



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Thursday, 9 March 2006

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Water Commission

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.40 am): I am pleased to announce today that a new South East Queensland Planning Authority with state and local council representation will be formed to secure vital water supplies across the state. We are establishing a Water Commission to provide certainty for water supplies in the south-east corner.

The establishment of the commission follows our decision last year to review the institutional arrangements governing water supplies in this region. The current water management regime in south-east Queensland is very complex and it has hindered rather than assisted the job of securing water supplies for industry, urban and rural users and the government. There are 19 major water supply storages owned by 12 different entities and 18 local governments in the region. It is a complex system that suffers due to a lack of cohesion and uniform planning. It is non statutory and no clear entity has the responsibility of ensuring regional water security.

Today, we have moved to resolve that. There are a number of bulk suppliers providing water to different geographic areas but there is no mechanism to create linkages between supply systems. In addition, when a new water asset covers more than one local government area, there is uncertainty over responsibility and planning decisions and this could be affected by parochial interests and often political interests rather than regional outcomes.

The establishment of the new commission creates a model where the supply of water and the demand for water can be jointly managed by one entity. It will drive the outcomes of the South East Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy and key functions will include setting and planning a level of service targets for the region; assessing supply and demand across the region; improving and enforcing a system wide operations plan to allow for water sharing throughout the water grid; and setting a common restrictions framework to ensure consistency across the whole region.

We do not have 18 separate countries in the south-east corner; we have one region. This planning will provide water security. It will be established as a statutory authority with a Governor in Council approved three-member board that includes a nominee from local government. We are working to have the commission in place along with the necessary legislative amendments in the second half of this year. This will allow work to start immediately delivering on recommendations within the South East Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy, which is due to be completed by December.

The recent drought has served to further highlight the issues of water supply security and reliability. Our government is undertaking a raft of initiatives to ensure the continued security of this precious resource. The South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan alone contains more than \$2.3 billion in new water infrastructure projects. That includes a new dam, lifting spillways, desalination and recycling pipelines. Mr Speaker, as you would know, we are the only government in Australia to have built a dam—the Paradise Dam—in the past 10 years.

The establishment of this new planning commission, with the support and cooperation of the 18 local councils in the region, will further enhance our ability to undertake a coordinated response to—

Mr Seeney: You got trapped into that.

Mr BEATTIE: I would have thought the member would have been interested in water—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Here they go—

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Callide, I warn you under 253.

Mr BEATTIE: This is typical: they whinge; we work. They smirk; we work. When it comes to working, we do it. All the members opposite do is smirk. They are not interested in anything. All they do is whinge, whinge, whinge, whinge, whinge. The opposition can whinge, whinge, whinge all they like; we are going to work, work, work and deliver for Queensland. The establishment of this new planning—

Mr Quinn: We've heard it all before.

Mr BEATTIE: Let the record show that the Liberal leader wants to attack water supplies—

Mr Quinn interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Robina, I warn you under 253.

Mr BEATTIE: Let the record show that the Liberal leader tried to undermine this new commission. I sat down and discussed this with the Liberal Lord Mayor of Brisbane, who supports exactly what we are doing. The member can take a leaf out of the Liberal Lord Mayor's book because, like us, the mayor wants to deliver water to the south-east corner and not see stupid politics being played like the member does.

The minister for water, Henry Palaszczuk, and I sat down with the four key mayors representing the ROCs, as they are called. They were the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, the mayor of Redlands, the mayor of Noosa and the mayor of Ipswich. They have agreed to this plan representing the whole 18 councils, because when it comes to water planning this will take Brisbane and the south-east corner of Queensland forward. I thank the councils who put party politics aside and thought of the people of the south-east corner. The Liberal leader can take a leaf out of their book and so could the National Party. Let the record show that on day one, when we have developed this Water Commission, the opposition has tried to undermine it. The situation is similar to what happened with the Liberal Party when we came up with a plan for Caboolture Hospital. It tried to undermine it. So let those opposite whinge, whinge, whinge and try to white-ant it, but we will deliver for Queensland.

Mr Quinn interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Robina, I have a plan, too. You have been warned under 253. If you continue, you will be walking.

Mr BEATTIE: This is a great day for Queensland. The establishment of this new planning commission, with the support and cooperation of the 18 local governments in the region, will further enhance our ability to undertake a coordinated response to important water issues and help ensure security of supply for many years to come.

It is important that we establish a framework for uniform restrictions because we need consistency. This body will play a role that is, in the broadest possible terms, very similar to the role played by the Reserve Bank. It will set those restrictions. Councils will be able to make submissions to the commission, but the commission will make the final decision. That means that we can share water across the south-east corner of Queensland so that we can get it to where people need it. We all know that water is liquid gold. This commission will not only have planning for infrastructure to get it right with local authorities but also it will make certain that if there are restrictions there is consistency across the region.

Yesterday the Logan council made a decision on water restrictions in relation to senior citizens. This commission could establish whether that decision needs to be consistent across the south-east corner. The commission needs to ensure that we have water. I want to make the point that we are in a period of climate change which is changing the water that is available to the community. None of us can play God. We cannot make it rain. However, we can make sure that when it rains and we have some water we use it efficiently for Queenslanders.

This is an important day in planning for the future. I thank the minister Henry Palaszczuk for his support. I also thank my cabinet colleagues who approved this model. We will proceed with this plan to look after the interests of all Queenslanders.