



Speech by

## Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Tuesday, 9 May 2006

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### WATER AMENDMENT BILL

**Mr MESSENGER** (Burnett—NPA) (8.01 pm): I am happy to make a contribution to the debate on the Water Amendment Bill 2006, because the wellbeing and health—and I am talking about the physical and economic health—of Queensland families in our unique environment that we have been blessed with hinges on the competent, efficient and sustainable management of our state's water resources.

On the surface of this bill, all is calm and most casual observers will see this as an attempt to better manage our state's water resources, but, as we know, still waters run deep. As the shadow minister and member for Callide, Mr Seeney, has stated, the Beattie government is now in the politics of panic and this legislation before the House tonight is proof of that panic. This government has finally realised that we need more water infrastructure, and the recent snap announcement of new dams in south-east Queensland is nothing more than a cruel hoax. It is a cruel hoax on the people of Brisbane who expect this water. The government is raising their hopes. It is also a cruel hoax on the people of Gympie and the Mary Valley. It has caused untold heartache.

If the government wants us to put aside the significant environmental concerns relating to the lungfish, the Mary River turtle and the Mary River cod, let us look at the basic economics of the Traveston Crossing megaproposal. The area affected by this ridiculous proposal is 7,600 hectares at approximately \$20,000 per hectare. It means the government will have to spend in buyback alone in the vicinity of \$1.7 billion. Then there is the loss of infrastructure including powerlines and roads—roads that are still being built—plus the cost of building the dam wall. We are looking at at least \$300 million. The project will not get much change out of \$2.5 billion. The Premier is not being honest with the people of Queensland about the true cost of his grand plan to save his own political skin.

I recently attended a meeting of concerned landowners. Scott Alderson, who is the representative of the environment council, was present at this meeting. I gave an undertaking that I would raise some of their concerns. They would like the minister, if he would be so kind in his summing-up, to answer a number of questions. If Brisbane is going to run out of water in 2008, how can a dam being built on the Mary River, which could not be finished construction by 2011 and filled up by who knows when, be a solution for Brisbane's water crisis? Why is the government not looking at recycling and rainwater tank alternatives, as it suggests for Toowoomba? Dams, it claims, do not work in this case.

When will there be a map of proposed inundation, and when will that map be available to the public? Where and when will there be a cost-benefit analysis available to the public? Why has the government abandoned its Water Act 2000 process for involving community consultation? The water resource plan is not finalised. When will there be an environmental impact assessment made for public comment? How much water is being planned to be used from the Mary River? Why were these community people not consulted in the decision of a dam? There was absolutely no consultation whatsoever. It was pulled out of who knows where—the dark recesses of the Premier's mind.

What percentage of natural flows will be lost when the dam is built? How will the water resource plan's requirements for environmental flows be met? When will this dam proposal be referred for a determination under the EPBC Act? Of course, that is federal environment legislation which will have the

overriding or whip hand in this situation. Many people are now saying that this is a crafty, cunning political stunt to try to blame the federal government when the federal government does not give approval to this megalith.

They also want me to ask these questions: what are the impacts of this dam and how far will the impacts of this dam go downstream? What will be the impact of a major flood while the dam is being constructed? At what rate will the dam fill up with sediment and how long will it be affected? We all know that this is a very shallow dam. I do not think the government has bothered to think about these questions. What are the environmental impacts on the Great Sandy National Park, which of course is World Heritage listed? What is the value of the affected fishing and tourist industries in the Wide Bay? I think it is around \$300 million. I believe \$300 million has been budgeted for land acquisitions and infrastructure relocation. That has been proven to be completely ridiculous. It is pie in the sky stuff.

How much more money has already been spent determining a new route for the Bruce Highway? In the plan that we have seen the Bruce Highway is going to be cut off in two places. Has the government taken that into consideration? Has it liaised with the DNRMW? I have been told that this was a bolt from the blue for the DNRMW. It had absolutely no idea that it was going to happen. Why is it possible for the government to fund a recycling scheme for Toowoomba and not for the rest of south-east Queensland? These are important questions that the government needs to answer, as is the question: what has the government done in the last five years to overcome this problem? I will build on that question and ask: what has this government done in the last eight years to alleviate this problem?

The coalition shadow minister for natural resources has correctly pointed out that this legislation will not create an extra drop of water—not one ounce of water. This legislation is just another card in the Premier's house of cards that he has been building. That sound that we heard from the public gallery this morning—the boos—is the winds of change that will blow over—

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I understand that there is a fair degree of latitude in speeches at the second reading stage, but seven minutes have elapsed and the honourable member has not yet mentioned anything about the bill.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Copeland): Order! The minister is quite correct; there has been a lot of latitude given to both sides of this debate, not just the member for Burnett.

**Mr MESSENGER:** In addressing the Water Amendment Bill 2006, I have to say that, sadly, Queenslanders have learnt not to trust any legislation that this Premier brings before this place. Bitter experience has shown us that, no matter how benign the legislation may appear, this Labor Party is always looking for a chance to emerge from these still legislative waters like the shark from *Jaws* and put the bite on Queensland families. It is Queensland families who have felt the very real pain. A tidal wave of public opinion caused by this continued and sustained mismanagement of our water resources over the last eight years has forced the Premier and his government into bringing this legislation before this place, the Water Amendment Bill 2006. I offer my support for this legislation and eagerly look forward to the opportunity to examine this legislation in detail, which will create the Queensland Water Commission whose key functions, as mentioned in proposed section 345, will be to advise the minister on matters relating to the water supply and demand management and delivery of desired levels of service objectives for water supplied to the SEQ region and other designated regions; facilitate and implement regional water security programs; and ensure compliance with regional water security programs and with commissioned water restrictions. There is no doubt that, as part of an integrated water management policy, this state needs to build dams as well as carefully consider—based on the latest sound science—recycling initiatives and water-saving initiatives.

In relation to water recycling initiatives it is a timely moment to remind this House of the conservatives' water recycling vision. Many times those opposite have tried to paint the conservative side of politics as environmental vandals. It is an absolute furphy. The people from the bush have an abundance of common sense and respect for the environment. I have great confidence that the solutions for the many environmental problems posed by water shortages will be found in the wisdom of local communities and families who choose to live in the bush. People from the bush know not to take 45-minute showers. People from the bush know not to wash their car with a hose running all the time. They use a bucket wash. I remember a city colleague in a previous work situation who was obsessed with washing his car. I remember having a chat with him, saying the last thing I am going to think of in my last dying breath is, 'I wish I had washed my car one more time!' People from the bush know not to leave the tap running when they shave or brush their teeth.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr MESSENGER:** Members opposite have read my script. When water levels are getting really low people from the bush ask their guests to follow the water-saving technique if they use the toilet: if it is yellow, let it mellow; if it is brown, send it down.

It is the conservatives in this parliament who are listening to local community wisdom and leading the way with our vision to recycle water and improve water quality in our streams, rivers and oceans by lobbying for zero ocean outfalls. Even the environment minister has recently acknowledged the validity of our vision. The environment minister recently said during a revocation debate—

I also want to take a moment to commend the shadow minister for the environment on his support for zero ocean outfalls into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. It was absolutely excellent to hear his strong support for that objective.

It is now time for the environment minister to publicly display her support for zero ocean outfalls by taking all necessary action available to bring to an end the use of ocean outfalls. Statewide early research has shown that there are more than 30 ocean outfalls which are dumping in excess of 400 megalitres of treated sewage water into the Pacific Ocean beside our Great Barrier Reef. In my own backyard I have inspected the ocean outfall at Bargara. I welcome the state government's recent announcement to provide funding for the upgrade of the Bargara waste water treatment plant, but I am calling on the environment minister to help abolish sewage ocean outfalls. The funding of \$2.6 million towards the upgrade of the plant is a good first step, but it is now time—the time is now; it is right—for the government to adopt the coalition's long-term vision for zero ocean outfalls.

The plain stark fact is that, even after the Bargara waste water treatment plant upgrade is completed, it will still mean that two to three megalitres of sewage water is pumped into the ocean each day beside a beach where endangered turtles nest. The long-term common-sense solution is, of course, to re-use this water in agricultural or industrial projects. I can give examples. In the Burnett 200 farmers rely on the underground aquifer for irrigation purposes. Increasingly, that underground aquifer is becoming saline. Many of those farmers have only 30 per cent or 40 per cent allocations. We should be able to find a way to recycle the water that is pumped into the ocean. As well as that, the Bargara Golf Club would love to use that two to three megalitres of water that goes out each day. However, because of the government red tape—the cooperation between local government and state government—something like \$400,000 worth of studies has to be completed before even starting the recycling process. We need to streamline those processes.

I visited the Virginia recycling scheme in South Australia. Another one that I can think of is the recharge of the aquifer in the Burdekin from stormwater and other run-off. They are just some of the examples of the ways that we can recycle and make better use of our water. Of course, we should have more tanks for water supply, as many members have mentioned here. I have to pay a compliment to the Miriam Vale Shire Council. Since 1993 it has been compulsory in that shire to use water tanks. They are between a rock and a hard place with no water. They are very seriously contemplating the use of desalination plants because there is no other viable water supply.

I turn to the issue of water weeds in the Burnett. The issue of the quality of water that is being managed by the state government is paramount in my electorate as well. I drive across the Cedars Crossing over the Burnett River from which SunWater makes massive profits. As far as the eye can see, there is water weed—salvinia—on the top of this water. SunWater has not managed this problem at all.

**Mr Palaszczuk:** What do you mean by 'massive'? What's a massive profit?

**Mr MESSENGER:** The minister would like to know what a massive problem—

**Mr Palaszczuk:** The profit that SunWater makes.

**Mr MESSENGER:** Around \$59 million a year.

**Mr Palaszczuk:** That is how much profit?

**Mr MESSENGER:** Yes. I will tell the minister about the massive problem that we have in the Burnett and Kolan rivers. I hired a light aircraft. I took the door off and hung the video camera out. We estimate that there are some 300 to 400 hectares of water weed on both rivers. It is a massive problem and it is not being addressed by this state government, which is shirking its responsibilities.

This state government has failed to plan for the future, and this is evident by the numerous dams that are running dry throughout our state. As was pointed out by the shadow minister for natural resources, it is estimated that major dams in the south-east could run out of water as early as September 2008 while north Queensland could face water shortages by 2015. South-west Queensland is in a similar predicament and may lose its water supplies by 2016. What has this Beattie Labor government done about this up until now? In one word, nothing. Instead, it has ignored the coalition's warnings that the Beattie Labor government's failure to invest in water infrastructure to cater for a population growth would lead to dangerous water shortages across Queensland. We have all known about this population growth, and the modus operandi of choosing the do-nothing option has been reflected not only in water management but also across the broad spectrum of departments within the Queensland government. Health is another issue. It ignored the population increase there. This government has ridiculed the coalition's suggestions, calling on more water infrastructure. Only now is this government waking up to the fact that implementing these water infrastructures is vital. This opinion was backed up by the councils in the south-east late last month on 22 April.

It was reported in the *Courier-Mail* and later in the *Sunday Mail* in an article by Michael Corkhill entitled 'Mayors accept defeat' that council leaders admitted that the takeover of water resources was necessary in the south-east but only due to successive state government failings in their duty to fund dams and infrastructure. I would have to point out right now that of the last 17 years we have effectively had 15 years of Labor government. So the finger of blame can be pointed directly at this government and previous Labor regimes. It was reported—

As water levels dropped below 32 per cent for the first time on record, mayors had no option but to agree that a uniform approach to water management was needed.

I note that there was considerable concern from these mayors about the undue haste of the Beattie Labor government in pushing this latest amendment bill. The article in the *Courier-Mail* goes on to state—  
Some leaders had missed a hastily convened early morning State Government meeting because a request for them to attend had arrived too late.

This was extremely convenient for the state government and hardly surprising. The article further states—

On Friday night, most mayors were still unaware of the detail of the Water Amendment Bill 2006 introduced into State Parliament earlier in the day, which included fines of \$100,000-plus for water providers who did not comply with upcoming plans.

Once again the Beattie Labor government has used its usual tactic of minimal community consultation to hastily change legislation to its liking. I am also told that these mayors and the Local Government Association of Queensland were only given two weeks to respond to the amendments to the bill and make their own suggestions—suggestions which we are yet to see taken on board by this government. In closing, I have one remark, one comment. This government has failed to improve; it is time to remove.