



Speech by

## CHRISTINE SCOTT

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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Hansard 3 December 2002

### PLUMBING AND DRAINAGE BILL

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT** (Charters Towers—ALP) (11.23 p.m.): It is a pleasure to rise tonight to speak on the Plumbing and Drainage Bill 2002. The Plumbing and Drainage Bill provides for a range of matters, one of which is controls over smaller on-site sewerage facilities. This is a matter that was dealt with under the Sewerage and Water Supply Act 1949, but the bill updates the processes for approvals and provides for improvements to the process for review of government decisions. The controls in the bill only apply to small sewage treatment plants with a peak design capacity to treat sewage of less than 21 equivalent persons. Such systems are typically used for single domestic dwellings, small commercial premises and small residential complexes. They are generally located in areas that cannot be served by normal sewerage system infrastructure, that is, they are not normally located in sewered areas. Often, part of the land surrounding the facility is used for the disposal of the treated effluent.

The largest sewage treatment facilities that are designed with the capacity to treat sewage of 21 or more equivalent persons are considered to be an environmentally relevant activity and are controlled under the Environmental Protection Act 1994. The Plumbing and Drainage Bill therefore provides in the one place for the controls over the smaller sewage treatment facilities as well as controls over the plumbing and drainage works that connect these facilities to premises such as the house served by the facility.

The bill continues the situation that applies under the current Sewerage and Water Supply Act and its subordinate legislation where the Department of Natural Resources and Mines gives generic approvals of on-site sewage treatment plants for use in Queensland including the materials and prefabricated parts of these facilities. This department will also set the performance based technical standards for the installation of facilities.

Under the bill, local governments will continue to inspect and approve the installation of on-site treatment facilities and the maintenance of the facilities. This is on the basis that local governments are better placed to take into account site specific issues for individual installations. Local governments can therefore ensure that an on-site sewerage facility once installed does not have an adverse effect on human health and safety or the environment. Local governments will also inspect and approve the plumbing and drainage works connecting the treatment facilities to premises.

The bill clearly sets out the responsibilities of owners in relation to on-site facilities after they have been installed. It also provides for the responsibilities of persons who service on-site facilities and for those persons to have the relevant licence issued by the Plumbers and Drainers Board. Facilities must be serviced and maintained in accordance with relevant approvals given by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and the local government, and they must be kept in good working order.

Local governments will have powers under the bill to issue notices requiring on-site facilities to be installed, repaired and removed in appropriate circumstances to protect both public health and safety and the environment. Under the Sewerage and Water Supply Act there has been a right of appeal to the Magistrates Court. There have been only a small number of appeals instituted in relation to on-site sewerage facilities in the past few years. However, the bill provides for an improved process to contest decisions made by the department in respect of generic approvals or specifications and materials for on-site facilities.

A further change is that appeals will be heard by the Building and Development Tribunal established under the Integrated Planning Act 1997. This is a specialist tribunal where technical experts hear appeals about technical matters. This will provide for better quality decisions and is a speedy and inexpensive review mechanism for the public to access.

In summary, the bill retains the content matter of the Sewerage and Water Supply Act and its subordinate legislation in respect of controls over on-site sewerage facilities. However, it provides for an updated and more modern legislative framework for the approval and ongoing management of on-site sewerage facilities. I commend the bill to the House.