



Speech by

Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

Hansard Tuesday, 11 November 2008

WATER SUPPLY

Mr HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (12.09 pm): I have referred in the House before to my support for science. Having regard for science means having regard for truth, and I believe we have no greater duty to our electors and the people of Queensland generally than to do so. That is why I wish to speak up in support of the Bligh government's decisive position and commitment to future proof south-east Queensland's water needs.

Today we are on the verge of completing a combination of water assets that will not only protect our water needs but ensure the water needs of future generations. Through a combination of desalination, purified recycled water, 400 kilometres of pipelines, water storages and potentially new dams, this government will put in place water security for Queenslanders.

And, yes, the purified recycled water that will be added to Wivenhoe Dam and our drinking supplies will go through a seven-stage process and will be safe. As a starting point to ensure this, the government introduced new legislation to introduce stringent water quality standards for recycled water and require recycled water management plans from each entity involved in a recycled water scheme.

Recycled water management plans outline the risks associated with the scheme—risks that exist with all potable water supply schemes—and demonstrate how these risks are managed, as well as demonstrate the quality of the water produced. These plans must be approved by the Office of the Water Supply Regulator prior to supplementing Wivenhoe Dam. Approval requires regular reviews and audits to ensure standards are being maintained. This involves demonstrating that the treatment processes at each barrier are operating effectively and verifying that the water produced by the advanced water treatment plants—barrier 5 as it is known—is consistently meeting the water quality standards.

Online, real-time monitoring is critical to the control of the advanced water treatment plants. If an alert limit is reached then an alarm sounds for the operator to investigate. If a critical limit is reached then the plant automatically shuts down until the cause is addressed. Monitoring equipment is regularly calibrated to ensure accuracy. Barriers 1 and 2 are the existing and very effective source control and waste water treatment plants operated by the councils.

Extensive verification that the product water is meeting the required water quality standards involves testing for a broad range of contaminants that have been reviewed by Queensland Health. This list has been developed through a catchment risk assessment based on the monitoring of raw water, potential contaminants in the catchment, those that could affect the treatment process and compounds previously identified in testing carried out by the Queensland Health laboratories.

The verification process has a minimum requirement of 26 samples over 13 weeks for some 200 parameters. Ongoing monitoring will continue to be conducted based on the significance of the compound, frequency and level of detection. The list of contaminants tested for will vary based on ongoing review of data collected. Regular broad screens for all contaminants will be conducted. Science is the basis of it. The Queensland Water Commission's expert panel, made up of national and international experts, is reviewing

the plans and the resulting water quality information to ensure the process is robust in producing water that meets the required standards and ensuring the safety of the production system.

It should be remembered that purified recycled water is produced at barrier 5 before entering the dam—barrier 6—where it will be diluted and detained for a further six months. The water is then re-treated through normal water treatment processes—barrier 7—which have produced safe water for the region for many years.

Science needs to and must come first, not fear. The science argument was respected by the members of the opposition when debating fluoridation. My honourable and learned friend the member for Surfers Paradise said in March this year that 'the oral health of Queenslanders was too entrenched in politics rather than in science'. It would now appear that purified recycled water has become entrenched in politics. The erstwhile leader of the member for Surfers Paradise, the member for Caloundra, also stood up in support of fluoridation saying—

There is no credible scientific evidence to suggest that fluoride has any adverse effect on health.

There is no credible scientific evidence to suggest that purified recycled water has any adverse effect on health, either. The member for Mirani took pleasure in supporting the Water Fluoridation Bill. He said—

Finally the government has accepted the overwhelming body of medical and scientific evidence that fluoride is safe.

When will the opposition accept the overwhelming body of evidence that purified recycled water is safe? At this stage, members of the opposition are not being led by the science and are therefore just not up to the mantle of government. In contrast, the Bligh government is committed to securing south-east Queensland's water needs, and we would not be pursuing purified recycled water as a part of our plan if the science did not stack up.