



Speech by
Ted Malone

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard Tuesday, 13 November 2007

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

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (9.04 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak on these two bills with regard to water. Before I move on to the provisions of the bills themselves, I want to go back over history. In the House this morning the Premier used a red herring in order to encourage the backbenchers to have a bit of spirit in that she accused the Liberal Party of not supporting the Wolffdene Dam. In 1989 when Joh Bjelke-Petersen lost government and the Goss-Rudd government took over, we had a situation where—

Government members interjected.

Mr MALONE: What are you laughing about? That is true.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Perhaps if the member could direct his comments through the chair instead of debating with the member for Chatsworth.

Mr MALONE: My apologies, Mr Deputy Speaker. Three-quarters of the land had been acquired for the Wolffdene Dam under the National Party government at that time. As indicated by others in the House today, the Liberal Party was on the crossbenches. The government of the day had acquired the land for Wolffdene Dam. It was cancelled or dumped by the Goss-Rudd government that came to power in 1989. Goss and subsequently Beattie were crowing about the fact that 1,500 people were moving into Queensland every week, but they did not give any attention to the water resources that would be required to supply sustainable water systems to the people of the south-east corner of Queensland.

During the short time of the coalition government, DNR under Howard Hobbs put together a \$1 billion plan to build water structures throughout Queensland—and not just in the south-east corner, either—and then geared up another \$1 billion to ensure that Queensland would be drought proof under any circumstances. Unfortunately, the Borbidge-Sheldon government was not in power long enough to implement many of those schemes. But the reality is that that program will be on a shelf somewhere and can be dusted off.

The Nathan Dam was one of the big dams that was proposed to be built in my area but was walked away from by the Beattie government. I understand that there is some research being looked into in order to build the Connors River Dam, but that will be another 10 years away. There was a proposal for a dam inland from Mackay that certainly would support further irrigation in the Pioneer Valley and sustainable development in Mackay. There was a plan to introduce agriculture into the northern regions of Queensland with sustainable irrigation supplies. It is interesting to note that both the federal Liberal-National coalition and the Rudd opposition are looking at sustainable agriculture moving to north Queensland because of the quality of the water supplies in that region.

As I said, under Howard Hobbs and then at a later stage Lawrence Springborg that \$1 billion plan was put together. It is unfortunate that in the latter days of the Beattie government senior ministers like Henry Palaszczuk were saying that Queensland would not need another dam until 2050. They were amazing comments by a supposedly senior minister of the government at that time. He went on to say that the thinking of building dams was draconian and that it was old-age thinking by the National Party.

Isn't it strange that in that very short period of time from 1998-99 to 2003-04 suddenly there was a huge change of attitude by the government on the other side of the House?

The National-Liberal opposition is being accused of not supporting water infrastructure in the south-east corner of Queensland. That is far from the case. We have always been strong supporters of water infrastructure because we are practical people. I note that the member for Gregory is in the House at the moment. Any member who has had the opportunity to develop farmland or agricultural land knows that when you move on to a block of land the first thing you do is look at the available water supply to ensure there is enough to take you through the worst drought situation possible. The farmer either puts in an off-creek storage and pumps water or digs a well and makes sure that he has enough water, because that land is unsustainable unless it has a good water supply, not only for the farmer and his family but also for the produce and cattle or other stock that they might run on it.

We have a situation on a larger scale, obviously, in the south-east corner of Queensland where for a number of years governments—the whole term of the Goss-Rudd government and that of the Beattie Labor government—virtually looked the other way as each week 1,500 people moved to Queensland and moved into high-rises and other new developments right throughout the south-east corner of Queensland without a thought for the resources that would be required to sustain that population growth. When we really think about it, it is quite amazing that we now have a situation where the government is in panic mode and is building pipelines all over the place. It is threatening to build dams that are virtually unsustainable on some of the best cropping land that we have in Queensland. As other members have said in this House, when infrastructure is developed in a panic, the cost of that infrastructure trebles or increases even more than that. We are seeing the cost of the development of the infrastructure in the south-east corner of Queensland doing exactly that. The government is paying huge premiums to put in place this infrastructure. It is really unfortunate that not only the ratepayers and the taxpayers of the south-east corner but all of us right throughout Queensland will have to put our hands in our pockets to pay for this panicked development of infrastructure.

As others have said, we are seeing docket tendering taking place. Basically, to bring a project in on time, contractors are charging whatever price they come up with. The supply of aggregate concrete pipes—you name it—is at exorbitant levels. The coal industry is booming, so we are short of skilled workers. When that happens, the costs go through the roof. Had Labor started developing these projects 10 or 15 years ago when there was an opportunity to do so—when we could see problems arising, and for many years members on this side of the House tried to raise those problems with the government but were not listened to—we would be in a far better situation.

I can recollect—and it was quoted in the House again today—when the then minister for local government and planning, Desley Boyle, said that these National Party type men were coming up to her asking why the government could not build some more dams. She indicated that dams were blokes' toys, that the building of dams was old-age thinking and that we should be thinking of other ways of delivering water through restricting the usage of water and putting in place water-saving devices. The cycle has turned. We are now in a situation where we are saving as much water as we possibly can. The recycled water project is being limited quite extensively by the fact that less and less water is being recycled. Every time we recycle water, we end up with only about 60 per cent of the original volume of water. So there is certainly a limit in terms of how much water we can recycle.

I think the member for Tablelands in her contribution raised a very good point, but I would like to suggest that she was a bit off the mark when she indicated that the Borbidge-Sheldon government did not put in place any water infrastructure at all, either. As I pointed out, there were certainly plans to put in that water infrastructure and we need plans before we can go ahead and build infrastructure. The member for Tablelands raised the issue that the south-east corner of Queensland, particularly in the coastal regions with its buildings and roads, gets a lot of run-off that could be utilised far better. That water could be used to recharge aquifers or it could be put into small dams and cleaned up rather than allowed to flow into the sea and then retrieved through desalination. As we all know, desalinated water is probably the most expensive water that we could acquire. I believe that a lot of infrastructure could have been put in place had we had the time to do it. We have got ourselves into a situation where the government has panicked. Under those circumstances, the best decisions are never made.

I want to raise the issue of regulated areas. Some time ago in this House I raised the issue of the North Eton Bowls Club, which at that stage was having trouble maintaining its membership because a huge colony of bats lived next door. Now, that bowls club has had a meter put on its bore, which is in a regulated area. That club has just been charged \$300 to have that meter read. The club has not been charged for its water use, because the club is not connected to a water scheme. Instead, the club has a bore, which has an allocation of two megalitres, which it uses to keep the greens in good condition. That club is being charged \$300 just to have the meter read. Such an action will translate right across Queensland. Similarly, there will be huge costs for sporting grounds, such as school ovals, where a bore is used. Certainly, this legislation will allow for that to happen even more.

I have some real concerns about that level of impost on some of our smaller organisations. We all support our athletics clubs and our sporting organisations, but some of those clubs in rural areas have to pump water to get their greens in a softer condition in order to grow grass. If the club is located in a regulated area, which means that there are limitations on the number of bores that can be drilled—and that happens quite a bit right across Queensland—those clubs will be paying a charge just to be able to access that bore water. In the case of the North Eton Bowls Club, it is being charged \$300 a year for the meter to be read. As I said, the club is struggling financially. It is just another impost on the volunteers attached to that club who have to raise the money for that charge, and that is not easy to do.

As other members of the coalition have said, the coalition will be supporting the legislation, but it has some grave concerns about the situation in the south-east corner of Queensland as it relates to the council of mayors. Quite frankly, when we see such a grab for water assets in the south-east corner, we can almost smell a GOC or a Babcock and Brown takeover. As the previous speaker said, that is a step in the wrong direction. We are losing stakeholders. Our councils across rural and regional Queensland are under extreme pressure. It now appears that the councils in south-east Queensland are also coming under the thumb of this Labor government. With those few words, as I said, the coalition will support most of the legislation but has some very grave concerns about some parts of it.