



Speech by

**JEFF SEENEY**

**MEMBER FOR CALLIDE**

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**PLUMBING AND DRAINAGE BILL**

**Mr SEENEY** (Callide—NPA) (10.10 p.m.): I rise to make a contribution to the Plumbing and Drainage Bill 2002. In so doing, I certainly echo the sentiments that were expressed by the shadow minister, the member for Warrego, in lending support to this bill.

I would also like to give some guarded support to the comments that were made about private certifiers. Although I recognise that there certainly can be some issues involved with private certifiers, I think that they are necessary, especially in the more remote parts of the state, such as the area that I represent, where the alternative is just too hard to find. So there are two sides to the argument about private certifiers. I think that the issues that were raised by the member for Nicklin and the member for Bulimba are certainly valid to some extent, but there is another side to the issue as well. It is a very different issue in small communities from that which exists in the larger centres such as the one that is represented by the member for Bulimba. I know that he is certainly sufficiently aware to appreciate that there is a significant difference in issues according to the part of the state people live in.

**Mr Purcell:** Can I make an interjection?

**Mr SEENEY:** I always take interjections from the member for Bulimba. I enjoy taking interjections from him.

**Mr Purcell:** The shires and the councils would increase employment in those areas if they employed the people.

**Mr SEENEY:** That is true, but unfortunately there is not enough work to keep one person employed full time. It just does not work. We cannot expect a council to keep on paying a certifier full time with the amount of work that is involved. Councils can address that in a number of ways. Certainly, the private certifiers can provide a valuable service if there is sufficient auditing and controls kept on their activities. I take the point that the member for Bulimba raised, but it is something that needs to be considered and every effort made to address those concerns.

**Mrs Carryn Sullivan:** An area near and dear to your heart.

**Mr SEENEY:** It is an issue. I am just making the point that it is an issue that is different in different areas.

This bill deals with plumbing and drainage regulations. I do not intend to repeat the summation of the bill that was made quite adequately by the member for Warrego, the shadow minister. However, I would like to remind members that at present the problem for many communities throughout Queensland, especially for a lot of the communities that I represent, is accessing water in the first place rather than draining it away. There really is a looming problem in a lot of communities and that, unfortunately, has the potential to become quite extreme. A lot of communities that I represent are finding that their urban water supplies are very close to being exhausted. Some of those communities are in a very precarious situation. It is simply a fact that, given the long drought that we have and the absence of run-off rainfall events, for the first time that I can remember—to this extent at least—communities right across Queensland are going to face the problem of accessing water for basic domestic purposes.

Places such as Monto have less than a metre of water left in the bore that supplies the town. Already towns have had to cart water. I know the minister is aware that Blackbutt is one such town. Biloela has quite horrendous restrictions on the use of water. Once again, Biloela is located in my electorate. I hope that the government is making some effort to plan for the unfortunate event if we get

to February or March next year and we do not have that rainfall event to provide a replenishment of those urban water supplies.

There needs to be contingency plans put in place now. I say that to the minister quite sincerely. As the Minister for Local Government, I think that she needs to take a leadership role in ensuring that the government puts in place some contingency plans to ensure that a whole range of communities are able to respond adequately to the situation if it continues to develop. Unfortunately, the outlook is not particularly good and the chances of it happening are certainly of a magnitude to warrant some contingency plans being put in place. I would be interested to hear the minister take the opportunity in this debate to advise the House as to what her department is doing in terms of contingency plans for these communities that are facing a very difficult time if we have a repetition of the last couple of so-called wet seasons and we do not have a rainfall event that produces run-off water to recharge the source of those urban supplies.

As the member for Bulimba and so many other members have said in this House over and over again, water is certainly a major issue for people throughout the state. It is becoming increasingly scarce and increasingly valuable. I think that there has to be a major change in mind-set about the way in which we use water.

**Mr Purcell:** Hear, hear!

**Mr SEENEY:** The member for Bulimba says 'Hear, hear!' I think that we have to do a lot more than just give vocal support. We really need to change the way in which we think about the whole water cycle. Traditionally, the plumbing and drainage part was considered to be the end of the cycle. By the time the plumbers get to it and the drainage systems drain the water away, it is seen to be the end of the cycle. I believe that that cannot be allowed to continue. This situation has developed because, in the past, there was an oversupply of a resource that did not have a lot of value as there was plenty of it in urban areas.

The whole water treatment system was designed to treat large amounts of water, for that water to be used once and then disposed of. I have heard that of the water that is treated in Queensland's urban treatment plants, something like five per cent actually comes in contact with a human person, such as being used for washing or drinking. I know that that figure varies in some places, but overall a big percentage of the water—which is treated at considerable cost to local governments and, therefore, at considerable cost to ratepayers—is used for things such as flushing toilets, watering gardens and washing leaves off driveways—that type of thing. That puts a burden on the drainage system and on the plumbing system to deliver the water in the first place and on the obvious cost of the treatment.

The development of a drainage system that separates what we have come to term grey water and makes it accessible for that range of activities currently carried out with treated water is not just overdue but inevitable. It will take something of a mind-set change. It will mean a complete change in the way that individual houses are designed. To make it successful, it will mean a complete change in the way that entire drainage systems are designed on a whole-of-community basis. We really need to start to get our heads around that. We really need to start to think about how we will pay for and put in place the infrastructure to allow that sort of drainage system to effectively make it possible to recycle a big percentage of that water that is currently treated and used in a way that really does not justify the cost of the treatment and then disposed of.

It costs us as a community large amounts of money, firstly, to store and produce; secondly, to treat and deliver; and, thirdly, to drain away and dispose of. As a community we really need to change our mind-set. I think that sort of mind-set change has occurred in other areas in the community generally in terms of recycling other commodities. All of us now are familiar and comfortable with the idea of recycling plastic bottles, glass, rubber tyres, oil and all of those things, but the next big mind-set change—

**Mr Reeves** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** Plastic bags for sure. I appreciate that they are very difficult to recycle. If the member thinks back over the last 10 or 15 years, there has been a mind-set change right throughout the community in terms of recycling a range of commodities. That is the type of mind-set change we must now apply to the issue of recycling water. To make it possible, we need a drainage system focused on recycling rather than discharging water that has been used once or used only very marginally and then discharged.

The greatest example of that is the project talked about a lot in this parliament—and so it should be—the City to Soil project, the project that involves using the huge amounts of grey water produced in a city like Brisbane for agricultural purposes in the Lockyer Valley or even hopefully on the Darling Downs at Toowoomba. There we have a great example of where a drainage system is designed to take water from the Brisbane urban area and deliver it to Moreton Bay. We really need somehow to turn around that whole drainage system, because had we the mind-set to recycle water 100 or 150 years ago when the city was designed, the drainage system would have been designed completely differently; in fact, it would have been the complete reverse of what it is now. That, if you like,

encompasses our difficulty. It is a lot easier to recycle glass, plastic, paper and cardboard even though we have had to redesign a lot of systems to make that possible. It would not have been that many years ago when the idea of having two rubbish bins with different coloured lids—

**Mr Cummins:** Three bins on the Sunshine Coast.

**Mr SEENEY:** That's right. It would not have been that long ago when that sort of concept would have been very difficult for people to accept. Back in the days when we all just had a little round rubbish bin—

**Mr Cummins** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** I think that is good. It will be the same with recycling water. It will take a forward-thinking community to put in place the infrastructure needed.

**Mr Reeves** interjected.

**Mr SEENEY:** Absolutely. That is the problem. It is a lot easier to introduce a change in the rubbish bin type arrangement than it is to turn around the drainage system of a city. Of course it will be a lot more difficult. As I said, the City to Soil project is probably the biggest example. The same philosophy can be applied, though, to individual households. If we look at the drainage system that is an accepted part of our mind-set for individual households, it is designed exactly the same as the drainage system for a huge metropolitan city like Brisbane. It is designed to take away the water used once, or hardly at all in many instances, and discharge it. It stems from a mind-set that once we use the water we throw it away. It is a lot easier to turn it around in an individual household situation. It is probably something that I think that individual householders who take responsibility for their own services are leading the field in, because in urban areas where we have sewerage systems that are the single dwelling systems—and I note, Minister, that this legislation does deal with clarifying some regulations about those single dwelling systems—the potential to recycle and reuse that grey water is probably realised a lot more by householders than it is in the big urban areas.

The people leading in this field are the people who have bought into the semi-urban developments in my electorate, the real residential type blocks where people buy five acres or 10 acres and water supply is always a problem because they have to rely on house water tanks, unless they are lucky to get a bore on their five acres. They are not in a situation where the local council will provide them with a water scheme, so water supplies are always a problem for them. As the member said, they are leading the way in developing systems that allow them to use the grey water that they themselves produce. In that sort of isolated single house system there are some great developments in terms of simple technology that allows that to happen.

This is an important subject and it is something that really will require some changes. This legislation also makes some amendments to the Water Act. Part 15 of the legislation sets out the amendments to the Water Act. I did intend to go through them, but I have spoken at length about recycling water. Suffice it to say, those amendments to the Water Act do not contain any controversial issues that I can see. Obviously, the Water Act comes within the field of responsibility of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. Some of these amendments transfer responsibility to the minister or the chief executive of that department. All of them, as I said, do not particularly present any problems that I can foresee in terms of the transfer of those responsibilities.

There is one section, though, that I wanted to make some comments on, section 956F. Section 956F refers to the interference with the path of stormwater. This section prohibits a person from restricting or redirecting stormwater flow across land where this may cause the water to collect and become stagnant. However, according to the explanatory notes, the section permits a person to collect stormwater in dams, wetlands, tanks and ponds provided no offensive material is allowed to accumulate.

This whole area of interfering with water flow and impounding water or causing a problem by interfering with the flow of water causes a large amount of problems for local authorities right throughout the state. Those problems are no less severe when the amount of water impounded is small. It causes huge conflicts between neighbours, as I am sure the minister knows from her days in local governments, whether it is on urban blocks when someone builds a garden bed on the top side or on agricultural land when someone builds a levee bank across a flat which floods their neighbour or does not let the water run down to their neighbour, in some cases.

My concern is that there needs to be a coordinated approach to this problem across a range of departments and legislation that deals with it. I would be interested to hear the minister's comments about the coordination in this case before this legislation was drafted with the Department of Natural Resources and the minister's colleague. This is an issue that has to be dealt with in the same way by a number of departments. The angst and conflict between neighbours is just as great in a local government situation over a garden bed as it is with a levee bank. I commend the bill to the House.

Time expired.