



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Hansard Tuesday, 6 February 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Purified Recycled Water

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure) (10.15 am): Statements and reports published in recent weeks have fuelled fears that south-east Queensland may run out of water before the end of next year. I would like to assure the people of south-east Queensland that, despite the very real water shortages gripping this part of the nation, water will continue to flow through their taps. However, make no mistake: our water situation is grim. We are in the grip of the worst drought on record. Our major dam system—the Wivenhoe-Somerset system—is at record low levels. As at today the combined levels for the Wivenhoe, Somerset and North Pine dams are 22.24 per cent. South-east Queensland residents and businesses are doing their bit to curb water use. Across the south-east, residents and businesses have cut consumption by more than 30 per cent under level 4 restrictions compared with their predrought consumption.

In January we averaged 721 megalitres a day of use versus the predrought average of 1,136 megalitres for that month. It is a sensational outcome. Nevertheless, as people know, we have not had the rain in our catchments that we need to replenish our dam supplies. Inflows into the combined Wivenhoe system are currently tracking at 20 per cent lower than for the same period—that is, April to December 2004-05, which to date is the worst full year on record.

As the Premier outlined earlier, tough times call for tough decisions which is why purified recycled water will be an ongoing feature of our water supply system. Two surveys undertaken in December and January of 1,000 south-east Queensland residents on each occasion found very strong support in the community for supplementing our water supplies with purified recycled water. When respondents in the January survey were asked whether they would support the use of purified recycled water for drinking that met all health and safety requirements, 78 per cent said they would vote yes. I note that that result is in fact consistent with the results of the online poll conducted by the Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Moggill, who also found with a lesser number, but nevertheless 78 per cent in support of the proposition. Purified recycled water gives us a new source of water that is not dependent on rain.

Tonight we begin an information campaign with a series of television ads aimed at informing the public about the need for purified recycled water and desalination as well as water-saving initiatives being taken to guarantee our short- and long-term water security. It will also provide information to residents about how they can access a range of government rebates to assist them in cutting their water use.

Key actions we are taking to secure our region's water supplies are listed in the emergency water regulation introduced into parliament by the Premier in August last year. I seek leave to table the progress reports on these emergency regulation projects for the months of November and December.

Leave granted.

Tabled paper: Document by the Queensland Water Commission titled 'Water Amendment Regulation (No. 6) 2006—Monthly Progress Reports' dated November 2006.

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Both of these are available on the Queensland Water Commission website and have been since they were published. Based on the current forecast performance of these projects, population growth and conservative dam inflows, analysis and modelling by the Queensland Water Commission show that south-east Queensland will not run out of water at the end of 2008. This is even before purified recycled water would be available to supplement our dam supplies. Based on our current worst case scenario, which is the region receiving the same level of inflows each year into the Wivenhoe system as those received in 2004-05, our worst year to date, the commission advises that dam levels will be at about 6.66 per cent at the start of December 2008. SEQWater advises that water from the Wivenhoe system can be accessed down to one per cent of capacity.

Even without adding purified recycled water, our dam levels increase to 7.15 per cent in January 2009 as the Gold Coast desalination plant increases its output to supply Brisbane. Clearly, if we continue to receive poor rainfall into our dams, the time frames for completing our projects are tight, and we have acknowledged this. But we are taking all possible steps to bring these projects in on deadline and we are reporting publicly each month on project performance. If our water outlook deteriorates further, there are other actions that can be taken to further reduce the pressure on our dam supplies. These include introducing a possible new level of restrictions and further scaling back power station water usage that does not risk the region's electricity supply. The commission will continue to closely monitor our dam inflows, particularly given that inflows for the 2006-07 year to date are currently tracking lower than the worst recorded year to date. We need to see what rainfall we receive in February and March, which are historically higher rainfall months in south-east Queensland, before any definitive conclusion can be drawn about the 2006-07 water year. The commission will also continue to track and report on our emergency water measures and make any changes to its scenario planning to ensure that our region has the water that it needs.