



Speech by

Mike Horan

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WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6.11 pm): It is good to support this common-sense motion that has been moved tonight. It is absolutely disgraceful to see the amendment that has been moved in this House that will try to con the government backbenchers into believing that the government has some sort of reporting system every month. In fact, the reporting system that the Deputy Premier and the Premier talked about is one for emergency declarations only, and that system covers only south-east Queensland.

The coalition's motion is about all the promises that were made during the election campaign in relation to the supply of water in south-east Queensland—along with all the other promises that were made in relation to other areas—and a quarterly report to the parliament that will show changes in the timetable and changes in costs, not some web site, so that we can debate the issue in an open and accountable fashion. There is only one reason we have a crisis in water supply—and it is a crisis. That is, for eight years the Beattie government had a policy of building no new dams in south-east Queensland. In 2004, we were roundly criticised when we said that there was going to be a water shortage. But now the chickens have come home to roost. This massive infrastructure is a major undertaking. Any delays or any financial blow-outs must be fixed in a timely manner; otherwise those delays or blow-outs will worsen.

The coalition has moved a motion to ensure that this parliament and the people of Queensland can have every promise made in relation to water supply, ranging from those that were made in relation to water supplies in rural and regional Queensland to the important promises that were made in relation to the water supply in south-east Queensland, which is facing a water supply crisis—and it is a real crisis—debated in this parliament every quarter rather than the government simply relying on that cunning trick of saying that information is released every month when that information will be released every month only if it has been a declared emergency. If the government would move an amendment to this motion to state that it will declare every situation an emergency, that might satisfy us. But, once again, this government is hiding behind this facade.

This water crisis is immense. It will take a long time to put this major water infrastructure in place. I have only a few minutes left in which to speak, but I want to say a couple of things about what we should do. At the end of World War II we were a poor nation, yet we built the great Snowy Mountain Scheme. Now we are a nation with a trillion-dollar economy, a national \$13 billion surplus and a state \$3 billion surplus. It is about time we put real money into the supply of water and not continue with bandaid and boutique solutions. One such boutique solution was recycled water. A referendum for that was held in Toowoomba. In order to recycle water we need sources of water, because only 60 per cent of water that is used in the recycling process results in recycled water. So we need dams and bores and the ability to transfer water throughout the state.

I agree with the principle of the water grid. The opposition leader proposed such a project when he was the shadow minister for water. Grids are important so that water can be taken from areas where there is rainfall or where there are good catchments to population centres or to where it is needed. We will have to transfer water more often in the future. We have to have a vision of the way in which we supply water to

places such as Toowoomba, which is located 2,000 metres up on top of a range and which has to bring water from catchments that are located elsewhere.

The water task force that was put together in Toowoomba after the referendum is supposed to report within six months of that referendum. We have about 3½ months of that time left. The situation is urgent. We need immediate solutions, such as accessing the Norwin water supply and sinking more bores. I note that the council has started drilling and has been successful in getting water from some of those bores. The Norwin water supply would have given us immediately 5,000 megalitres a year, which would have been leased from the irrigators. Those irrigators could take the water when they needed it or, if there had been a good year of rainfall and they did not need the water, they could choose not to take it. We need to be hooked up to the South East Queensland Water Grid or be more visionary and be hooked up to the Nathan Dam, which would have a yield of 188,000 megalitres a year and which could supply towns such as Miles, Chinchilla and Dalby, which have booming mining industries, and Toowoomba. The sale price of that urban water could help provide water for rural irrigators at a reasonable price. South-east Queensland may also need to be hooked up to the Paradise Dam so that it could receive water from that source.

The time is now. We need accountability regarding project management and we need accountability regarding the financial cost so that this parliament can address this massive water crisis. We can do it only if each and every project—not those that have been declared an emergency—is brought before this parliament for the people of Queensland to see and for all the elected members to debate so that we can make sure that the infrastructure is delivered on time and so that we all know what the cost and the social cost is to our state. That is what we want and that is what all members should vote for.