is prepared to make changes based on what it determines to be in the best interests of the community, then the Government must surely have a responsibility to help the people affected by those changes to adjust. We have beaten the drum on this issue of compensation for lost property rights and we will continue to beat it until the Beattie Government starts listening.

Although most water users may be able to accommodate minor changes to their water allocations—of the order of around 10%—anything more than that will seriously erode their economic situation with dramatic flow-on effects for their communities. That has to be acknowledged and prevented at all costs. However, this is not just about money; this is about decency, this is about recognising the investments that people have made and recognising that a Government process is going to affect people's lives.

An adjustment or incentive package does not have to mean just setting up a pot of money. In most cases, people would rather get on with what they have been doing in running their farms and running their businesses. Such an adjustment package could also be based around measures such as improved extension services—simple things such as having commonsense public servants who know the Act and who know the issues that water users out there face and helping those people to address those issues. It has been reported to our office only this morning that there is a distinct lack of those sorts of people in the regions explaining the laws and what the new water resource planning process is about and how it is going to affect people. The Minister is all too willing to accuse the Opposition and anyone else who raises legitimate concerns about the Act of scaremongering. So why are there not people from the Department of Natural Resources out there doing their work and helping people?

This adjustment package should also include a component to address water use efficiencies to assist water users and irrigators to use the water they have more efficiently. There has been some effort directed to that endeavour, but clearly not to the extent necessary to promote a fast uptake of new technologies and measures to use the water better. The other component that any adjustment package should contain is time for the people to adjust. While it seems all very well for the Government to take its time to develop these WAMPs and impose moratoriums, it seems to expect the people most affected by these decisions to adapt to them overnight. They simply cannot do that. Along with the introduction of any WAMP, there should be a provision made to allow water users up to five years to adjust to the new arrangements, to change their water use if necessary and to restructure their businesses if necessary.

This motion is not calling for anything outlandish, it is not calling for anything unreasonable; it is simply calling on the Beattie Government to recognise the ramifications of its decision on ordinary, hardworking people who are out in the real world trying to run businesses, supporting communities and trying to contribute to the State's economy. This motion calls upon the Beattie Government to honour the commitment made by the Minister for Natural Resources. This motion is calling upon the Beattie Government to do the right and decent thing by the people and the communities who are so dependent on those water resources. I have to say that this is one occasion when I really call upon members to support this motion without amendment, and for very good reason. We are seeing so many people who have been used to doing things a certain way, who have planned their budgets that way, who have made their commitments that way—

Time expired.

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