



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.59 am): The residents of south-east Queensland should be bracing themselves for massive hikes in their water bills following another broken promise by this state Labor government to keep water rate rises low. Premier Anna Bligh stated the following in a press release dated 13 March 2007—

It would mean that the average bill would increase from \$350 to \$525 in real terms (excluding normal inflation) over 5 years rather than to \$733 under the Commission's recommendations.

But figures released yesterday show that this government expects Brisbane residents to pay at least \$747 for their annual water bill—another broken promise by this government that expects Queensland taxpayers to keep forking out money to pay for its costly infrastructure mistakes.

The tragic news is that water bills will rise much more than the guesstimate of \$747 because this figure does not include inflation, distribution charges or retail costs. Brisbane City Council's bulk water charges will increase by 197 per cent over the next five years and will increase by a total of 339 per cent by 2018, yet the government is predicting only a 70.5 per cent increase in household bills. The question is: who is going to pay for the remainder of the price rise? Who is going to pay for the difference in this bulk water charge in the next five years? How much further will water price rises affect people's cost of living by 2018 to cover the total 338 per cent increase?

Obviously infrastructure and planning minister Paul Lucas does not know. Today on radio he first claimed that his predictions included inflation. He then had to do a backflip once he was told that his own press release said that inflation was not included. This government is consistently loose with the truth. It lies on radio, it lies to taxpayers and it tries to fudge the grim reality of what taxpayers really have to pay by using glossy sales pitches that simply do not hold water—excuse the pun.

The cost of the water grid has continued to blow out, with many projects running over budget and delivering less water such as the western corridor recycling scheme, which recently added \$700 million to its cost yet reduced its expected yield from 232 megalitres a day to 131 megalitres a day. Unfortunately, after all the money has been spent, there is still no security in the water grid. South-east Queensland still risks running out of water, and the government knows this. That is why the Water Commission, in its latest monthly report released on 30 April, revealed that the government is still spending money to prepare for desalination barges on the Brisbane River as an emergency measure. So \$9 billion later, after years of harsh water restrictions and escalating water bills, south-east Queensland is still in the grip of a severe water crisis—one that has been created by this government's lack of action. The Traveston Crossing Dam, which the government says is the saviour, does not yield until after 2013.

I want to talk about our alternative policies to debunk the government's lies. Our ClimateProof SEQ water policy, which can be found on www.climateproof.com.au, proposes a modular desalination plant. Our policy will produce greater water-saving measures by rewarding water innovation. There will be an up-front \$800 million saving in capital—yes, saving in capital. This plant will be modular. That debunks the lies of this government, which does not seem to understand. The modular desalination plant would have an initial capacity of 125 megalitres a day but, because it is modular, would be able to be built up to yield 250 megalitres a day, which is more than what Traveston Crossing Dam would yield, not less as the

government has said. Recycled water from the western corridor will be used, but instead of being placed into drinking supplies it will be directed to industry, power stations and irrigators.

In relation to our Eco Home program, obviously the minister does not know about the number of unplumbed water tanks. There are over 200,000 unplumbed water tanks in south-east Queensland. The use of new technologies would see up to 50 per cent and higher of a household's water supply used more efficiently, which would create a significant saving. We believe we should reward innovation and water saving—and, no, it does not require an extra 1.9 million tanks, as the minister has stated.

This government is stale and tired, but because of its mistakes it is costing Queenslanders a lot. It is time for an innovative approach. We have had endorsements from people in the conservation movement who recognise that you can have green-powered desalination plants. You can also combine that with sustainability, with better water-saving technology and with rewarding those who innovate. That is at the heart of our policy. It is a shame this government still wants to proceed down a path that does not provide water security and which still has mobile desalination barges on the Brisbane River as an option.

Time expired.