



Speech by

Hon. KEN HAYWARD

MEMBER FOR KALLANGUR

Hansard 7 November 2001

WATER AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. K. W. HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (9.55 p.m.): As we move into the new millennium, one of the most crucial policy areas facing governments is planning for an allocation of our scarce water resources. We just heard the shadow minister speak for an hour. He said that this amendment bill squibbed the opportunity. He had an hour in which to say something, but anybody who was in this parliament—I can see the member for Mirani yawning—would know that all he did was use empty words. He put forward nothing positive. He injected no ideas about what we are going to do about the allocation of scarce water resources. The demand for water has been created through population growth—

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order. I did not think any member could stand up in this House and mouth blatant untruths. I went to great pains in my address to point out—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McNamara): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr SEENEY:—what we could have done and the fact that we support the water reform process.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr SEENEY: I find the member's comments deeply offensive. They are quite demonstrably wrong, and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Ms Spence: Give us a break.

Mr HAYWARD: Somebody said, 'Give us a break.'

Mr SEENEY: I have found the member's comments offensive and I have asked for them to be withdrawn. In accordance with the traditions of this House, the member is obliged to withdraw those comments.

Mr HAYWARD: Just to placate the member, of course I will withdraw the comments. The fact remains that demand for water has been created through population growth, more intensive agriculture and industrial development in this state. Areas that previously were not worked are now being worked. Agriculture has become much more intensive. What did we get from the shadow minister? He said that people are disregarded. Surely he will not object to that comment, because that is what he said. However, it is not true. As I will point out, there was extensive consultation in relation to the Water Act 2000. That is what precipitated this amendment bill being brought before the parliament.

The member emphasised that his complaint was about the lack of security for water users. The purpose of the Water Act is to ensure security of water when water is a scarce, valuable resource. Nobody in this House, apart from perhaps the shadow minister, would dispute that water is a scarce, valuable resource that must be harnessed in a very judicious way. In order to keep that intensive agriculture and industrial development and to deal with population growth, we must guard those resources. As everybody except the shadow minister knows, water is a finite resource. The purpose of the original legislation and this amendment bill is to ensure security of water.

The past few years have been a landmark period for water reform in Queensland. This government's commitment to the effective and efficient management of our rivers and streams reflects a wider commitment to conserving and regulating our precious water resources. I think that everybody here would understand that we must ensure that we do that. It is essential that we judiciously look after our water resources because they are absolutely vital to maintaining the growth of the state of

Queensland. We have seen the most fundamental rewrite of the Water Act 2000—the most fundamental rewrite of water industry legislation since the early 1900s. We have seen the development of water resource plans from vital catchment areas across the state. We have seen the approval and commencement of five-year rural water price paths to enable most schemes to achieve lower bound cost recovery by 2004. We have seen the corporatisation of the state's rural water service provider.

The shadow minister said that people have been disregarded. That is simply not true. There has been extensive public consultation in relation to the Water Act about the issues of institutional reform, water resource planning and rural water pricing initiatives. That is one of the reasons why this bill is coming before the parliament tonight. The more significant amendments have arisen from talking with water users about ways to improve the operation of the original Water Act 2000.

The state moved to control the taking of overland flow where this activity was resulting in less water being available for existing users and, of course, for the environment. One of the difficulties that arose during the public consultation, as the minister said in his second reading speech, was that some people were part way through the construction at the time of the moratoriums. That was the first problem that had to be addressed, and it is addressed through this amendment bill.

There is another problem that needs to be addressed by this legislation. A small number of users sought to take advantage of this provision by continuing construction programs that were going to take up to 10 years and would use increasing amounts of water. They realised that the Water Act 2000 had come in, and because they were in the process of developing future water resource construction programs they decided to do them then. There is one issue that has been brought to my attention and to which I would be interested to hear the minister's reply. It relates to people who were part way through construction when the moratoriums were made and whether a particular water user who had entered into a contract—although nothing had occurred—would be considered to be part way through construction. From information given to me, there have been rumours that some of these contracts were backdated to take advantage of the moratoriums. That is one of the reasons why this amendment was introduced.

The Queensland government's approach to the implementation of COAG water reforms has its basis in the Water Act 2000—the first overhaul of water laws in 90 years. Prior to its implementation, some water policies and regulations reflected laws from 1910. We all know how our society has changed in Queensland since 1910. We all know that agriculture is much more intensive now than it was in 1910. We all know that industrial development and intensive agriculture have occurred on a scale never envisaged in 1910. We also know about the population growth that has occurred in this state since 1910.

When the original act was put in place in 1910 there was little competition for water and little impact on the environment. To some extent, not only was there little impact on the environment but the impact on the environment would not have been clearly understood anyway. There was no way that at that particular time any effort would have been made to measure water flows. Those laws failed to reflect the issues facing the water industry in the 21st century because of the industrial and agricultural development and the population growth that has occurred. There was no explicit requirement to ensure sufficient water was available for the health of watercourses, and water allocations were able to be granted to the point where there was insufficient water to satisfy the needs of existing licensees. I ask members to think about the madness of continuing to allocate licences without thinking about whether or not people would be able to get any water through having those licences.

The Water Act provides, for the first time in Queensland's history, the principle of sustainable management of water. It ensures for the first time that that principle of sustainable management of water has been enshrined in legislation. Finally, we have a modern water law that is aimed at improving the security of supply for future users. As I said at the beginning of my speech, one of the complaints expressed by the shadow minister was about the lack of security. The purpose of the original bill and the purpose of this amendment bill are to ensure that people do have security of water so that they can know with some certainty that the water allocation is available to them. It ensures that future water development is sustainable. And of course it protects the health of our rivers and our water catchments. The legislation provides for both environmental sustainability and the needs of a wide range of community and water industry participants. That was a result of the extensive consultation that occurred with regard to the original Water Act 2000.

Queensland, of course, has the opportunity to put irrigators on a sustainable footing and avoid the massive costs of repairing degraded rivers. I take this opportunity to congratulate the minister on his announcement last week that the government will contribute \$150,000 towards a major land and water resources study for the catchments in the Nebo-Broadsound area. The Fitzroy water resource plan has identified 300,000 megalitres of water available for allocation from the Nebo, Connors, Isaac and Lower Fitzroy catchment areas. That study will investigate future opportunities for sustainable development in the area using this potential water resource. As I said, the emphasis in this case is on the sustainable use of water.

The shadow minister—dare I say—would say in this parliament that he is an advocate of public consultation. Public consultation is the reason for this amendment bill. He used the example of SunWater. I am not sure of the significance of the example he used, but I think he was talking about an interest charge on late payments of invoices for water use, and he bemoaned the allegation that that occurred. I have learnt enough in this place to know that lots of things get said, but whether or not they are true is sometimes open to question. Assuming what the shadow minister said was correct, what is he suggesting should happen? Is he suggesting that when people do not pay their invoices, we do what most companies in this world do and just turn off supply? Is that what the shadow minister is advocating? Because people do not pay, we just turn off the tap and they do not get any more water? Surely, the shadow minister is not proposing something such as that?

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order. I can assure the member that I am not proposing something such as that. I am proposing only that SunWater adopt a reasonably fair approach and charge interest from when the payment is due.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McNamara): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr HAYWARD: The point is that the shadow minister made some charge against SunWater concerning interest payments on invoices. He should have had an alternative suggestion and, obviously, that alternative suggestion would be what would happen in a normal commercial environment: supply would be cut off. The worst result would be that the water supply would be cut off, like any other company would do in a commercial environment. That has not happened, and that does not happen because of the extensive public consultation that has been carried out.

I spoke about the Fitzroy water resource plan and the other studies that had been put in place in the Nebo-Broadsound area. Those studies will provide a comprehensive assessment of available natural resources. They will take into consideration environmental issues and provide a platform for planning future development. As I said, when it comes to water use, those issues are so important. That is clear proof that the Beattie government is committed to sound planning that provides a balance between the ecological, the social and the economic values of Queensland's catchments.

Since the commencement of water resource planning processes, there has been extensive consultation. That is why we are debating this Water Amendment Bill, which relates to water allocation management issues in all catchments, and in the past year draft plans have been released for public comment. Queensland does not intend to pay for the overallocation mistakes of the other states of Australia by holding back from a reasonably sustainable level of water development in the catchments.

In conclusion, we are debating the Water Amendment Bill. I think that, with the process of public consultation that is occurring—and I am sure that the shadow minister would agree with me on this one; he will not need to call on Mr Deputy Speaker—this will not be the last amendment bill to come before this parliament. One does not have to be Nostradamus to know that. As that consultation process continues, as issues come forward, I am certain that that will occur. This government is about making improvements where they are needed. Those improvements are to ensure that people in Queensland have security of water supply. That is the purpose of this amendment legislation. I think that this is an ongoing process and will continue into the future, particularly as agriculture becomes more intensive, as the population continues to grow and as industrial development continues to occur in the state of Queensland. I commend the Water Amendment Bill to the House.
