



Speech by

**Hon. ANNA BLIGH**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE**

Hansard Thursday, 30 November 2006

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## **SOUTH-EAST QUEENSLAND WATER RECYCLING PLEBISCITE BILL**

### **Second Reading**

**Hon. AM BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure) (11.32 am): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the South-east Queensland Water Recycling Plebiscite Bill 2006. This bill effects the Beattie government's commitment to seek the views of the people of south-east Queensland on the use of purified recycled water, which meets all health and safety standards, by mixing it with the region's existing water supplies.

Special legislation is required to give effect to this commitment because the state does not currently have the power to hold a plebiscite, with compulsory voting, in only one part of Queensland. Under the Referendums Act 1999, the state only has the capacity to hold statewide referenda.

This bill proposes a framework for conducting a plebiscite on whether the people of south-east Queensland support the use of recycled water for drinking that meets all health and safety standards. Importantly, the bill does not specify the question to be put at the plebiscite. Rather, it establishes the process by which the Electoral Commission of Queensland can conduct the plebiscite and provides for the question itself to be determined by resolution of this House. It is the government's intention to put a resolution on the question to the House in the first sitting week of 2007. This is important because the question needs to be worded carefully to ensure that it does not unduly favour one side of the debate or the other. At this stage, however, it is important to ensure that a mechanism exists by which a plebiscite on water recycling in south-east Queensland can be held.

There is strong community awareness of the importance of water issues in south-east Queensland. The commendable response of the region's residents to the continuing severe drought is testament to this fact. In the face of this drought, and with the increasing understanding of the impacts of climate change, many members of the community are increasingly interested in the steps the government is taking to ensure the region's long-term supply security and about what additional water supply options may exist. The use of recycled water is one such element. The Queensland government has committed to seeking the views of the south-east Queensland community on indirect potable reuse.

It is important for me to be clear that this plebiscite is not about the emergency use of recycled water. In emergency circumstances, governments must make emergency decisions, and this government will not resile from its responsibility in that regard. This plebiscite is about the use of recycled water as part of our ongoing water supply, in good times and in bad.

I now turn to the detail of the bill. The bill provides for the Electoral Commission of Queensland to conduct a plebiscite on Saturday, 17 March 2007. This includes advertising the polling day and the enrolment cut-off day, arranging returning officers and generally making arrangements for the conduct of the plebiscite. This will ensure the process is administered appropriately, in line with elections and referenda. The date of the plebiscite is to be published by gazette notice, which must also state the cut-off day for the electoral roll for the plebiscite.

As I have already identified, the bill allows for the plebiscite question to be set by a resolution of the Legislative Assembly. It outlines what the question is to be about—that is, whether relevant electors support the use of purified recycled water for drinking that meets all health and safety requirements.

The bill defines the area to be included in the south-east Queensland plebiscite by reference to schedule 1. This schedule lists the 19 local government areas that are included. They are: Beaudesert Shire Council, Boonah Shire Council, Brisbane City Council, Caboolture Shire Council, Caloundra City Council, Cooloola Shire Council, Esk Shire Council, Gatton Shire Council, Gold Coast City Council, Ipswich City Council, Kilcoy Shire Council, Laidley Shire Council, Logan City Council, Maroochy Shire Council, Noosa Shire Council, Pine Rivers Shire Council, Redcliffe City Council, Redland Shire Council and Toowoomba City Council. The bill also allows for the addition of local government areas by way of a gazette notice up to seven days prior to the cut-off day for the electoral roll for the plebiscite.

The bill will specify that the Queensland Water Commission can provide information about the plebiscite question, indirect potable reuse and other relevant issues, including material in support of the proposition and against the proposition. Given the contentious nature of the issues involved in such a debate, it is important that members of the community have access to a reliable source of factual information. The Queensland Water Commission is best placed to provide this expert advice.

The plebiscite will be determined by a 50 per cent plus one majority of voters across the region. However, as per a referendum, the result will not be legally binding on any present or future parliament or government.

I have no doubt that this will be a much debated issue in the community. This bill provides a comprehensive and fair mechanism to bring focus to that debate and to obtain a clear expression of the will of the people. I commend the bill to the House.