



Speech by

Peter Wellington

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Hansard Thursday, 11 May 2006

WATER AMENDMENT BILL

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (7.59 pm): I rise to participate in the debate on the Water Amendment Bill 2006. I realise it is now nearly 8 pm and there are many other matters that this House wants to get through before we rise tonight, so I will be brief. I do not intend to repeat many of the matters that have been raised by speakers on both sides of the House on this bill. I will try to keep my comments as concise as possible.

I note that the primary purpose of the bill is to establish a Queensland Water Commission to assist the state government to better ensure a future reliable supply of water to south-east Queensland. I do believe the creation of a Water Commission will provide a better method of coordinating a regional response to south-east Queensland's water needs than the current way. While saying this, I also put on the record my appreciation of the good work that the Sunshine Coast councils have been doing over many years in managing the water needs of our rapidly growing region. I am informed that on 26 April the Maroochy Shire Council passed the following resolution—

1. Council strenuously objects to any SEQ drought contingency project to release water from the Sunshine Coast to the Brisbane/Wivenhoe sub-region because it potentially compromises the security of water supplies for the Sunshine Coast and it devalues the effective long term water planning that the Sunshine Coast Councils have achieved over several decades:

Specifically:

- a. Council objects to any State Government proposal to introduce water restrictions on the Sunshine Coast to free up water to redress the obvious water planning deficiencies in the southern part of the region; and,
 - b. Council objects to any State Government proposal to connect the Sunshine Coast water supplies to the southern part of the region as a drought contingency project.
2. Council calls upon the State Government to urgently move from the desktop phase of planning for future water sources (particularly surface storages) to on-ground preliminary and detailed design because the prolonged delay in this progress will compromise the security of water supply for both the Sunshine Coast and the SEQ region as a whole.
 3. In recognition of the efforts of local government to respond and partner the water reform process, the State Government and in particular its institutional arrangements steering committee needs to tangibly demonstrate its consideration of local government's position including timely responses and statements of reason where local government's position is not embraced.

In the minister's second reading speech he stated—

The commission's planning activities will be conducted on a technical expertise basis. In carrying out its activities the commission will focus on the security of the region as a whole.

The minister stated further that included in the commissioner's activities will be the role of providing advice to the minister on options for new infrastructure necessary to achieve regional water security. I am very pleased that the minister has clarified that, except in relation to emergency situations, the commission will have a recommendatory role rather than a determinative role. I also note that in the minister's second reading speech he stated specifically—

The commission will not be an asset owner or operator.

The minister provided an assurance to this parliament and all Queenslanders that there is nothing in this bill that would allow a state takeover of non-government water assets. I think that is very important,

because when the Water Commission was first mooted a number of local councillors said that they would not support in any way, shape or form a takeover of their assets. But I am pleased to read in the minister's second reading speech these commitments and assurances. Further, the minister stated—

The Water Commission will be formally constituted as a new statutory authority within the portfolio of the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Water.

As such, this new commission will need to ensure proper compliance with the Financial Administration and Audit Act 1977.

I believe that the government must ensure that this new statutory body always remains focused on being a small enterprise and is not allowed to grow into a small empire, top heavy with too many staff providing support duties to the core work that this bill requires from the commission. I am certainly looking forward to this bill progressing to consideration in detail so that we can consider the clauses in more detail and also consider the amendments proposed to this bill.

I note that while speaking to this bill a number of members have used the opportunity to speak about existing or projected dams for Queensland. I will also take that opportunity. Before doing so, I advise all members that I have taken advice from the Clerk and advise that, although my wife and I do not own any land that is identified to be included in the Traveston Dam investigation area, on Tuesday of this week I discovered for the first time that a small part of my parents' property is included in the investigation area. Accordingly, I make this statement so as to allay any concern of a possible conflict of interest. Should it eventuate that I may be placed in a conflict of interest situation because of that and not able to represent my constituents' views on this proposed dam, my Independent colleagues the member for Gladstone, Liz Cunningham; the member for Nanango, Dolly Pratt; the member for Gympie, Elisa Roberts; and the member for Maryborough, Chris Foley have advised that they will be able to assist. I take this opportunity to thank them for their support.

I also take this opportunity to reiterate that I do not support a dam in the Obi Obi Valley or the Mary Valley. I believe that the dam should be built on land already owned by the state government at Amamoor. This land was purchased specifically by a previous state government for the very purpose of building a dam.

I also believe that all Queenslanders should play a part in water conservation and I again call on the state government to follow the lead of other state governments and some of our progressive local councils in Queensland and provide in this year's budget, which is only a few months away, a rainwater tank rebate or incentive package to encourage better water conservation efforts in urban areas. I am informed that, by using a 3,000 litre rainwater tank to provide water for flushing the toilet, washing the clothes, watering the garden and filling the hot-water system, the average household could reduce its annual use of mains water by 30 to 40 per cent. I commend the bill and look forward to it proceeding to consideration in detail so we can further consider the clauses and the proposed amendments.