



Speech by

Hon. Paul Lucas

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

Hansard Tuesday, 30 October 2007

MOTION: WATER ASSETS

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for Infrastructure and Planning) (5.40 pm): I second the motion moved by the Premier. The closest that people in my electorate might come to experiencing the complexity of 25 different institutions dealing with the storage, transition, distribution and sale of water in south-east Queensland is when they travel to the United Kingdom and read a map of the London Underground. I have looked at a map of the Tube and at a diagram explaining current urban water arrangements in south-east Queensland. While the Tube map might give the water arrangements diagram a run for its money in terms of complexity, at least the Tube is managed by one authority. There it is: there are the current water arrangements and there is a map of the London Tube. I table both of those because you might as well swap one for the other, except that the Tube is managed by one authority—that is, Transport for London.

Tabled paper: Diagram titled 'Current Urban Water Arrangements in South East Queensland'.

Tabled paper: Map of the London Underground.

It is the sort of rigour the state government wants to introduce to the management of bulk water distribution in the south-east—having sensible functional arrangements. As I said at the start, I do not expect that most people are concerned with the inefficiencies of the current arrangements, nor should they have to be. Residents just want a secure water supply. That is why the state government is spending more than \$9 billion building two dams, three advanced water treatment plants, a desalination plant and 450 kilometres of pipeline to connect them.

In examining current arrangements for water supply assets in the region, the state government identified a number of key problems. These problems were: a lack of clarity and proper accountability around ownership of water assets in south-east Queensland; confusion about respective responsibilities of state and local governments for water security; 25 different entities running the place; council boundaries encouraging focus on local issues, not on regional water security. We say now that we adopt a planning horizon for south-east Queensland, we say that we operate an electricity system for beyond south-east Queensland, we say that we operate a transport system for south-east Queensland, but for some reason those opposite think it is justifiable not to deal with water on the same basis. That is simply ridiculous. The state government—not the Brisbane City Council, not the Gold Coast City Council and certainly not the federal government—has said that the reality is that enough is enough. Indeed, what we are doing is bringing water and sewerage in some respects into line with what happens in other states. The way that it happens in Queensland could hardly be described as best practice.

Unfortunately, despite the Lord Mayor of Brisbane previously endorsing a methodology for compensation, we now have him out there conducting a scare campaign. Of course the opposition, which has no agenda whatsoever and is not capable of doing it at all, has hopped on his bandwagon because it has no other bandwagon. Those opposite voted against the water grid. Some of them do not want a dam, then others do not want a desalination plant—and they are both from the Sunshine Coast—and some of them do not want a pipeline. One thing that they have in common with each other is that they know nothing.

So first of all the mayors were out there scaring ratepayers about increasing rates and then they moved to scaremongering about services being cut. We all know that the councils were out there previously saying, 'All the money we get from water is reinvested in water.' But south-east Queenslanders who drive on the roads every day observe leaky water mains—water mains that simply have not been fixed by local authorities. Indeed, the state government put up \$32 million for local authorities to invest in pressure reduction and leak reduction and they have only managed to spend a third of it. Their stewardship of water assets is far from ideal. That is why we will take responsibility, not for all of it—we will reform the rest of it in relation to retail and distribution—but we will accept responsibility when it comes to transition and bulk water, and that is what we are doing. We are putting our money where our mouth is when it comes to \$9 billion of expenditure.

Let us further analyse local government when it comes to its claims of rate rises and service cuts. We have said before that local councils started off with their original claim that all the money went back into water. If it all does then why do they have to increase rates or cut services? We know that local authorities are sitting on a gold mine: they are sitting on rate revenues, and rates in south-east Queensland are going through the roof for no other reason than more people have houses here and they all pay rates and property prices are going through the roof. Members only have to look at their quarterly rates to see what is happening. Those councils do not have to do any extra work to benefit from skyrocketing land values which is increasing their rates base.

Miss Simpson interjected.

Mr LUCAS: We will leave the economic giant over there alone for the time being. When it comes to issues such as local governments' relativity with the federal government, they are on a par. They hang on to the money, they do not want to spend it and they leave it all to the states. Bob Abbot is well to be embarrassed because all of them are nothing but an embarrassment.

Time expired.