



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Water Supply

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.47 am): What we do need to get is a sensible debate about water. The current drought and the resulting water restrictions declared by south-east Queensland councils have spawned a rash of commentators eager to give Queenslanders quick solutions. Common sense and long experience has taught Queenslanders that there is no such thing as a quick fix for this. The long-term solution to ensuring our water supplies are secure for decades to come is multifaceted. That is what my government is doing. It is implementing long-term plans that are futureproof and take into account climate change and population growth.

Part of that strategy is to promote the installation of rainwater harvesting and water conservation measures in people's homes and businesses. In simple terms, we want to see more people installing tanks that allow them to use rainwater not just for watering the garden but also for flushing toilets and even washing clothes. I will have more to say about this on Sunday. We also need more Queenslanders to fix their leaking taps, phase out the old full-flush toilet and install water-saving shower heads and taps. That is why we have already announced \$20 million to help people do the right thing in their homes across the south-east.

However, I must inject a note of caution. I know that some people believe that the wholesale installation of water tanks is the quick answer to our entire water supply problem. In fact the leader of the Greens, Bob Brown, visited our state a couple of weeks ago to sell that message. 'Don't build dams,' he said, 'Look at what the NSW town with a population of 37,000 people has done.' There is a scale issue here, as I have told the House. When it comes to water, size does matter.

There are some 1,382,774 households in Queensland. I do not want to knock the efforts of the city of Queanbeyan, but a community of 37,000 souls can explore different options to a state the size of Queensland. Let us have a look at the numbers. Experts tell us that we need two big dams to help meet our future water needs. Yet to deliver a quantity of water equivalent to the proposed Traveston Dam using very common 5,000 litre tanks, we would need to install 1.42 million tanks and it would cost between \$4.28 billion and \$8.5 billion to install that many tanks. At the end of that massive outlay of taxpayers' dollars all we would have is a huge number of tanks that were not part of a network, that were not part of a grid. What we are trying to build is a water grid similar to the electricity grid, and we cannot connect one tank to another in that way. So if it rains in one area we cannot move that water to another set of tanks somewhere else. That is the fallacy of the argument.

That would mean that the water could not be treated, it could not be shared and we could not work with councils to ensure it was used efficiently. Senator Brown said that the reality is that there is a very large amount of water which falls across this city and this corner of the state which simply goes into stormwater channels. The Leader of the National Party is on the record as saying that under a coalition policy 'rainwater tanks will be mandatory, creating water overnight'. We know how silly that is. I would say this to Senator Brown and the opposition leader on behalf of all Queenslanders: they may think they can

put a roof over the entire south-east to catch all of the stormwater and they may think they can make it rain and they may think that we all came down in the last shower.

Water tanks and water conservation measures are a vital part of our strategy to ensure water security, but they are just part of the solution. Those opposite were 24,000 or 25,000 megalitres out in their estimates of water, so no-one takes them seriously. Once again, the Leader of the National Party has not done his homework. First he wants to join the Liberals; now he wants to come up with some pie-in-the-sky scheme that will not work. We have a strategy. We are building dams. We are building recycling pipelines. We are supporting desalination. We are encouraging water tanks and water-saving technologies and we are creating a system of pipes between our dams to allow us to transfer water to where it is needed. We all need to do our bit to catch and conserve precious water resources. I know that many Queenslanders are already doing more than their share. My government will continue to support them in the weeks and months ahead. We are building a water grid similar to the electricity grid, as I said, to secure our water supply for more than the next 50 years.