



Speech by

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WATER AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (5.51 pm): The Water Amendment Bill is an extremely important bill. It is a bill which will put in place the Queensland Water Commission. Whilst we are supporting this bill, we are disappointed because when the Water Commission was mooted it looked like it was going to be something of substance—something that would encompass south-east Queensland and pull people together so that new issues that have arisen in water could be dealt with in a comprehensive way without having cross-border issues and problems.

With climate change and the different patterns of rainfall, the time has come to have a different approach to water and to be able to share water around. I come from a city of almost 100,000 people on top of the Great Dividing Range 2,000 feet up, and our water comes from either side of that watershed but down towards the bottom of it. We have to lift our water 400 metres vertically and then pump it some 50 metres to the city, so I am well aware of the issues facing a city or a population that has to get its water from outside the city area from other shires or from other areas of the state.

Likewise, most of Brisbane's water—95 per cent of it—comes from about 140 kilometres to the north-west, from two dams located almost side by side on the same stream in the same catchment area. What is needed for Brisbane is a source of supply. That is why the Wyaralong Dam has been looked at and why the government has now come up with another suggestion.

Looking at it in practical terms, we have to look at where the catchment is and where the rainfall is. Rainfall is probably the most important thing. Where is the rainfall in south-east Queensland? Mostly it is in the Springbrook area, on top of the hills behind the Gold Coast, along the McPherson Range that runs east to west across the state border. The border was drawn based on the watershed. What runs south is New South Wales; what runs north is Queensland. A lot of our rainfall forms on the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast in places of high rainfall like Maleny.

We thought this Water Commission had some real potential. That is why we are voting for the bill. However, as our shadow minister has pointed out, we are disappointed because we feel the commission is nothing more than an advisory body. On reading the bill, it is clear that it is an advisory body that will facilitate this and facilitate that. What does that mean? Is it just going to talk to people? What is it really going to do? The only thing of substance it appears that it will do is impose water restrictions on various shires and councils. Other than that, it is basically an advisory body.

The reason for the introduction of this bill and, more directly, the sudden announcement of two dams that were put aside some 12 years ago as not being viable is panic and the need to play catch-up football by this government. It has been exposed—as it was exposed in the health debacle, as it was exposed with the department of families, as it was exposed with the electrical problems that we had. Once again it has panicked and it has raced out to make these big announcements to suddenly make it look like it is doing something when we have had eight years of absolute inaction.

In fact, the opposition has been criticised for continually bringing up the need for dams. Let us have none of this rubbish that the opposition is opposed to dams. We are the ones who have been promoting them. If we do not want restrictions, if we want recycling and all of those other things, we cannot do it with

fresh air. We have to do it with water. We have to build dams. Even if there is climate change, dams are there to last eight, 10 or 12 years. They need to be built in places where there is a proper structure that can take the wall. Have a look at the Burdekin Dam. It has a huge catchment, a huge rainfall and an absolutely perfect place in which to put the wall. It can also be extended. That is an example of a good dam. The fact that water is being transferred from there to Townsville makes sense and I agree with it.

In our case, in Toowoomba we need water from other areas. When this commission was first mooted, I felt it could smooth the way for sensible decisions to give Toowoomba just a smidgin of water from some of the catchments below the range, where there is a higher rainfall, to solve the particular issues that we are facing. I will come to that issue shortly.

With regard to the Mary River Dam, other speakers have talked about how that was looked at and discarded back in 1992 or 1994. On the night that that announcement was made I did not sleep because my wife, my kids and I had a farm there—and it would be about 30 feet under—at a place called Goomong Pocket, about two kilometres upstream from Traveston. To think of the cubbyhouse which the kids built and where we lived being inundated with water was a dreadful thought. The thought went through my mind: what happens to those people who live there? What happens to their future? How are they going to feel about this sudden, knee-jerk decision by the government? If it had been put in place and talked about for years, if environmental and social impact statements had been carried out, it might be different. But the government is proposing just six weeks to look at something like this.

The dam is going to cost \$2.5 billion. I hope the government remembers what I said. There are 900 properties in the area. Very few, if any, will be under \$1 million. This Noosa hinterland country is worth \$10,000 an acre. Have a look at the *Country Life* and see the prices of little places there. There are dairy farms milking 1,500 cows with big rotary dairies on them. Goodness knows what they are going to be worth. Multiply those 900 properties by so many millions of dollars, which is the average of each property, and you will soon see that the estimate of \$1.5 billion to \$1.6 billion for the purchase of those properties is well and truly spot-on and might even be a little short.

That is the price of the land. Then there is the price of the dam. The government will never build a dam across Traveston. It is wide. It is not a true dam site. It is sandy. There is some 60 feet or more of sand. It will be a big, shallow dam that will take a lot of properties. It will go out over the Bruce Highway to where you turn off to go to Imbil. It will go right up through Federal and goodness knows what other places. They are talking about putting a dyke around Kandanga, because Kandanga Creek will rise and flood the bowls club and all through that area. When we look at the economic capacity of that area, 20 per cent of Queensland's dairy production will go. It is the best dairy land in the state, with the irrigation that it has and the river flats there.

Let us look at an alternative location for this dam. We all agree that there has to be a dam. What disturbed me when listening to the debate on this issue on the radio one evening last week was that the Premier had discussions with the member for Nicklin and the member for Glass House. Obviously there is another site further upstream but for political reasons it has been canned. Upstream they have a high rainfall and probably better dam sites. There is also the Borumba Dam, which can be raised. That is on a different catchment altogether on Yabba Creek. It is another catchment altogether but it could be raised. A dam site has been proposed on the Mary River further upstream. In a political deal the Premier has ruled that out—and probably the minister—with the member for Nicklin and the member for Glass House. So they are going to impose this dam further down—a shallow dam—on all those people who live and produce in that highly productive, vast area that the Traveston wall will back up.

Dams are important to us. We think that they have to be economical. They have to be where there is high rainfall. They have to be where there is a good catchment and they have to be where a good dam wall can be built in order to have an efficient dam. There is another thing about the dam that the Premier has alluded to right from the start. There was a little bit of spin put out that it was being built for Gympie and the Sunshine Coast. However, we all know that it is for Brisbane. The Premier has said that and he has said that it is for Lake Wivenhoe. They are going to take one of two routes. They are going to pump the water over that ridge at the back of Maleny so that it runs into the Stanley system at the back of Woodford and the Beerwah Range where it runs down to the Stanley and then into the Somerset and from Somerset into Wivenhoe. The other option is they will go down the coast and hook into one of the systems further down there. Add that cost to the \$1.5 billion or more for the land and the \$500 million or more it will cost to build a dam there and we see that it is going to be a very expensive dam to build—the pumping system, the size of the pipeline, the pump stations required, the high lift to get over that ridge or even to pump it over the various ridges down the coast. The cost of this dam will be absolutely massive. However, a better dam site was most probably ruled out politically by the Premier's discussion with the member for Nicklin and the member for Glass House.

The other thing that really annoyed me when I heard all these announcements was the plight of Toowoomba. Because the Premier is facing criticism for having done nothing for eight years and being anti-dams, all of a sudden the government goes to this big proposal that will affect so many people and one of the best farming areas of Queensland. As I said, it is going to cost about \$2.5 million for resumptions for

the dams, the pipelines, the pump stations, the lift gear and so forth in order to ship that water down towards Lake Wivenhoe and the Brisbane system. When it came to Toowoomba, which sits on top of the range and which needs only 5,000 megalitres a year extra on top of what we have now, and looking at the supplementary systems that could provide that to Toowoomba plus some growth, the Beattie government has said no to every single option. It has said no, no, no to everything that has come up, whether it is the 30,000 megalitres sustainable yield for Norwin underground suppliers; whether it is a system of managed weirs to catch the stormwater on Gowrie Creek at the back of the bacon factory where there are steep banks and a very short pump to Cooby Dam; whether it has been using the recycled water of Toowoomba for industrial purposes, parkland and sports field irrigation; whether it has been to use a smidgin of water from the Wivenhoe system or catchment and transferring that water from Wivenhoe to Crestbrook Dam where the infrastructure is already in existence to take it to Toowoomba; whether it is taking it along the existing pipeline that goes to Gatton and then on to Withcott and increasing the diameter of those pipes at the foot of the range and lifting it up to the existing reservoir at Picnic Point—that is treated water that goes through Gatton—or whether it be by putting the Emu Creek Dam in place, which is in the catchment of the Wivenhoe, so that Toowoomba can have some water out of that dam and the balance could go down to the Wivenhoe.

Bear in mind that the Wivenhoe Dam was built for two purposes: as a flood buffer for Brisbane and secondly to provide extra storage. The Wivenhoe Dam filled to the top will hold 2.2 million megalitres. It is only filled to one million megalitres. It is only filled to 48 per cent of its capacity. The balance is a vacuum that is kept there to protect Brisbane from any future floods of the ilk of the 1974 flood. If a dam was built on Emu Creek and if the government is so concerned not to lift Wivenhoe a little bit—and that would be a cheap way of holding extra water when it does rain—Emu Creek would hold 130,000 megalitres. It could be shared between Brisbane and Toowoomba, and that 130,000 megalitres would be additional to the one million megalitres that is held in Wivenhoe because that is the maximum they let it hold. That certainly was an option for us at Toowoomba.

The other option, of course, has been the coal seam methane water, which is progressing well for Chinchilla and Dalby. Both of those towns are going to take in the order of 1,000 megalitres of water. I have had a look at those mining operations. There is massive potential through that area and further out probably for hundreds of years. They bring the gas up. It is 50 per cent gas and 50 per cent water. It has what could be described as a relatively low salt content varying, depending on the particular well, from 800 to 3,000 parts per million. That water is quite suitable for cows, trees and certain crops. With reverse osmosis they are going to use 1,000 megalitres at Chinchilla and a similar amount at Dalby. That water could certainly be pumped across to Oakey, for example, which takes a large amount of water from Toowoomba and some of the surrounding areas on that lower altitude to relieve the burden on Toowoomba—and ultimately even for Toowoomba. Instead, our city is torn apart and ripped asunder by referendum and the debate about recycled water and whether it should go into our drinking system. No-one else around Australia wants to do it. On the radio yesterday morning Premier Lemma said no to a recycled system that they are introducing in the north-western suburbs of Sydney. It was a quite emphatic no. Because of health issues they will not be putting that into the drinking supply. Premier Beattie has said on TV here in Queensland that Brisbane will not be drinking recycled water. Just this morning we saw the minister sidestep the question when he was asked whether he agreed with Brisbane drinking recycled water or whether he agreed with the comments of Premier Lemma. He dodged the question. Normally he speaks for the full three minutes. I think he spoke for about 15 seconds on that one and sat down.

That is the situation in which we are in Toowoomba. We see the government prepared to spend \$2.5 billion and more on a sudden fix because it sees political problems. It absolutely deserts Toowoomba on the top of the range and leaves us to recycle the water into the drinking system—and all this to ensure that Brisbane does not have to do the same.

I want to say a few words tonight about tank water. I think it is a shame to all sides of politics and to all levels of government that over the years the use of tank water has not been what it should have. If honourable members visit some shires today they will find that there are all sorts of regulations regarding what tank water cannot be used for. In some places it can only be hooked into toilets. It can even be banned from showers and so forth. Just over the border of that shire—and it might be just over a couple of hundred metres into a rural area—tank water might be what people use for everything. In time, we should gain a bit of common sense. I would like to see the Local Government Association of Queensland look at this matter. Tank water should be used for almost everything in the house. If people want to be ultra careful and if they want to cover themselves they should not hook it into the drinking water in the kitchen. It should be allowed to be used in showers, toilets and washing machines.

Look at the formula for rainfall. One of the problems we have is that, even though we still get most of the rainfall and we are still getting some up around the dams—have a look at Brisbane's rainfall; it is probably 32 inches or something in that order—it is not coming in one heavy drop of eight, nine or 10 inches that we get with cyclones running into creeks or streams. However, when that rain falls on a tin roof, it goes into the tank; we can catch 100 per cent of that rain. There are new modern systems of 10 or 20

litre take-offs that take the first flush off the roof and, via a T-piece in the downpipe, runs off to a pot plant through a tube. So the first flush does not go into the tank and people can save so much water. Honourable members can work out the figures. If, say, 100 millimetres falls on a square metre of roof, looking at the total rainfall for an area they will find that most houses would fill a 10,000-gallon tank a number of times per year.

Looking at my own city of Toowoomba, before 1947 people lived on tank and bore water. We did not get a dam until 1947. People lived on tank water and they were mostly little galvanised iron water tanks, not the big moulded plastic ones that can be purchased now that do not let algae in because they keep the light out. People can easily have two 5,000-gallon tanks. With modern house building systems, water can be stored under patios or in inground tanks. I think it is essential. As part of the housing industry's awards each year, it should have an award for the best collection and distribution system of water. The amount of water that runs off a city is equivalent to what could be held in a large dam. We could easily catch that.

It is not the answer but is part of the answer. It is a big part of the answer for the simple reason that the rainfall that falls around our dams—the 24 inches or 28 inches or 20 inches in a low year that falls around the Kilcoy area at the back of Somerset and Wivenhoe—does not run because the ground is dry. It fills up the cracks and soaks in. If it hits a tin roof it will run and we can catch 100 per cent of it.

We have to look at different pricing mechanisms in the future. Water is a valuable resource. We must always consider the elderly and those who have difficulty in paying. We have to look at restrictions. I think the public are now aware that restrictions should come in earlier and that water is not something that we can use with gay abandon like we used to. We have to look at dams. We are a firm believer in dams. They are a primary source of water for those places that have difficulty in catching water such as units and so forth. Every household has it as a backup supply. We have to have dams. We can only get water from either a dam or underground.

We are also looking at the potential of treating sea water and bringing it to a purified state. We have to have a look at all of those things. We are supporting the Water Commission but I think we are all disappointed at its lack of strength. It is basically an advisory body. We have exposed the Beattie move on the Mary River Dam for what it is. It is time that every single community around Queensland and councils got fair dinkum about having tanks which can supply in many instances between 50 and 80 or 90 per cent of people's water. What a difference that would make. It would make us all the more water wise and careful with what we are doing.