



Speech by

## Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Wednesday, 6 June 2007

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### WATER ASSETS

**Hon. PD BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (5.44 pm): I move—

That all words after "Parliament" be deleted and the following words inserted:

1. Acknowledges that the current system for storing, transporting, distributing, regulating and retailing water in South-East Queensland is confusing, inefficient and inconsistent with a regional approach to this issue;
2. Notes the need to reform the institutional arrangements for storing, transporting, distributing, regulating and retailing water in South-East Queensland;
3. Notes the commitment in relation to water reform given by the Deputy Premier to the Parliament on 24 May 2007 as follows: "All assets will continue to be owned by government. The Queensland Water Commission report does not recommend, nor is the government considering, any privatisation of any part of the water asset system."

The Deputy Premier told parliament on 24 May—

All assets will continue to be owned by government. The Queensland Water Commission report does not recommend, nor is the government considering, any privatisation of any part of the water asset system.

End of story, end of quote. Mr Speaker, you and I will recall this because you were a mayor in north Queensland. When the Townsville-Thuringowa Water Board was forced on Townsville in the late 1980s by Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen there was no compensation offered by the government of the day.

**Mr Wallace:** They're still waiting.

**Mr BEATTIE:** They are still waiting for compensation from the National Party. The reality is that in moving this amendment I acknowledge that we are being fair about the ownership and structure of water. In the south-east corner of Queensland we currently have 22 bulk water assets owned by 12 different bodies and 17 water retailers. The member for Moggill seems to think that that is a good system, a good thing, an efficient system. He is one of the very few south-east Queenslanders who does.

This is not about a full government takeover of water. This is not about privatisation by stealth. In all there are 25 different water entities just in south-east Queensland, all with different approaches to managing water. Future generations will congratulate my government for having the courage to do what we are doing.

Today's welcome rainfall aside, we are in the state's worst drought in history and it has changed the way we think about water forever, hopefully. We must rethink how water is managed. We can and must do things better. The south-east Queensland water grid will allow us, for the first time, to move water from areas of plenty to patched communities. This is a grid for all south-east Queenslanders. Climate change, as we all know, is making our weather patterns unpredictable. Communities that currently have a surplus of water have no guarantees that this state of affairs will continue into the future.

The current water management systems across local government areas will not sustain the new equitable approach to water supplies. That is why my government commissioned independent expert advice from the Queensland Water Commission on ways we could bring about reform and ensure south-east Queensland has a water management structure to meet the challenges of this century. My government is acting on those independent recommendations contained in the QWC's report *Our water*:

*Urban water supply arrangements in South East Queensland.* I have already tabled this report in the House.

The report recommended the complete reform of south-east Queensland's water delivery services. The QWC believes that this is the only way to provide a secure, commonly shared water supply through the grid. Despite the opposition's ill-informed arguments, it is clear to all dispassionate observers—that is, those with a brain—that there is a lack of clarity and proper accountability around ownership of water assets. There is confusion about the responsibilities of state versus local government. Most people think the state government already controls bulk water. We do not. That confusion in the community is understandable.

Under the new streamlined structure just three bulk water suppliers—that is, state owned authorities—for the benefit of the member for Moggill, will operate. Two of the bulk water providers will own our dams, weirs and other sources. These will be based on catchment areas. One will encompass all bulk water assets in the Moreton catchment, taking in the Wivenhoe-Somerset dam system and the relevant water treatment and storage facilities in Brisbane, Ipswich and Redlands. The others will integrate surrounding bulk water assets on the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast such as the Hinze and Ewen Maddock dams, the Logan area and the Albert and Mary rivers. The third company will control the manufactured water supply to the grid—that is, the Gold Coast desalination plant and the western corridor recycled water plant.

The important point that I need to make is that this model will deliver a properly planned, regionally focused water supply system that clarifies the roles of state and local government. This is about having a management system that will be able to provide certainty once the water grid is built. This is common sense. When we get a Water Grid Manager appointed as a statutory authority, which is part of the plan, to control the equitable sharing of water across the region we will achieve that—an equitable sharing of water across the region.

I repeat, this is not about a full government takeover of water. It is not about privatisation by stealth. This is about good management practices. This is about providing a water grid that, as much as humanly possible, will drought proof the south-east corner of this state.

Let us not forget that councils will still have an important role to play at the retail and distribution end. Under the proposals the councils will jointly own a single distribution entity that will be responsible for the domestic network and pumping stations and will also jointly own three retail companies. In conclusion, let me say this: this is common sense, it is practical and it is long overdue.