



Speech by

CHRISTINE SCOTT

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard 7 November 2001

WATER AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT (Charters Towers—ALP) (10.33 p.m.): Moratoriums on water works are in force in a number of catchments in Queensland. The Beattie government originally introduced the moratoriums in a number of Murray-Darling Basin catchments and the Fitzroy Basin to halt further development on flood plains until the issue of water allocations could be resolved through the water resource planning process. This will allow for an accurate assessment of what water is available for future allocation, both to water users and the environment.

Under the moratoriums, exceptions were made for work that was under way or could be shown to be about to commence at the time of notice. While certain works affected by a notice may continue as started works, it was important to establish a firm cut-off date for the completion of these in order to bring development to a close and secure the intent of the moratorium. Moratoriums extend only until the water resource plan process is finalised. Secure arrangements for the future allocation and management of water in a catchment will then be specified in the plan.

The notice for the Fitzroy requires works to be completed or ceased by 12 November 2001. The Minister for Natural Resources and Mines recently extended the deadline for Murray-Darling catchments from 20 September to 20 November, because heavy rain was making it difficult for irrigators to complete works in time. This situation also highlighted the need to establish an appeals process to consider exceptional circumstances which may prevent the completion of works by the deadline.

The proposed amendments to the Water Act provide a formal and transparent process for individuals to apply for extensions of time to complete works. The amendments are proof of the Beattie government's willingness to listen and respond to irrigators' concerns. Under the amendments, a referral panel will be established to hear cases for extensions and make recommendations to the minister, and the minister's decisions will be gazetted to ensure transparency. These changes were prompted by farmer groups who acknowledge the referral panel process is a step in the right direction. Conservation groups were also consulted and agree that it is a reasonable way to deal with legitimate exceptional circumstances. The amendments are about finding a balance between the rights of certain individuals to continue construction of their works and the interests of other water users and the wider community.

Monitoring is another important component of the water resource planning process. In those areas where a water resource plan or moratorium notice has not been issued, people have the right to take overland flow water or subartesian water without the need for a licence. A further amendment to the Water Act requires people in those areas to notify the Department of Natural Resources and Mines of existing work or works under construction. This will help departmental officers to monitor how much water is being taken from certain catchments and allow them to take a more proactive approach to water planning for the future.

The Beattie government is committed to working through these crucial and complex water issues with irrigators at the same time as ensuring security of water supply for future generations and the environment. I am pleased to commend this bill to the House.
