



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Tuesday, 9 May 2006

WATER AMENDMENT BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (4.39 pm): In rising to speak to this legislation, I note that my colleague the member for Callide has outlined particularly well a number of concerns we have in regard to poor planning of water infrastructure in the state and a number of proposed amendments that we will be seeking to make to this legislation.

First of all, I would like to put on the record some of the concerns that have been raised by the Maroochy Shire Council. I think these concerns have been reflected in other councils as well. Maroochy Shire Council passed the following resolution on 26 April—

1. Council strenuously objects to any SEQ drought contingency project to release water from the Sunshine Coast to the Brisbane/Wivenhoe sub-region because it potentially compromises the security of water supplies for the Sunshine Coast and it devalues the effective long term water planning that the Sunshine Coast Councils have achieved over several decades:
Specifically:
 - a. Council objects to any State Government proposal to introduce water restrictions on the Sunshine Coast to free-up water to redress the obvious water planning deficiencies in the southern part of the region; and,
 - b. Council objects to any State Government proposal to connect the Sunshine Coast water supplies to the southern part of the region as a drought contingency project.
2. Council calls upon the State Government to urgently move from the desktop phase of planning for future water sources (particularly surface storages) to on-ground preliminary and detailed design because the prolonged delay in this progress will compromise the security of water supply for both the Sunshine Coast and the SEQ region as a whole.
3. In recognition of the efforts of local government to respond and partner the water reform process, the State Government and in particular its institutional arrangements steering committee needs to tangibly demonstrate its consideration of local government's position including timely responses and statements of reason where local government's position is not embraced.

In its resolution the Maroochy Shire Council also deals with the institutional arrangements review. There is more I could quote from the concerns raised by the Maroochy shire, but I want to start on this note in regard to the legislation that we are currently debating. There are still many unanswered questions. The state opposition—the National and Liberal Party coalition—has long stated that there needs to be good water planning in this state. In fact, we have championed options and committed to options in this parliament and publicly. It seems that the Beattie government has only belatedly realised there is a crisis when the taps start to run dry. Its response has been more about panicked politics and planning by press release than real technical data, consultation with stakeholders in the public and getting the right triple bottom line solutions to address not only short-term issues but also long-term sustainability of water supplies and sustainable growth in this state.

Growth in this state is not a surprise. It amazes me when I hear Labor ministers stand up and say, 'Golly gosh, we have all these people moving to Queensland.' In fact, the growth rates are quite predictable if we look at the demographic profiles. To suddenly say, 'It is a surprise that has come upon us like a thief in the night,' is irresponsible government by a government that has been there for too long and has started to look for desperate answers to take the heat off its many areas of failure.

There are a number of questions to which we are seeking answers from the government in relation not only to this commission but also to some of the planning decisions it has already announced with no technical data. Whether the Water Commission is going to be the patsy for the bad decision making of this government and its planning by press release we will have to wait and see. Clearly, it is extraordinary to announce the building of a major dam which has never been seriously investigated previously with no on-the-ground, technical data. Who is this mob running government in Queensland? It makes this state look ridiculous. To think that we have a need for environmental impact statements, to think that we have a need to assess myriad economic impacts and to assess the alternatives for delivering true short- and long-term water sustainability, and yet this government has done nothing. We know that the technical on-the-ground data has not been collected. That was confirmed this morning by the government in question time. It announced that it would build a dam and then said that it would do the EIS and all the technical things, but we are still going ahead with this dam unless things prove otherwise. That is an extraordinary way to plan major infrastructure with major impacts. That is not the way to come up with the best triple bottom line solutions to an integrated approach to water supply in this state.

One wonders whether this Water Commission is simply going to be a patsy and rubber-stamp the bad decisions of this government's legacy of inaction over the last eight years. We know that there have been no on-the-ground surveys. That is quite an extraordinary way to proceed. This resolution of council which I believe was made before the government's announcement of the major dam was right to say that technical on-the-ground investigations needed to be done. That is the way to plan good sustainable infrastructure, to understand the ramifications and to get the best options. It is quite extraordinary that this government has not done that. Now it is planning by press release. It announces infrastructure without any of the detail and then pats itself on the back as being a great hero of infrastructure delivery. That is a road to ruin if we do not have the right technical data and the right environmental assessments.

The Premier also pooh-poohed a question from the member for Maryborough this morning about the downstream impacts of this particular piece of infrastructure, yet we know that the environmental impact statements have not been done. Once again, we see a government that does not plan except by press release. Now we are to have a Water Commission, the concept of which should be about good planning, but will it really just be a patsy for the bad decisions of this government?

The Maroochy Shire Council's resolution 'strenuously objects to any SEQ drought contingency project to release water from the Sunshine Coast to the Brisbane/Wivenhoe sub-region because it potentially compromises the security of water supplies for the Sunshine Coast'. I need to explain this, because I realise that it is natural in times of a great crisis for there to be water envy and in areas where others are doing okay for people to think 'why not share?' The concept of sharing is okay unless you are compromising the security not only of people's long-term economic stability but also of their immediate water security.

I need to explain to people who do not understand the difference between small coastal dams and longer fill, longer empty dams. Currently with the Sunshine Coast supplies there has been good water planning. There has been a recognition that with regard to yield and capacity there is a need to have another dam on the Sunshine Coast or supplying the Sunshine Coast in the next 10 to 15 years. However, we must realise what the yield capacity is on the Sunshine Coast versus the greater Brisbane situation.

I want to cite some figures. The annual yield versus current demand of Wivenhoe, Somerset and North Pine dams is 431,000 megalitres per annum versus 300,000 megalitres per annum. The percentage yield already utilised is 69.6 per cent. The annual yield versus current demand of Lake Baroon is 38,500 megalitres per annum versus 24,000 megalitres per annum. In the historical no failure yield from 1890 to 2005, it is 34,750 megalitres per annum versus 24,000 megalitres per annum. The percentage yield already utilised is 62.3 per cent or 69.1 per cent. In the Brisbane catchment we have a system where, I am advised by water planners, it can run dry from a protracted drought in about five seasons. On the Sunshine Coast, while we have had good rainfall in recent times, if it has three seasons of drought it can run dry.

The broader security issues are also important on the Sunshine Coast. Thus there is some concern over the plan to investigate a 20,000-megalitre pipeline to hook Lake Baroon into the greater Brisbane network. It is a plan which the minister denies but it has been initiated and driven by his department. It is a plan which has been drafted. The consultant's brief, which is in draft, has been done under DNR specifications. It has been done with a project manager and a project officer who are DNR officers. This is a secret plan of this government. I wish this minister would come out and admit these things.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I rise to a point of order. I find those remarks totally untrue and offensive, and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lee): Order! The member for Maroochydoore will withdraw the remarks that the member finds offensive.

Miss SIMPSON: Whatever the minister finds offensive I withdraw. However, let the record note—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Maroochydore, there will be no qualification on your withdrawal. Either withdraw or do not withdraw. I ask you to withdraw.

Miss SIMPSON: I have not misled this House, and that is not a standing order that you can ask people to withdraw on, that the minister has taken offence.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Maroochydore, simply withdraw the comment and then you can continue with your speech.

Miss SIMPSON: I did withdraw the comment, but I need—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I do not want to get into a debate. You are welcome to continue your speech, but you are not going to withdraw your comment and then try to say that you are not really withdrawing. I do not want any reflections on me, standing orders or anything else. Just withdraw your comment and continue with your speech. It is pretty straightforward.

Miss SIMPSON: I withdraw whatever the minister finds offensive under the standing orders.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

Miss SIMPSON: The minister has to answer this question: if this pipeline investigation is not being driven by his department, can he explain why the consultant's brief has been drafted under the DNRMW standing offer arrangement SOANRS316 and the project officer and project director are members of his department's Water Planning Unit? There needs to be openness and accountability in the water planning process in Queensland, not this secret deal process of this government.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I rise to a point of order. The honourable member again is perpetuating the mistruth about a secret deal.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I find that offensive and I ask it to be withdrawn. It is untrue and offensive.

Miss SIMPSON: I did not refer to the minister; I referred to the government.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I understand from the Clerk that there has to be a personal reflection in a statement made by a member that someone finds offensive in the chamber. I will be incredibly diligent in pulling up members who make any comment that reflects personally upon a member of the House that that member finds offensive. There was no personal reflection.

Miss SIMPSON: This government is good at secret plans, planning by press release and not actually having an accountable process that involves genuine consultation with the key stakeholders.

We need to have a process of planning for water in this state that is not done in secret by this government. We need to have an open and accountable process in this government that is not about politics but is about the triple bottom line of good, sustainable water security and water delivery. Our infrastructure needs to be underpinned with good planning. That would then have bipartisan support in the outcomes.

We have long talked about the need for new dams and new water initiatives to provide that sustainability. Instead, what we have seen this state government do is come out with an SEQ Regional Plan with high levels of growth, particularly in the western corridor and with new satellite cities. My concern is that the planning this government will be doing is really about environmental vandalism in some parts of the state in order to enable the target populations in the new satellite cities to be achieved. The government will say on the one hand that it is a good environmental manager and it cares about people, yet it closes its eyes to the fact that it is shifting some of those negative impacts across the region without due consideration of industry and community impacts. We want to see good triple bottom line planning of infrastructure that is not done with these closed, secret deals of this government without the details being brought into the open.

It is ironic that Noosa, which has a population cap, now may be in the situation where it has to pay the price for an extraordinary piece of infrastructure that will probably inundate the pipeline access into Noosa. I note that Noosa Shire Council has come out specifically opposed to the Mary River option. We have clearly stated that we are opposed to the process that has been used, because new dams must be constructed with good technical information and the proper environmental statements, which this government has not got. It is interesting that Noosa, with a population cap, will potentially pay the price for the growth of the satellite cities with the four-wheel drives that get washed down on Saturdays in these new areas. Noosa will pay the price for the population growth in the new satellite cities to the south of Brisbane and the west of Ipswich.

The other question this minister has to answer is: are we going to see those areas that still have water infrastructure capacity actually subsidising, with postage stamp pricing, the new water infrastructure that he is bringing online to water Brisbane and the western corridor, in the new satellite cities? Are we going to see Noosa paying a subsidy for the new desalination plant at Currumbin by new postage stamp pricing of water across this state? It is not equitable and it does not address what I believe is good triple

bottom line planning for those who have invested in infrastructure to now subsidise the growth in those corners that this government failed to plan for.

Let us never forget that it was a Labor government—the Goss government—that canned the Wolffdene, which would have certainly meant that there was not this immediate crisis with water infrastructure. Let us not forget that it is this government that has announced options with no EIS, no planning and no consultation. We raise concerns because we want to see sustainable, deliverable infrastructure rather than ambit claims from this government with options that have never actually been road-tested with basic technical data that cause great distress to people on the ground who actually pay the price, not just with their hip pocket but emotionally as they have to put up with the political posturing of a government that has done nothing for eight years and now wants them to pay the ultimate price for its bad planning.

Water infrastructure must be properly planned. It must be open and accountable. It must involve the key stakeholders. As I have said in relation to the draft consultant's brief that this government is drawing up for a pipeline to hook the existing Sunshine Coast water supply into the greater Brisbane network via Caboolture, that is just par for the course with this government. It did not consult when it announced the new Water Commission. It did not consult when it announced the new water options. Now it is clear that it will not consult when it comes to getting the best options to move into the future.

I do not think the government should be afraid of involving people in the process and letting people have access to that technical data. With regard to the Mary, that may be technical data as far as understanding options even with water harvesting that would not require mass inundation. Some of that is technical information that only the department would have and currently is not publicly available. That would certainly be of assistance to try to understand more innovative and less damaging options which currently are not on the table and are not being considered. We call on the government to stop planning in secret, to start putting the information out and to let people have access to the experts and the technical data—to interrogate that to come up with the best sustainable options and to build the best sustainable options for the future.

It is also mooted that the government has been investigating a second desalination plant—a far larger one—to the north of the shipping channel in addition to the Currumbin one. These are things that seem to be known within the circles where the planning is being undertaken, but they need to be brought out into the open so that the public knows—in fact, some of these investigations that are underway are being driven by the department of natural resources—and so that there is not only informed debate but also community dialogue and involvement to ensure that the future of this state is not just a political decision made at cabinet level which is not supported by technical data.

This state is too important to start playing the divisive politics we have seen to date. There are better options. We have certainly put forward options that this government has knocked down. Tragically, that is why the taps are now running dry in this state. It is time there is openness and accountability. I have not seen yet that this legislation goes far enough to provide that opportunity for us to see and understand why certain decisions are made and to provide accountability to ensure the best triple bottom line delivery of infrastructure that meets the needs of not only south-east Queensland but also beyond.