



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Tuesday, 28 March 2006

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Water Management Charges

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (10.11 am): At the community cabinet meeting in Mackay last Sunday I announced the immediate suspension of new water management charges for farmers, industry and local government and charges for stock and domestic use. I seek leave to incorporate details in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The charges had been set at \$4 per megalitre for agricultural users, \$10 per megalitre for industrial users, \$15 per megalitre for local authorities and \$100 per annum for licensees accessing the Great Artesian Basin for stock and domestic purposes.

To date no charges have been collected.

Our farmers and representatives of the agricultural industry have raised a number of issues in relation to the new charges and their implementation.

In response to these concerns, my Government has decided to suspend the charges pending the completion of an updated independent analysis of the State's water planning and management costs and consultation with key stakeholders.

These groups include AgForce, the Queensland Farmers' Federation and the Local Government Association of Queensland.

Terms of reference for this study have already been developed in consultation with representatives of these groups and I expect the report will be completed within the next few months.

I look forward to the continued cooperation of AgForce, QFF and the LGAQ throughout this process.

Mr Speaker,

The Government's water charges policy was developed to be compliant with the National Water Initiative, which was signed by the Prime Minister and Premiers in June 2004.

This intergovernmental agreement requires States and Territories to develop consistent approaches to pricing and attributing costs of water planning and management by 2006.

The Queensland Government's water charges are intended to deliver the outcomes of this agreement.

However, the Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, Peter McGauran, recently made confusing comments about the National Water Initiative.

Minister McGauran acknowledged that full cost recovery is a principle of the agreement. But he then seemed to suggest that recovery of water planning and management costs does not apply to some commercial users.

These statements put implementation of water reform in this country at risk.

My Government is serious about its National Water Initiative commitments, and I have written to the Prime Minister to clarify the requirements of this national arrangement, to ensure Queensland has continued support in the implementation of the Initiative.

I would like to express to the House my disappointment that the Federal Government has not yet initiated the development of a consistent national approach to water charges.

I will be asking the Prime Minister to address this issue through the Council of Australian Governments.

Mr Speaker,

Water security and supply is a national issue that needs national solutions.

I don't want our farmers and industry disadvantaged by a water pricing system that isn't competitive with other States and territories.