



Speech by

**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS**

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## **WATER AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr KNUTH** (Charters Towers—NPA) (7.47 pm): The explanatory notes to this bill refer to the amendment of the Water Act to create a Water Commission whose main area of responsibility will be south-east Queensland. However, the minister can direct the commission to operate in regions and other parts of Queensland as well. The main function of the commission will be to advise the minister on issues relating to water supply and demand management, including infrastructure development. The minister does not need any more advice on water infrastructure development as the people of Queensland have been screaming out for a dam.

The south-east corner's water infrastructure is all about a lack of planning. When I talk about a lack of planning, I am referring to south-east Queensland and all over Queensland, including rural and regional Queensland. We also have infrastructure problems in south-east Queensland. I believe that those problems can be solved if we provide the infrastructure in rural and regional Queensland as well.

When talking about water infrastructure, there are a number of sites that I should mention: the O'Connell Creek project which was pushed by the Richmond Shire Council, the Hell's Gate Dam on the Burdekin River and a number of sites on the Bowen Basin.

The Flinders Shire Council has completed a cost-benefit analysis to build a 250-megalitre dam on the Flinders River. The Flinders River is Queensland's longest river and has approximately 50 per cent of the flow of the Burdekin, yet there is not one single weir or dam on the river system. A dam on the Flinders River has the potential to irrigate 17,000 hectares of land, diversifying the industry based in the shire with the addition of irrigational crops leading to economic advantages for people who live in this area and for the state. The site chosen for a potential dam is 15 kilometres north-east of Hughenden. There would also be significant benefits associated with such a project, including recreational and tourism benefits.

An intermediate scenario developed in relation to the study determined that the capital cost needed to develop the dam is around \$70 million. The introduction of cropping in this region would result in significant increases in the growth of the area. The area is best suited to the crops that are found in the Emerald irrigation area, in particular cotton, crops related to cattle production and horticultural crops.

The people of the Georgetown area are also waiting impatiently for news of the proposed Green Hills Dam on the Gilbert River. The land and water assessment report noted that the area was clearly identified as worthy of further investigation and after three levels of assessment the option to build a weir was upgraded to a dam.

For over two years members of the gulf water resource plan committee have provided input into the plan and they are asking when the moratorium will be lifted. The people seeking an increase in water entitlements are asking when they can start planning for their future. When can future and existing water users apply for increased allocations? Currently there is less than 0.5 per cent of mean annual flow in existing surface water entitlements. The length of time the moratorium is in existence severely impacts on the region's ability to plan for its future.

What sort of management is this? Billions of megalitres of water pour into the gulf region each year and they cannot pump out a drop of water from those river systems. We are talking about jobs; we are

talking about aquaculture; we are talking about irrigation. All that they are asking for is a few drops to be pumped out of the millions of megalitres pouring into that gulf each year. The minister cannot even provide them with a drop. Something has to be wrong with the system. I ask the minister to indicate in his reply when that moratorium will be lifted for that gulf region. When will the minister give the people in that region an opportunity to utilise the water that falls out of the sky that pours into that gulf each year?

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** Yes, you might have learnt something tonight. We are not talking here about an area where there are thousands of residents; we are talking about an area where you can travel 200 kilometres and not see one single person. There is a moratorium on those river systems and they cannot pump a drop of water out of them. I hope that the minister will do something positive and give these people an opportunity to utilise that water.

Another issue is the \$300 million pipeline. It actually costs more to build this pipeline than to build the entire Burdekin Dam, which is seven times the size of Sydney Harbour. What sort of management is this? SunWater has identified a site that is on the Isaac River at a cost of \$50 million and there are other sites in that region that have been identified that would be much cheaper than a \$300 million pipeline project. That is more than what it cost to build the Burdekin Dam.

In the Joh years dams were built and water infrastructure was put in place. He built power stations and he opened up this state. When members look back after they have been removed from government all they can possibly say they achieved is a footbridge and a sports stadium.