



Speech by

# Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Tuesday, 6 June 2006

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## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Water Supply

**Hon. PD BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.45 am): As members would know, my government is working hard to ensure that the people of south-east Queensland have the water they need to live a full life in our state. That is why we are implementing a plan which will give us guaranteed water security not just for the next five years but for the next 50 years at least. Yesterday, the minister for the environment and I released a water wise kit, otherwise know as the toolbox. I table a copy for the information of the House.

It is the sort of toolbox that those opposite need to get a coalition together! Yesterday, the minister for the environment and I released a water wise kit which will help all Queenslanders conserve our precious water supplies. That is why we are implementing a multifaceted plan in south-east Queensland to harvest, dam, conserve and recycle water.

On that point, I want to ensure that the people of Queensland are clear on my government's stance on the use of recycled water. It has never been the state government's policy to pump recycled water into dams. We are actively supporting the use of recycled water for industry. If there is a surplus we will free it up for agricultural use, possibly in the Lockyer. The basis for claims by the discredited Leader of the Opposition that the government should 'uncover the bogeyman' and admit that recycling water for household use is a foregone conclusion is simply scaremongering. He is wrong.

The documents cited by the Leader of the Opposition were in fact an SEQWater planning document. As the SEQWater web site explains, SEQWater is a public company 45 per cent owned by the Brisbane City Council, 35 per cent by 11 other local governments in south-east Queensland and 20 per cent by the Queensland government. Further, the report states that one of the overriding objectives of the Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme is, on a precautionary basis, to assess the potential and allow flexibility in design for indirect potable reuse as a drought contingency option, subject to the state government position on the matter. The state government's position has not changed.

It is common sense to ensure that all possible contingencies are canvassed and my government has committed \$7 million for research into the good and bad outcomes in using recycled water to replenish failing dams. A further document, *SEQWater regional drought strategy contingency options*—again a SEQWater document—deals with recycled water under a point heading, 'Major source addition'. I am quite happy to table that Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme business case for the information of all members.

We have nothing to hide here. There is one aspect of these documents that is absolutely on the mark. In the preface to the report, the consultants state, 'The current drought, the worst in the past 100 years, has highlighted the vulnerability of south-east Queensland's water resources.' In the face of a potential continuation of this drought, our water supply is vulnerable and we need to investigate all of the options, which is why we have invested \$100 million in advance purchase of these pipelines.

As I have said, we are actively implementing a range of options to increase our supplies and decrease our use of water. We hope that we will not need to resort to some of them. I repeat: using recycled water for drinking is not my government's policy. Should circumstances demand such a radical option, I will take any council approach seriously but only on the proviso that the affected community is fully consulted. No recycled water will be used to replenish dams in Queensland until all other options are exhausted and the people using the water have had their say.

In the meantime, I would appeal to the opposition leader to stop scaremongering as a diversion from his internal woes. He should stop hoping for a merger to save him and put his head down and do some work. The Leader of the Opposition might start doing something about a water policy. The document woefully short on detail which those opposite released is clearly fundamentally flawed. I asked for an analysis to be done because I wanted to see whether there were any good ideas in the opposition's policy. The Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water has done that. The analysis finds that the yields claimed by the opposition on its dams program are wrong and vastly overstated. What did it get wrong? It overstated the yield of the proposed Wyaralong Dam.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr BEATTIE:** Those opposite did not do their homework. The analysis finds that it overstated the yield of the proposed Wyaralong Dam with Cedar Grove Weir by 13,500 megalitres per annum, it overestimated the Borumba and the Coles Crossing Weir by 15,500 megalitres and Amamoor by 800 megalitres. That is a shortage of 29,800 megalitres per year before we even get to the question of the efficiency of the opposition's scattergun approach. Although, to be fair, the opposition has underestimated the yield from the proposed Glendower Dam by 5,000 megalitres which leaves it 24,800 megalitres short. Most significantly, the performance of the Borumba and Amamoor Creek dams has been analysed by hydrologists using the coalition yields. The data shows that Borumba Dam would be empty for years on end and that severe constraints on use of water from the dam would need to occur for periods much longer than a decade, and I table that analysis for the information of the House.

Hydrologists at the department say that there would be extreme vulnerability associated with developing three small dams in command of a small area in relatively dry parts of catchments. In other words, the plan does not work. The size and the catchment area, especially that of the Traveston Dam, commanded by the storage proposed by the Queensland government is such that there will be some resilience to the effects of climate variability and change. That is the advantage of building the Traveston Dam. In short, the experts say that the coalition's attempt at water policy would lead to restricted growth in south-east Queensland and would restrict options for addressing the region's long-term water needs—in other words, it does not work. I say to the opposition: go back and do the homework. Do some more work. Put in some effort. Just do not look at the easy options. Give the people of Queensland a plan that would provide them with the water they need for decades to come, not the short-term solutions they are suffering now. I table that for the information of the House.

I should mention that in this document that I have tabled the worst reference—and this is the worst—in relation to recycled water says this—

There is growing concern in Australia and overseas about the potential of some of these chemicals to disrupt the endocrine system of humans when exposed to recycled water, particularly drinking water, from water resources that contain significant proportions of effluent from wwpts. However, the significance of these chemicals in the context of water recycling has not been fully explored.

That is the most detrimental thing we can find in the whole document. I want to make this point: we would never go ahead with recycled water into Somerset and then into Wivenhoe unless any health issues had been overcome. The minister for water, Henry Palaszczuk, tells me that the ministerial council on water will meet on 16 June and will talk about setting national standards for recycled water by the end of the year for indirect potable water. That means that the Commonwealth and the states will work together to get that significant outcome. We will overcome, if need be, any of those issues. What we are doing is simply examining an option if there was, as I said publicly, an Armageddon solution required. I say to the opposition that, if it were serious about a water strategy, I have highlighted to the House in detail why its plan will not work. I urge it to come on side and, firstly, support the Traveston Dam and have some courage to support a dam that will work and, secondly, to stop scaremongering about recycled water. The facts of life are that we are facing the worst drought in 100 years. I table for the information of the House a chart produced as part of this document about south-east Queensland which highlights that, in 2008, yes, we will have some issues to deal with in terms of water, which is why the recycled water—

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr BEATTIE:** If those opposite would just be patient I will actually explain what we are trying to do so we do not have any more dishonesty. There will be—and this document highlights this—a trough position in 2008, but that is assuming that there is no rain at all between now and then and that is assuming that we will not get our recycled water on target, which we will. We will actually have that recycled water in operation by 2008, and that in itself should get us over that difficult trough period. I urge the Leader of the Opposition to play a constructive role in terms of water. We have a serious problem as a

result of drought and climate change. We are working very hard with our councils to come up with a solution, and we do not need silly nonsense trying to undermine it.

*Tabled paper:* Folder by the Environmental Protection Agency, titled 'WaterWise Queensland—Toolbox—Every Drop Counts', containing brochures, fact sheets, school curriculum guidelines and other publications.

*Tabled paper:* Copy of a report, dated March 2006, by Marsden Jacob Associates and Cardno, titled 'Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme Business Case, Draft Volume 1—Report'.

*Tabled paper:* Document titled 'Assessment of Coalition Water Policy'.

*Tabled paper:* Copy of a chart titled 'SEQWATER Regional Drought Strategy Contingency Options'.