



Speech by

## Lawrence Springborg

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—NPA) (5.21 pm): This government's approach to water resource planning and water infrastructure investment in Queensland over a long period can at best be described as piecemeal. It has certainly been extremely lethargic in its delivery and planning. For a long time the Nationals have been warning about a growing water storage crisis in this state. Only the Nationals actually foresaw in the early part of 2000 that we were going to have a water shortage in south-east Queensland in particular and that this government needed to invest more in infrastructure. However, what did we get from the government over the ensuing months and years as the Nationals were warning that we were going to have this problem and it was highly avoidable? We had members of the then Beattie Labor government running around ignoring the problem, abusing and castigating us for even raising this issue. In actual fact, the members of that Labor government were running around saying that there was not a problem, that there was no emerging water crisis in Queensland let alone in south-east Queensland.

If any member opposite doubts what I am saying, I challenge each and every one of them to pick up the official record of this place, the parliamentary *Hansard*, and look at the government's response in this place over a number of years on this issue, particularly during the time that I was the leader of the Nationals in this place. Year after year I delivered my budget reply speech and I warned—

**Mr Lawlor** interjected.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** And it was listened to very avidly by the member for Southport. I warned about the issue of this emerging water crisis in Queensland. I was castigated year after year by this government—by the then ministers for natural resources and environment in Queensland, Mr Welford, Mr Robertson and also Ms Boyle at one stage, who actually described our inclination towards building dams in Queensland as 'nothing more than boys' toys', that we did not need to build toys. She described them as 'blokes' things'.

**Ms BOYLE:** I rise to a point of order. The member is misquoting me. I ask that he withdraw.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Darling): Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** When asked about the issue of building dams, the minister actually famously described at a conference that she has these blokes who keep coming up to her wanting to build dams and she variously went on to describe these dams as 'blokes' things'. That is certainly what the then minister thought about it. What did the then minister for natural resources, Mr Robertson, have to say when I was proposing the need to have major investment in dams across Queensland and in particular in south-east Queensland? The minister went on to actually castigate the Nationals at the time and said, 'You don't build dams; they are 1950s dinosaur thinking. We can solve this problem by simply having better water planning and better demand side management and probably praying for rain.' What a right royal pickle this government has got us into.

This government can run from its record but it cannot hide when it comes to its involvement in the current water storage crisis that we have in south-east Queensland in particular. I say again that it was only the Nationals who foresaw this crisis and only the Nationals had a plan to actually address it over a number of years. We had a very clear plan to build new infrastructure in Queensland and in south-east Queensland, including dams. The Nationals had a plan for a recycled water pipeline that would go through the Lockyer Valley to the Darling Downs. What did this government do? This government variously worked against that plan over a number of years.

If members do not believe that is right, they should look at the record of this place and look at what the then Premier said on 14 October 2003. He went on to castigate the Nationals and he said that this plan for a recycled water pipeline for the Darling Downs could cost \$810 million. It was going to blow out; we could not have this. We had one overrun from the government in recent times and that overrun was around \$600 million. So we are seeing the overruns in this government's recycled water pipeline basically adding up to what it would have cost to build the pipeline about four years ago. The Premier also went on to say that independent analysis estimates the cost of the project as being as high as \$810 million and that the government has rejected the project as being not viable on economic, environmental or financial grounds. So now we have a \$2.5 billion recycled water pipeline, not an \$810 million recycled water pipeline.

What sort of stupid economics is that that we are seeing from the government? If the Labor government had carried on with this project, which was planned by the Nationals in our period of government, with the feasibility work being laid down, it could have been completed in the early stages of this government for an absolute pittance compared with what it is spending now on what it is doing in the depths of a construction industry crisis. It makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. But the government wanted to play petty politics. It did not want to be bipartisan. It wanted to poke its nose at something which was eminently sensible. It was lethargic; it was late, and now it is costing the people of Queensland dramatically as a consequence.

What did we also hear from the government about four years ago? One of the reasons that it rejected the recycled water pipeline was because of a build-up of greenhouse gases. It said it could not do this because it would cause a greenhouse gas problem—that is, that the energy that would be involved in pumping this water would create too many greenhouse gases. When the government has a political problem, a water problem and particularly a power problem which flows on from that, then greenhouse gas emissions do not even rate in its thinking. This is the hotchpotch, irresponsible and irrational thinking that we see from this government that got us into this pickle to start with.

Let us go on to what the then minister for natural resources continued to say on 18 June 2004. He went on to condemn me and the Nationals for our request to build more dams in Queensland—the desire to build some more dams so we could catch some water. That could have been underway. But, no, we did not see the government move for another two years until it really started to understand that there was a problem. It ignored the warnings year after year, but after a while it had to admit that there was a problem. Once again, it was too late. The minister waxed lyrical. 'We have strategies and we have 15-year outlooks and we have 50-year outlooks,' he said in his press release of that day. All of the outlooks, all of the peering into crystal balls, all of the soothsaying from this government did not do us any good whatsoever; all it did was land us in this pickle. What we needed was some real action from the state government, not talk.

This is a real ripper. On page 3 of this tome from the minister he went on to say—

Mr Springborg claims that city after city have been placed on water restrictions yet the only restrictions I can find are the normal garden sprinkler restrictions that apply in Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Toowoomba and Ipswich.

That was our point exactly—that is, that we had a problem. We had a problem because our existing water storages in south-east Queensland, regardless of drought, were not able to sustain the additional demand being placed on them by an extra 1,500 people a week coming to Queensland. We have to be able to catch the water when it rains. Not only that, we need to have contingencies in place for the future. The sprinkler restrictions eventually led to bucket watering only and now to a limit of 140 litres per person per day.

Years ago the government failed to look at the warning signs. It ignored the warning signs and went out and actively castigated and engaged in a process of shooting the messenger. I say again that it was only the Nationals who foresaw this. It was only the Nationals that warned of this at the time. It was only the Nationals that actually had a plan to do something about this. That has to be recognised and it is a matter of public record.

We have heard much in this debate today. The member for Algeester stood up a few speakers ago and talked about the Wolffdene Dam. She said, 'if the Nationals were going to build it then why did they not acquire the land? The Nationals did not acquire any of the land.' It is unfortunate that the member for Algeester has such little corporate and historical knowledge of the facts and is simply regurgitating the ministerial brief which has been thrust in front of her. In actual fact, half the land had been acquired. One of our members of parliament, the honourable member for Lockyer, had actually had his land acquired for the

purposes of building the Wolffdene Dam. Any solicitor acting for a client in relation to a land deal in the area for the 30 years leading up to that knew there was a caveat on the land and warned their client that there was going to be dam built at some future time. People knew about this. This related to land that was not acquired as well as land that had been acquired for the Wolffdene Dam.

We have seen headlines recently—and government members have held some of them up in the chamber—saying ‘Oh, damn shame that the Traveston Dam had not been built’. I say, ‘Oh, double damn shame that the Wolffdene Dam was not built’ because we would not be in the mess we are in now in south-east Queensland. If we go back to the rain event in January and February last year, we know that tens of thousands of megalitres of water were flowing along the river system which feeds into what was the Wolffdene Dam site. The government suitably wishes to ignore that. The member for Algeester went on to blame climate change. She expressed an affinity with the rural people. She said that now the people of the city understand what water shortage is all about. She went on to blame it all on climate change. I am yet to be convinced that the water crisis in south-east Queensland is due to climate change. Some of it is due to drought, but a whole lot of it is due to no investment in water infrastructure.

I will give members an idea. At my place we rely largely on rainwater tanks, that is with the exception of the toilet in our house because we have the view that rainwater is too good to put in the toilet. Yet in the city it is the only place people can put it. We have the automatic washing machine. We have four kids and my wife is washing clothes all of the time. We use quite an amount of water. We have four-minute showers. We run a normal household with 20,000 gallons of rainwater storage.

Even though our rainfall this year has just touched 14 inches, which is down on average but we still have seven weeks or thereabouts to go this year for us to make our 24-odd inches, we have about 10,000 or 11,000 gallons in storage. Our conscious decision was that when our family expanded we would put in more storage so we could actually catch more water. That is what we have done. That is sensible. That is the sort of thing that people actually do. But not this government. It believes that we can have an extra 80,000 people come to Queensland each year and not do anything in so far as investing for the future. That is what has really happened here.

The member for Greenslopes made a good point in his contribution earlier. He said that we do not know the extent of this drought. We do not know the extent of the droughts that have gone before in Queensland’s history. That is true. With regard to climate change, it is yet to be established what proportion is going to be anthropogenic—that is, how much is human induced. There is no doubt that an amount of it is human induced. That is always going to be the subject of debate amongst scientists. It is impossible to take the normal cycle of the world and then take out the contribution of human kind and the other variables and repeat the situation in a laboratory and say what may or may not have happened.

The minister for natural resources will be aware of this: about 200 years ago in Queensland there was a drought and the Fitzroy River did not run for 30 years. I understand that the Burdekin was the same. We could not even imagine a drought of that extent in this day and age. How do we know that happened? From coral core sampling just out from the mouth of the Fitzroy River. No silt was laid down over a 30-year period.

We can talk about climate change and talk about the worst drought in history. It may be the worst drought on record. If we go back and look at the federation drought we see that that was pretty bad. We cannot say that it was the worst drought in history. I heard somebody from the CSIRO say recently that it is likely that in the last 10,000 years in Australia there have been up to 30 drought events that may have been this severe. We do not know how far this will go.

We have to stop using climate change and drought as an excuse for government maladministration and neglect of its basic obligations. The basic obligation of a government is to invest in water infrastructure to make sure that the people of Queensland are properly positioned for the future. That is where this government has actually failed. If members opposite doubt what I am saying, I point out that their new Premier went to CEDA, a well respected business representative organisation in Brisbane, and gave a major speech in recent weeks. Do members know what she said? She said that the government only two years ago discovered it was running out of water. If it had actually looked at the warning signs, which were obvious in the early part of 2000, then it would have known it was running out of water.

Blind Freddy could see where the problems associated with population growth in south-east Queensland were leading and the need for the government to do something. But this government sat back, castigated, poked barbs and poked fun at anyone who raised this issue then. It was highly avoidable. The government’s response was frankly about spin and about being seen to be doing something.

The government’s research shows what our research showed. People wanted to know that the government had a plan. They wanted to hear the words ‘water grid’. So we have a water grid. Now we have \$9 billion of water investment which those opposite hope will solve this problem. We will see very little water for that \$9 billion.

In actual fact, a former minister for natural resources, Mr Welford, castigated the Nationals in the late 1990s because we had a plan of borrowing \$1 billion to spend on water infrastructure across Queensland which could have delivered a number of dams and pipelines given there was not an overload

in the construction industry and given the cost of construction. Now we are talking about nine times that amount. The majority, if not all of it, is being borrowed to build a water grid to solve a political problem in south-east Queensland. That is the response we continue to see from this government day after day after day.

I want to turn to one issue which really concerns me regarding the Water and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Most of this is eminently supportable and no-one is going to argue against it. But I am concerned about the proposed restrictions on the use of groundwater taken from backyard bores. It might be very easy for this government to create an argument that these people should be on exactly the same restrictions as anyone else because we are in dire times. Keep in mind that most of the dire times are due to this government's inaction. It is now reaping what it has sown.

Keep in mind that it has been a person's right to sink a bore. People might not like that right. No doubt the Labor Party, with its socialist attitude, might not like that right. That is its philosophical position. I might not like that position but I have to understand and respect that view, although I totally and absolutely disagree with it. Those people spend up to \$30,000 or \$40,000 sinking those bores and are providing water for themselves because the government has not provided it.

The government is now saying that it is going to place those people on water restrictions just as severe as if they were connected to a reticulated water supply. If the minister is going to do that, the very least he can do is compensate those people 100 per cent for the cost of their investment, because they have been misled. They have been falsely and deceptively misled into believing that they would be able to do this and have taken into consideration their own water needs, yet now the government is taking away that right.

I am concerned about incrementalism which will see us go this way in the future for stock, domestic bores and other things as well. This legislation simply says that the government can do this where groundwater is being taken from the same source that supplies or supplements the town water supply. We do not even know the hydrology in a lot of these places, and I am concerned that we will see a bunch of tin god bureaucrats running around making subjective judgements about whether that person's bore is tapping into an aquifer which is feeding laterally and therefore impacting upon water supplies somewhere else. I do not believe you can do that, quite frankly. I am principally opposed to it, but I am also opposed to it because the science that enables you to do it is very lax.

If the government wants to take something that somebody has been encouraged to do, then it should be prepared to pay for it. The other point here is that every single rainwater tank which has been provided by people to try to do for themselves what the government could not do in south-east Queensland is probably catching maybe 100 million litres every time we have a major rainfall event across south-east Queensland. Does the government know that that is impacting upon the water supplies that would otherwise be fed into many areas? Therefore, doesn't the same sort of argument apply—that is, if it is done to bores, why not to rainwater tanks? Of course I would advocate that the government should not do it to either, but the same argument applies—that is, that water has been captured but it was going to go into the cumulative pool which was going to be used for many towns and cities across Queensland, particularly south-east Queensland. We have to respect people's rights and we have to encourage their investment to do things for themselves. If they want to help themselves, the government should be prepared to help them, not punish them.

The other issue is this government's water asset robbery with regard to south-east Queensland council water assets. Frankly, if this government is going to do that, it should be prepared to pay proper and due compensation. That is the principle that we work under—just terms. This government should be prepared to do it, but it is not prepared to do it because it is a part of its daylight robbery.

Time expired.