



Speech by

Mark McArdle

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

Hansard Tuesday, 9 May 2006

WATER AMENDMENT BILL

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (6.22 pm): I rise to make a short address to the Water Amendment Bill. I start by making the observation that any government that is responsible makes proposals for the development and growth of the region and the people that it governs. By doing so, it puts in place plans, amendments, strategies and goals that over a lengthy period will meet the needs of a growing region.

But in this state we do not have a government that has the capacity to understand the need for planning. We do not have a government that understands the capacity to look into the future and ascertain what needs to be achieved and then put down on paper exactly how it is going to achieve it. In fact, we have a government that shows absolutely no understanding of the concept of responsibility for the care of people in this state. In fact, I can remember, when the government handed down its 2005-06 budget in June last year, making a clear statement that it had gained a surplus of \$4 billion. The government made much of that figure to the media and about how it had met the ongoing costs of the Queensland public for many years to come by planning appropriately.

Of course, we now find that 12 months down the track that statement was far from the truth. In fact, we have found that the government has had to spend billions of dollars trying to undo the damage that it did in past years and, more importantly, plan for the future. Unfortunately, the government has planned for the future in a bandaid manner. That has meant quick, hasty, ill-considered, inappropriate plans being put on paper and pushed out into the media and to the public, not for the reason that the government is going to solve the problems but to attempt to save its political hide. This government has lurched from one crisis to another. The people of Queensland are quite well aware of that fact.

The bill removes power from local governments and puts the control of one resource in this state into state government hands. Up until recently, water provision had been the province of local governments. But this government had found itself in such political hot water that it had to move to ensure it controlled the resource that it had failed to adequately provide for in the foreseeable and distant future.

In my opinion, the centralisation of power in this state government's hands of one more resource is one more element to establish the fact that it simply is not planning for the future. The Water Amendment Bill is not going to achieve significant gains for this state. It does not do anything that DNRMW does not do. It simply places a further strata of bureaucracy, a further strata of government intervention, in a process that is not needed.

In my opinion, the government's insistence on controlling water clearly demonstrates its inability to consult with the people of Queensland and learn what they need and, more particularly, what local governments need to have in place to ensure that they provide for the future of their own regions. Of particular concern on the Sunshine Coast is the proposed plan to consider a pipeline from the Baroon Pocket Dam to Caboolture and for that pipeline to then draw water from the region into south-east Queensland.

When I asked the minister a question without notice about this matter, the minister made it quite clear that a pipeline was not going to be utilised to draw water from the Sunshine Coast to Caboolture. I ask the minister to confirm that a plan is not now being considered to develop—I did not say approve—a pipeline from Baroon Pocket Dam to Caboolture. If the pipeline is being considered, who is going to meet the cost? Who is going to pay the ongoing maintenance? Will such cost then be met by the ratepayers?

Mr PALASZCZUK: I rise to a point of order. I accept that challenge. I refer the honourable member to Aquagen, which is the Sunshine Coast water company that is proposing exactly that. It is not the state government; it is Aquagen, a Sunshine Coast water entity.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr McArdle: I return to the point. It is my very clear understanding that this project is under the governance and control of the department of natural resources and that it is the department that is pushing this plan. In fact, I understand that the planning has reached the point at which there are now time lines in place for that pipeline needing to be fast-tracked as a matter of urgency, given that in no circumstances can the proposed dam on the Mary River be up and running within a two years. In addition, is it not a fact that with that pipeline level 2 water restrictions will be imposed across the Sunshine Coast on the basis that the level in the dams on the Sunshine Coast is significantly lower than the level of Wivenhoe Dam simply because they are smaller in nature?

I notice that under new section 360F there will be an annual levy payable by each water service provider. The water service provider is, in fact, each local government authority or council. I am concerned that the government is proposing to establish a Water Commission then impose upon local governments the obligation to pay ongoing costs after the initial 12 months. Of course, that is one more charge that will be pushed to the ratepayers in local government authorities. That is another example of this government's inability to cater for its own needs and instead have other people pay for those needs by making local government pass on charges and commitments to its ratepayers.

The local governments in this area of south-east Queensland are concerned that the state government continues to ride roughshod over their desires and needs. There is a very strong argument that, with regard to water rationing or water resourcing, they are being left out in the cold. They simply have no capacity to have input into the Water Commission.