



Speech by
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MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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WATER AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL AND SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND WATER (RESTRUCTURING) BILL

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (3.32 pm): I rise to speak in support of the South East Queensland Water (Restructuring) Bill 2007 and the Water and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. It is interesting to look at the history of these bills and to consider some of the criticism that has been levelled at them, particularly from some people in the local government area and from members of the opposition. In making those criticisms, to coin an appropriately marine metaphor, I think those people have really missed the boat. They have missed the boat, because, if there should be any criticism, it should be that these reforms should have happened earlier. It is that simple. These reforms are certainly very timely. They fit very clearly within the suite of reforms that have occurred through our legislatures from the 1980s, the 1990s and into the 2000s.

Federally, during the Fraser years, when the rest of the world had moved on in terms of micro and macro-economic reform, absolutely nothing occurred. It was the Hawke and Keating years which saw restructuring in every aspect of our public and economic life. To criticise this legislation would be to say that none of those reforms should have occurred, either. It would be to say that we should be back to the old public telephone system when we had to put the money in the A or B coin slots in the black phones. It would be to say that there should not be competition in our telecommunications network or in our electricity network.

This legislation is a step in the right direction in that it puts in place exactly the type of reform that will move us towards rationalising these very important water assets, to running those water assets on sound business principles and to ensuring that we are properly evaluating what services and commodities are supplied in relation to those water assets. It is not that long ago that we saw similar reforms in other service areas. The one that always sticks in my mind is the Queensland Rail example. When Labor came to office in the 1990s, Queensland Rail was still operating on an old line accounting system with no real economic evaluation of assets or even a measurement of assets.

Essentially, these reforms will put in place a very important step towards ensuring that we can get on with the proper economic calculations of these water assets. They will be treated holistically instead of separately because they will be interlinked through the water grid. So it is important that the management that is applied to them are modern principles and that the important changes that are made are transparent.

Indeed, in that regard the management of our water assets is one of the very few areas of government that has not been reformed. Recently, we saw gas charges being affected by this reform. Sometimes these changes have undesired and unexpected consequences. But we have to find our way through those consequences and get on with bringing in a brave new world.

The Water and Other Legislation Amendment Bill sets out a framework for the sustainable management and allocation of the state's water resources, principally through a comprehensive water planning framework, including the compilation of water resource plans. Regional water supply strategies

are indeed part of this strategy. As we know, under the South East Queensland Regional Plan we are dealing with a range of massive new, visionary projects, including the construction of new dams and weirs and recycling and desalination plants.

Those projects are counterbalanced by a number of behavioural changes in our community. We are asking both residents and businesses to tighten their belts, as it were, or just to be responsible in their water use. This change in behaviour is being managed through the Home WaterWise Rebate Scheme, mandated water restrictions, education programs, improved water efficiency, water standards for new homes, and managing water losses through reducing mains pressure and fixing leaks.

Along with other members, I take this opportunity to congratulate the wider community, because the results show what people have achieved. I have spoken in this place about how it is often futile to legislate to make people do things that are important to society. The most important way of achieving these outcomes is through behavioural changes. That is exactly what is occurring in this situation. The behaviour in the community is indeed changing radically. People are moving towards a far more responsible way of managing their water resources. That change in behaviour is going throughout our society. In particular, our kids are really leading the way. I congratulate all the kids from the schools in my local area on taking such an interest in these water-saving schemes.

These bills are in line with our focus on achieving water savings that are essential to implementing a range of demand management measures through a collaborative relationship between the government and the Queensland Water Commission, which has been established under the water legislation. A number of measures will be phased in over a longer period. These include demand management, the promotion of awareness and, importantly, water charging for residential rental properties. Some significant submissions from landlords have been made to me in relation to this matter. It is an important measure to ensure that everyone in the community takes responsibility for their water use. The fact that landlords could not pass this charge on to their tenants has been a hole in the dam wall, as it were. From 1 January 2008 it will become mandatory to install meters on individual units in a multi-unit managed property.

There are a number of small and miscellaneous elements to the bill that I will not canvass in detail. The South East Queensland Water (Restructuring) Bill is an important adjunct to the legislation. Essentially it will improve the regional coordination and management of water, achieve more efficient water delivery systems in south-east Queensland, enhance customer service for customers across the region and create a clear accountability framework for water supply security. These are achieved by establishing a bulk water supply entity to own and operate bulk water supply infrastructure in south-east Queensland, establishing a manufactured bulk water entity to own and operate the Western Corridor Recycled Water Project and the south-east Queensland desalination plant, bulk water transport and a water grid as I mentioned previously.

As I have said, these are visionary projects. In Queensland at the moment we are experiencing what is almost a war mentality. We are facing a very grave enemy, which is the drought. We do not know how long and how deep such droughts can be as the records that are available show us a mere fragment of history. Geological records certainly show that these droughts can be very severe and very long. We do not know what we are in for, but we have to plan for all contingencies. We have to engage in the massive infrastructure development that Queensland is currently embarking on in order to anticipate these prospects.

I congratulate all in the state who have advanced this process at a technical level. This has been an incredible undertaking involving a lot of Queensland expertise as well as expertise from outside the state. All of those people are working well to achieve these ends. Again I congratulate all members of the wider community for doing their part in saving water and being part of an overall plan to make sure we get through this drought. I commend the bills to the House.