



Speech by

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**MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS**

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

**Ms LEE LONG** (Tablelands—ONP) (8.12 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Water and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. This bill is before the House for just one reason: the complete and utter failure of governments, both Labor and coalition, over decades to provide enough water storage infrastructure for the growing needs of Queensland's swelling population. How many significant dams have been built in Queensland in the past 20 years? One! Would the current drought have had such an impact if we had more dams holding more water and giving us more capacity to withstand dry spells? Of course it would not have had such a severe impact.

Instead, short-term political gain continually overrode good planning, and over and over again the decision was made not to build water infrastructure. Now we are faced with multimillion-dollar water grids, an asset grab of local council water assets of breathtaking magnitude and, again and again, an insistence that demand management needs to be tightened up. In plain English, this government's first response to its own failure to provide enough water is to tell the people of Queensland that it is their fault for daring to consume it. Somehow it is not the Goss, Borbidge, Beattie or Bligh governments' lack of foresight that is the problem; it is the average Queenslanders' audacity in thinking that water was for using.

The bill before us today highlights this attitude. The explanatory notes state the objectives of the bill, the first two of which are to—

- implement a range of demand management measures in the south-east Queensland (SEQ) region to address the continuing drought and contribute to long-term sustainable water use;
- implement a range of short and long-term demand management measures in areas outside the SEQ region also experiencing water supply issues because of drought ...

Of course, what is hidden in there is a reference to long-term sustainability. There is clearly no intention to provide sufficient water infrastructure to return to the levels of consumption that are still considered normal in many parts of the state and that were normal even in the south-east not so long ago.

We have wild rivers legislation locking up rivers and watercourses in one part of the state and country that experts are predicting will continue to have decent rain in the supposed climate change future, that is, in far-north Queensland. We have soaring prices on water, not because it has suddenly vanished from the planet but because the amount harvested and held by infrastructure has remained practically unchanged for decades and is now insufficient for the needs of our growing population, industry, agriculture, tourism and the list goes on. We are seeing prices on the grocery shelves climbing as basic foodstuffs are becoming less and less affordable. However, instead of building more and bigger dams, we are told that the first objective is to cut consumption. The only possible reason to do that is as part of a coordinated, wide-ranging and long-term plan to secure the entire state's water supply future, not just the drinking supply for the overpopulated south-east.

Drought is part of this nation's existence. So, too, are the wet seasons that sweep across it. It is vital that this precious resource is harvested and stored for the maintenance of jobs and industry. While that should not happen at any cost, it is certainly madness to let millions and billions of litres of rainwater flood

out into the ocean each wet season, just to turn around later on and try to take the salt back out of it in massive power-hungry desalination plants.

In far-north Queensland the Nullinga Dam on the Walsh River is now subject to a feasibility study. It needs a firm commitment to be constructed as soon as possible. This government's own statistics indicate that all available water allocations for rural purposes in the far north will be used up some time within the next 15 years and the lead time for Nullinga is estimated at around the 10-year mark. A clear and firm commitment must be made soon. The mighty Tully-Millstream project, which offers massive clean green hydro-electric power and sustainable irrigation benefits, also needs to be back on the front burner.

However, the bill before us sets about outlining the demand management measures to be adopted and notes that those measures will include water consumption information for tenants of residential rental properties to address the situation where about one-third of households receive no information about the amount of water consumed on the premises. Also there will be provisions to allow for water charges to be recovered from tenants of residential rental properties. However, this has the proviso that the lessor must have installed water efficiency devices and that the tenancy agreement states that the tenant is to pay the water consumption charge. Submeters will be mandatory in all new community title schemes, both residential and non-residential, and in buildings with two or more sole-occupancy units under a single title of certain classes.

There will also be provisions allowing the Water Commission or a water service provider to impose water restrictions on the use of water from backyard bores where the groundwater is being taken from the same source that supplies or supplements the town water supply. However, restrictions on the use of this bore water cannot be any more restrictive than those imposed on the reticulated supply.

The allowable uses of greywater will be expanded for indoor and outdoor use, and the restrictions on the class of a building that can use greywater will also be lifted. There are also sections that will allow for the trialling of on-site blackwater treatment systems in sewerred areas to assess the reliability of those systems for internal and external uses.

There are also amendments to the Integrated Planning Act to allow for the creation of a referral panel to assist the chief executive on matters about water licences that may be dealt with under an allocated water process set out in a resource operations plan. Also, a mid-form process will be introduced into the Water Act to cater for circumstances when the release or amendment of an ROP could allow for a water allocation holder to apply for a change to the allocation such as upgrading it from medium priority to high priority. This could trigger a large number of applications, and this new mid-form process will allow more flexibility in handling that situation.

For areas of Queensland outside of the south-east, the chief executive of NRW will have the power to manage urban water supplies where a significant threat exists to the sustainable and secure water supply. It does not explain why the existing service provider which in many cases would be the local council cannot do exactly this on its own. However, I am concerned by amendments that clarify that the Water Commission has the power to impose water restrictions at all times and not only during a drought. If there is no drought, there is no justification whatsoever for any restrictions. It seems the Bligh government's entire strategy even in times of abundant supply will be water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink.

Again, in the amendments for areas outside of south-east Queensland water service providers will be required to have an outdoor water conservation plan for reducing outdoor water use and promoting efficient water use. Again, this is to apply not only in times of drought but at all times. It beggars belief in the midst of the wet season, with torrential rains and floods inundating the tropical coast, that we could see Cairns, Tully and the tablelands subject to water efficient practices. George Orwell could never have imagined such foolishness.