



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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SUNWATER

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (10.48 p.m.): Attempts today in the parliament by the minister responsible for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines to defend SunWater's move to lease three floors of Brisbane's newest and most prestigious office accommodation have served only to prove the case being argued by Queensland irrigators that their water charges are unfair. Queensland irrigators and other water users such as local governments have long been arguing that SunWater's attempts to justify its demands for massive water price increases have used very creative cost accounting methods. SunWater will now pay \$350 per square metre for its accommodation in its new luxurious high-rise offices when the government's own publication tabled in the House today points out that the average CBD office rental rate is \$149 per square metre. Every member of the House got a copy of that.

SunWater will be paying \$350 per square metre, when the average is \$149 per square metre. On the figures the minister used to try to justify this, it is apparent that SunWater has been paying more than that—something like \$360 per square metre—for the rent of a very average office building, Mineral House, in the lower end of George Street. This is the hidden tax that is being used to justify the high prices that Queensland water users must pay. Every dollar of that money has to come from Queensland water users. Now the shareholding minister has supported SunWater's creative accounting methods and has tried to turn this absurd waste of \$1 million a year of irrigators' money into some sort of cost saving.

Why does SunWater need to have office accommodation that costs twice the average of the Brisbane CBD? Why does it need to lease offices in the Brisbane CBD at all? It could have just as easily discharged its functions from a suburban location or from a regional location that would cost but a fraction of that, and free up that \$1 million a year either to give Queensland water users some much-needed rate relief in terms of their water charges or allow for some much-needed capital investment in Queensland's water infrastructure. Instead, the minister defends SunWater's decision to squander \$1 million a year on leasing three floors of Brisbane's most prestigious new office building.

These are the same creative accounting methods that SunWater has been using to try to justify its harsh water price increases across the board. The facts are that SunWater is moving from a very ordinary government owned building at the lower end of George Street to occupy three full floors of Brisbane's newest and most prestigious office tower in the heart of the CBD. SunWater will be paying \$1 million a year to the building's private owners, and that \$1 million will be squeezed from Queensland irrigators. That compares with its existing accommodation at the government owned Mineral House, where the government sets the rent. It could have set the rent at any figure it liked. It could have charged a nominal rent. The rent could have been zero had the government wanted to assist Queensland water users.
