



Speech by

Ms Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (4.31 pm): I rise to support the South East Queensland Water (Restructuring) Bill 2007, the purpose of which is to primarily secure water for the people of south-east Queensland—a most important and precious resource. This bill gives effect to stage 1 of the proposed south-east Queensland urban water supply reforms and is essential to establish the new water entities and facilitate a structured and responsible vesting of the bulk water business from local governments to the new water entities. The bill facilitates the delivery of significant benefits to the people of south-east Queensland, an issue raised many times by the residents of Brisbane Central during my recent by-election campaign. These significant benefits include improved coordination and management of water, more efficient delivery of water services in south-east Queensland, enhanced customer service and, most importantly, a clear accountability framework for water supply security. Currently, south-east Queensland has an urban water supply industry which has bulk water sources, transport and treatment assets owned by 25 different entities servicing 17 retail businesses. Clearly this is not sustainable, especially during times of drought, and this bill is essential in streamlining the delivery of water for the people of south-east Queensland in good and bad times.

The bill establishes four new water entities which are non-corporate statutory bodies and their governance framework is similar to government owned corporations. They are the Queensland Bulk Water Supply Authority, the Queensland Bulk Water Transport Authority, the Queensland Manufactured Water Authority and the SEQ Water Grid Manager. The bill facilitates the transfer of the bulk water business from the existing water entities to the new water entities. It is important to note that the state government is only acquiring 20 per cent of the assets in question, with councils still having the remaining 80 per cent. Councils will still have the pipes and distribution assets and will still bill residents as they do now. With any new entities established, it is imperative that we secure the workforce to do the hard and necessary work in ensuring they are viable and able to deliver on policy objectives. Therefore, it is particularly pleasing to note that the new water entities will not be subject to the WorkChoices legislation and a smooth transition of necessary staff can be made under the state Industrial Relations Act. The Queensland government has made the commitment that there will be no forced redundancies and that transferred employees will not be disadvantaged as a result of the water reforms, and much consultation has taken place.

The South-East Queensland Water Transaction Unit has established a staff support group to address human resource and staff related issues—a key priority of the government. The group comprises representatives of unions, councils, South East Queensland Water and the state government. The staff support group has been meeting weekly since its first meeting on 6 August 2007 and since the government announced its decision about the final structure on 4 September this year. The councils have been represented at every meeting of the group. Reports on the issues discussed in the staff support group's meetings are also provided to the due diligence committee on which the councils are also represented. The key objective of the staff support group is to make recommendations and/or report to the Treasurer on matters that impact on existing employment arrangements of current councils and SEQWater employees as a result of the proposed water reform. Also, the staff support group is developing the staff support

framework which will contain a set of guidelines to assist councils, the new entities and employees to ensure employees are not disadvantaged by the project.

The bill provides for a process for the transfer of employees to the new water entities and that the transferred employees will be employed on the same terms and conditions with the new water entities. The Treasurer may also approve a staff support framework dealing with the transition of affected employees as a result of the SEQ urban water supply reforms. The local governments and new water entities must act in conformity with the framework. The bill also prohibits a new water entity from taking action to end a transferred employee's employment because of the carrying out of the project before 1 March 2011. These are all important protections for staff involved in the process of transfers, and these reforms where proposed will occur progressively between 1 January and 1 July 2008.

This bill only deals with the transfer of the bulk water supply and transport businesses, including assets, liabilities, contracts and staff, to the new water entities and the establishment of the new bulk water entities and the South East Queensland Water Grid Manager. There will be separate legislation to establish the SEQ water grid, regulatory framework and new distribution or retail entities. However, this bill is an important and necessary first stage to deliver water security for the people of south-east Queensland. I commend the bill to the House because I believe it provides a clear path to secure our most precious resource. I encourage all involved, particularly councils, to embrace this sound policy and structure and urge participation in meaningful negotiations to secure and ensure a successful outcome which provides a fair and reasonable compensation package free of political point scoring.