



Speech by

Rosa Lee Long

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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MOTION: LOCAL AUTHORITIES, WATER SUPPLY

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (5.51 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by the member for Gladstone. Water is one of the highest priority issues here in the south-east and it certainly is a subject that has attracted more and more attention as the crisis has worsened. Now, it has reached the stage at which the state government is floating the option of seizing control of local authority assets so that it can have sole control of existing water supply infrastructure in this region.

Clearly, this move has implications for the rest of the state. If this government seizes local government assets to resolve one of its own responsibilities, there will be nothing in the way to stop it seizing other assets as well. It will not be confined to the south-east; the government's tentacles will reach right across the state. We often hear the Premier rail against Canberra usurping states' rights and protesting about Canberra overriding states' rights, yet at the exact same time he is planning to usurp local government powers and override local government processes. The hypocrisy is breathtaking.

But it does not stop there. We also have a government that is insisting that any revenue that local governments receive from water infrastructure needs to be spent on water infrastructure. Yet this government has raided port authorities, energy companies and other GOCs and taken their revenue into consolidated revenue to spend willy-nilly on buying votes. Again, the hypocrisy is breathtaking.

This morning the Premier said that the difference between water revenues and revenues from power or ports and so on was that water was a life and death issue. In that case, one might ask: why was nothing done to secure adequate supplies before water became a life and death issue? It is also not acceptable for this government to suggest that securing the future water supply of the south-east has been the responsibility of local government. That is just playing Pontius Pilate. It was not local government that received reports dating back years warning of the need to prepare for drought, it was not the mayors of the south-east who sat down in meetings with senior departmental staff to consider the dire predictions of impending disaster through lack of structure; it was this government. So in the interests of moving forward, perhaps the first thing that should happen is for this government to step up to the plate, own up to its mistakes and stop the pathetic duckshoving that it has indulged in while water reservoirs have been running dry.

Although the focus of this crisis is on the south-east, the issue of water management and cooperation—or lack of it—from the government is also of vital concern to people in regional electorates such as the Tablelands. People in regional Queensland are watching with very great interest indeed how these issues are dealt with and how they are playing out. The issues relate to more than just water management planning, or the lack thereof.

One clear example is the debate about paying for the massive raft of infrastructure projects that are now underway or planned to ensure that Brisbane and the south-east has enough water to ride out the drought. When the pricing recommendations of the Queensland Water Commissioner were released, they were based on full cost recovery as demanded by the National Water Initiative. Yesterday, the Premier told this House that these prices are not going to apply and that, in fact, subsidies to the tune of some

\$1.5 billion over the next 10 years would be granted to the south-east so that consumers would not have to pay the full cost of the water grid.

Yet in my electorate, where studies are being undertaken for the Nullinga Dam, we are told that there is no option but to go down the track of full cost recovery. That is expected to mean that, once the dam is constructed, the water will cost in the thousands of dollars per megalitre, because full cost recovery will be enforced. Shires in my electorate are facing a doubling of water charges as SunWater hikes up its fees. Why? Because it is enforcing full cost recovery. If it is good enough for ratepayers in the south-east to escape the burden of full cost recovery, why is it not good enough for ratepayers elsewhere in Queensland? To paraphrase George Orwell, we are all equal, but some are more equal than others.

Irrigators in the area known as above Tinaroo Falls Dam and who have agreed to participate in the introduction of the water meters to assist the state government to better manage underground water supplies are being slugged with the cost of buying and installing and maintaining those meters. They even have to pay for the people to come to read the meters. AgForce has figures which show that irrigators across Queensland will soon be hit for \$55 million for water meters that they will never own. Let us remember that irrigators use only four per cent of the state's water. That is hardly an excessive amount in return for the jobs, income and export earnings that are generated, not to mention the food that is produced to be put on our tables.

Although there must be a cooperative approach in the south-east, there also needs to be a cooperative and equitable process for the rest of the state. Water is a life and death matter. No-one has suggested until now that the people of Brisbane are in danger of perishing because of a lack of an affordable drink of water. But the Premier has now raised that spectre. In regional areas, people's livelihoods are in danger of perishing from a lack of affordable water.