



Speech by

**Mr L. SPRINGBORG**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

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Hansard 30 April 2003

**WATER AMENDMENT REGULATION [NO. 1] 2003**

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.40 p.m.): I rise to second the motion of disallowance moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I well and truly recollect the day in my electorate when the government announced it was going to introduce these new charges. The new charges were to amount to a \$50 annual licence fee whereas at the moment the licence fee is a one-off, and also a \$3 per megalitre water harvesting fee. I remember that because it came in the middle of one of the worst droughts in history in my area. At a time when people were seeing their bores drop, when they had very little water whatsoever and were being charged as a percentage of their nominal allocation for the water which they were not able to pump as a part of their irrigation licence, the government imposed these new fees. They were wrong and they came in without any solid justification whatsoever.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has pointed out many of the reasons why these fees are inequitable and how they are not linked in any way whatsoever to a reasonable regulatory regime. In building a case the government has contended that this is necessary to ensure proper regulation of what is a finite resource in this state. That is what it has claimed out there.

If we look at what work is actually done by the department vis-a-vis what it actually collects, we see there is no relationship whatsoever. The reason these fees have come in is that the government is broke. As the honourable member for Callide and the shadow minister pointed out, there is a get even aspect in this as well, that is, get even with the people out there who have invested, in many cases, tens of millions of dollars in infrastructure and equipment to develop an enterprise that, in many cases, not only sustains their family but dozens of families and also some communities. For example, the member mentioned Cubbie Station.

The government has been doing that in respect of many issues. Earlier tonight we debated another schedule of fees this government has brought in which were unjustified. We have also seen the government's introduction of late registration fees, such as a \$40 late registration fee for motor vehicles. There are many examples in Queensland. This is another one. This is because the government is desperate to raise revenue and is doing so at all costs.

The Deputy Leader highlighted the situation with respect to bores in particular. How many honourable members in this place know what goes on when a bore is sunk and what work is put into licensing and regulation? There may be a greater degree of monitoring or regulation in an area where underground water is taken for irrigation purposes. But this does not only apply to that, it applies to any bore licence, for example, a stock and domestic bore licence. Many people in western Queensland and in my area have bore licences. Quite frankly, the government and the department hardly even know they exist. They have not taken any notice of them whatsoever from the moment the bore was sunk and the bore log was lodged, be it 10, 15, 20 or 30 years ago. They might have been databased in the modern context, but that is all they have really done with them. There is no monitoring of the majority of those bores. As I said to somebody not so very long ago, when asking for a copy of a bore log we basically have to take a can of Mortein to get rid of the spiders; they are covered in cobwebs because it has been that long since anyone has seen them.

Nothing that the department does can justify charging \$50 per annum for that process. Once the bore log has been put in and a licence has been granted the department never goes near them again. They are not pouring over them every day of the week. They are not analysing all of the data. In

the majority of cases there are no test bores and no monitoring. There might be some monitoring in areas of intensive irrigated agriculture where they have some test bores, but the majority are not monitored. They are all being put in together. All of the licences, whether they are bore licences or otherwise, will now incur a \$50 per annum charge. As I understand it, the new licence fee will be for five years. It will be \$250. But people can then write back and ask for the fee to be charged on an annual basis.

**Mr Horan:** On every licence, even if you're not using a bore. Disused bores have still got a licence on them. You pay for every bore on the place. It will rake in millions.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** As the member for Toowoomba South has said, there are so many bores that have hardly been used. They are sitting out there and have not been equipped. The windmill might not have worked for some time. They are just sitting out there. Because a bore log was put in, a licence was granted. They might be used one day. \$50 per annum for that process!

The other important thing was that there was not any consultation with industry. This government always says how much it consults. It puts its hand on its heart, wrings its hands and says that it consults with and cares for people.

**A government member:** We do.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Why did it not consult? It did not consult with industry in any way whatsoever. This was a unilateral, arbitrary decision of this government imposed overnight at the worst possible time with no real consideration of what it was doing and bearing no relationship to any proper regulation or monitoring that could have been justified by any form of licensing fee. That is what the government has done. Is it any wonder that industry was stirred up?

The Scrutiny of Legislation Committee of this parliament has worked very well under successive governments since its establishment. Both the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee have pointed out that they believe this is a new fee, not just an enhancement of an existing fee. It is also sceptical of why the regulatory impact statement was not abided by or why that process was not followed. We do need and we should have a regulatory impact statement when there is a charge or an annual fee of this nature. I have spoken to people out there who are going to be hit eight, 10 or even more times per annum with these fees—50 times 10 or even more. That is the sort of thing—

**Mr Malone:** By five years.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Yes, in the first instance by five years on top of that. \$50 by five years by, say, 10 bores on top of that. That is the sort of situation we are dealing with. Does the minister really care? Is he at all open to any sort of persuasion? No, he does not appear to be. He could have at least gone out and consulted.

**Mr Horan:** What else gets charged in advance in this state? Why suddenly do they hit these people in advance for five years?

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** As the member for Toowoomba South asks, how many other things are charged in advance like that in this state? Five times 50! The member for Toowoomba South has pointed out a very significant aspect.

That is what we are dealing with. These fees could not have come at a worse time. Quite clearly, in relation to these fees, the government should go back to the drawing board, because they are wrong, they are unjust, and they do not add anything whatsoever to the proper regulation of many of the areas where the government has imposed these fees. The government has imposed them right across-the-board regardless of the size, regardless of the extent of any regulation or monitoring. There is a \$50 per annum fee payable up front five years in advance. The same situation applies to the \$3 per megalitre charge. These fees will reap in an enormous amount of money for this government. All I can say is that they should be opposed, and opposed very strongly in this parliament, because they cannot be justified. This takes away from a process that, by and large, has been fair and has worked well to date. They have been imposed without any consultation or any proper consideration.