



Speech by

**JOHN KINGSTON**

**MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH**

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Hansard 17 October 2001

### **WATER RESOURCES**

**Dr KINGSTON** (Maryborough—Ind) (6.31 p.m.): I rise to support the original motion. The member for Gympie has covered the equity shortfalls of this bill very well. I want to mention the more personal concerns of farmers in the Wide Bay district and those in the Mary River catchment in particular. They have two major concerns about SunWater's current approach to irrigation water charges. The first concerns price. Apparently, SunWater wishes to recover all supervision and distribution costs directly from irrigation farmers.

I refer the minister to a very significant and recent study by the World Bank. This study found that large dams and irrigation schemes cannot be supported by only the recipients of the water. The benefits of an irrigation scheme flow throughout the target community with a significant multiplying impact. According to the World Bank study, the costs must be borne by the wider community sharing in the benefits, both direct and indirect, that is, the whole impact zone. One has only to watch the endless march of semitrailers full of high quality horticultural products travelling from the Emerald irrigation scheme to Sydney and Melbourne to realise how wide the impact zone is.

The second concern is that the future allocations of water, at least from the Lower Mary scheme, will be auctioned. Such an auction system could lead to the purchase of allocation, which does not optimise the benefits of the available but limited water. Such a system will not necessarily consider soil types, topography, et cetera, thus it could lead to poor natural resource use.

Of wider concern is the fact that Australia is the driest continent in the inhabited world. This is not appreciated by many of the people who wish to migrate to what they think is the land of milk and honey, not a land of harsh climates. The fact that the majority of Australia is dry and subject to great climate variability has led to a prolonged discussion concerning just how many people Australia can support in a sustainable manner. The current conservative estimate is around 25 million people.

When water is the lifeblood of a country, I strongly suggest that the government should be strongly encouraging communities and farmers to build dams and storages and, consistent with the results of aggressive marketing, produce to the sustainable capacity of their country. When one looks at the intensity of land use in Holland and some Asian countries, then it is obvious that we are underutilising our resources.

To emphasise this point, I seek permission to table this document, which is the preliminary release—taking place tonight at the Institute of Engineers—of a study of the demands on the Mary River by two students at the Queensland University of Technology. The study has recorded current demands on the Mary River and calculated demands 20 years from now based on projected population growth. Projections concerning the number of people reliant on the Mary River 20 years from now range around 600,000. And those people have to be fed and watered. The conclusion at this time in this study is that demand will exceed capacity. Keep in mind that the Mary is the most reliable river in Queensland. Despite this, significant additional water conservation measures will be necessary to support the projected population and to feed them. Thus I conclude that the government should be encouraging—in fact subsidising—farmers and citizens generally to store water for their own use and to use that water for productive and responsible purposes.

There are many ways in which the use of water can be optimised, ranging from house water tanks to off-stream storage and desalination. I emphasise to the minister that we have watered 2,000 cattle by desalination in the Rockhampton area. I am confident that our population, both urban and

rural, will respond positively to this increasing need for water provided the government creates the correct legislative environment. But I am very concerned that the current restrictive environment being implemented by this government is not regarded as encouraging by water users and thus the positive response that we will so badly need will not be forthcoming. It is expensive to store water. People need encouragement and security of tenure to spend.

Time expired.

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