



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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NEW SOUTH WALES-QUEENSLAND BORDER RIVERS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr STRONG (Burnett—ALP) (5.08 p.m.): In the early 1990s, governments throughout Australia recognised that there was a need to find a smarter, more responsible and more transparent way of sharing water fairly. In 1993, the Council of Australian Governments reviewed water resource policy in Australia and agreed to implement a strategic framework to achieve an efficient and sustainable water industry. One of the major components of this framework was the introduction of comprehensive systems of water allocations, including the determination of clearly specified water entitlements, the provision of water for the environment and water trading arrangements.

This and other COAG water resource policies are incorporated in Queensland's Water Act 2000. The act provides for efficient and effective management of our precious water resources and the needs of a wide range of water industry participants, including private sector participants. It provides a framework for water allocation that includes provisions for the environment and protection of current entitlement holders, management planning of water as a resource, water entitlement trading, public and private sector involvement in development and operation of water infrastructure, regulation of water services applying to all service providers, corporate governance of public sector water service providers, and water supply planning and development to achieve an efficient and sustainable water industry.

Queensland's water reform policy is designed to maximise the benefits from existing infrastructure while ensuring that future resource use and development occurs in a manner consistent with the principles and actions of the COAG framework. Problems like salinity and environmental degradation from overuse of water are not yet as severe in Queensland as they are in other states. However, there is already stark evidence that a number of river systems across the state have limited or no capacity to provide further allocations of water over and above the level of current use.

As our population and industries continue to expand, there is more and more demand for water. Consequently, water allocation decisions have become more complex and the community is demanding a smarter, more responsible and more transparent way of sharing water fairly. Water users are seeking greater certainty regarding the security of their entitlements. That is what this government is delivering. The challenge in delivering the Water Act has been to develop modern water law aimed at improving the security of supply for users, ensuring that future water developments are sustainable and protecting the health of our rivers and catchments.

It is crucial to industry and the environment that we manage existing water resources to maximise the value of production from each drop. Quite apart from Queensland's commitments under COAG, water reform will provide a framework for achieving an economically efficient and sustainable Queensland water industry.

The Queensland government has commenced the difficult but essential task of defining water resource allocations to users within key catchments. Our task is to find a balance between supporting existing uses and investment at the same time as preserving the natural environment, water quality and ecosystems that sustain the community. We need to do this by defining sustainable extraction limits from catchments. Of course, some development is necessary to ensure the viability of regional economies, but development cannot occur to a degree where our streams become little more than drains and where water quality is unfit to sustain local communities and ecosystems.

Preserving and maintaining our water resource and ensuring the sustainability of the communities that rely on them underpins the crucial water reform process occurring in Queensland and elsewhere. Rivers and streams do not respect state boundaries. We need to develop with other states cooperative agreements such as the New South Wales-Queensland border rivers legislation if we are to ensure their effective management. I commend this bill to the House.
