



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard 22 April 2004

WASTE WATER RECYCLING, LOCKYER-DARLING DOWNS

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6.12 p.m.): I have often spoken in this parliament about the proposal to take recycled water from Brisbane to the Lockyer and the Darling Downs. I am pleased that the Minister for Primary Industries and the Environment Minister are here tonight. This week the matter was brought up in the parliament, and the Minister for the Environment carried on about other projects. They are good projects. The government is looking at the issue for the Lockyer Valley, the Bremer and the Warrill and the Wetalla project in Toowoomba. They are very small projects compared with the recycled water project. Once again, I want to run through the history and what should happen with this issue of recycled water.

Approximately 120,000 megalitres of waste water in Brisbane is pumped into the Brisbane River and Moreton Bay. It is high in nitrogen and phosphorus so it promotes blue-green algae, which is an environmental problem in Moreton Bay. Under the COAG arrangements the Brisbane City Council will have to face up to an upgrade of the sewerage systems and the effluent disposal into Moreton Bay and the Brisbane River. It makes sense when they have to go to that expense to put it to good use so that the water goes west instead of being wasted and thrown away into the Brisbane River and into Moreton Bay. That is 120,000 megalitres over and above what the council currently sells to industrial users.

The people behind this proposal are sensible, practical people—irrigation farmers and other people—who are prepared to put their hands in their own pockets and make a major contribution to this project. The concept would be that we take about 40,000 megalitres into the Lockyer and about 80,000 megalitres into the Darling Downs. The immediate benefit of this is somewhere in the order of \$200 million in farm gate sales, which extrapolates to about a \$400 million to \$600 million economic benefit to the Lockyer and the Darling Downs. Imagine what that means in jobs, small business, transport, export and opportunities for young people. All of that money goes back into the community and we are doing something good for the environment at both ends of the pipeline.

The current Minister for State Development, the previous Minister for State Development and Mr Beattie have said that \$1 million per farmer would be too big a subsidy for the taxpayers to carry. The people involved are putting forward a revised plan now. It is backed by good, practical and sensible people and engineers. They are prepared to put in a major contribution themselves into the project. I believe it is in the order of \$80 million to \$100 million. They want some federal government assistance and some state government assistance. Private enterprise is also prepared to put into the project. On top of that they are prepared to pay the costs of pumping the water and the maintenance and repairs of the scheme.

It is not as though they are asking for a lot. It is not going to be for the farmers—the 300 or more on the downs who have signed up to take 500 megalitres a year or more. They have to put the infrastructure on their own places. They will pay a major contribution to the pipeline. On top of that, everybody benefits right throughout south-east Queensland from the environment, to the people who will get jobs and to the people in the Lockyer and the Darling Downs who benefit.