



Speech by

Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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SOUTH-EAST QUEENSLAND (DISTRIBUTION AND RETAIL RESTRUCTURING) AND NATURAL RESOURCES PROVISIONS BILL

Mr POWELL (Glass House—LNP) (9.38 pm): I rise tonight to speak to the South-East Queensland (Distribution and Retail Restructuring) and Natural Resources Provisions Bill 2009. The scope of the bill is quite large, as it focuses on the strategic planning of water use, its management and distribution, on leasehold land provisions, on Aboriginal land leases, land valuations and water supply safety and reliability.

In the time available to me I will not be addressing all of these issues. Let me begin by addressing the issue of water distribution in South-East Queensland. As acknowledged in the explanatory notes, the SEQ water reform program was to be delivered in a two-stage process. Stage 1 was all about bulk water reform. It included the construction of the water grid and major water resources.

I would like to pause on this note and highlight some of the impacts of stage 1 on constituents in my electorate. Firstly, there are ongoing frustrations over the construction of the northern pipeline interconnector stage 1. If these frustrations are indicative of the rollout of stage 1 of the water reform program then I am seeking reassurances that stage 2 will not be rolled out in such a slapdash and irresponsible manner.

Let me particularly refer to the impact on Mr Ray Roberts of Price Lane in Caboolture. Mr Roberts came and saw me at my mobile electorate office in Elimbah on the weekend rather concerned with recent correspondence from the Southern Regional Water Pipeline Alliance. Mr Roberts has a sizeable property and uses it to graze a number of horses. When the pipeline rolled through his property he was reassured that his property would be returned to its former state, that of good grazing land. In the interim the alliance also agreed to agist his horses at nearby properties with the supplementary feed costs being reimbursed by the alliance.

Unfortunately, Mr Roberts's property has not been returned to its former state and Mr Roberts knows exactly why. He assumed when truck load after truck load of his fine topsoil was removed from his property it would be returned once the pipe was laid. Such has not been the case. Instead his precious topsoil has been replaced by a rocky clay based soil that, despite the repeated efforts of the alliance, will simply not grow the grass seed spread upon it. So, as I said before, Mr Roberts was quite alarmed when he received the following letter from the alliance. It is entitled 'Re: Supplementary feed bills'. It states—

The Southern Regional Water Pipeline Alliance is pleased to announce completion of the Northern Pipeline Interconnector Stage 1 (NPI, Stage 1).

In the time that construction activities within the corridor were undertaken, feed supplementary costs were reimbursed to you by NPI Stage 1 for any animals or livestock that were unable to occupy or use the corridor that runs through your property.

All construction activities and reinstatement works associated with the NPI Stage 1 within your property are now complete—

That is questionable according to Mr Roberts and I support him in that—

and, as such, the land is now returned to you for your occupation and use.

As a result, your property can now be occupied and used for animals and livestock.

Your feed supplementary costs have been authorised until 16 October 2009.

Please ensure you send your final feed supplement receipts ... as soon as possible after the 16 October 2009 for processing.

Thank you for your ongoing patience through construction of the NPI Stage 1.

Yours faithfully

Mark Stevens

Project Alliance Director

The problem is, if Mr Roberts can no longer fund the agistment of his horses or get that supplementary feed reimbursement then nothing is left for him but to sell the horses themselves, because there certainly is not any feed left on his property. I call on the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning to review this issue with the Southern Regional Water Pipeline Alliance so that Mr Roberts can return his livestock with the full knowledge that they will again be able to graze on his property.

Regrettably, examples such as these do not instill confidence that further rollouts of the stage 1 water reform program will be any better. I think in particular of Keith and Judy Paxton of Woombye. The Paxtons own an orchard through which will pass the northern pipeline interconnector stage 2—the \$450 million monstrosity that will connect Landershute with Lake McDonald, carving swathes through the Sunshine Coast hinterland and boring holes, at incredible expense, through places such as Pringle Hill south of Nambour.

Mr and Mrs Paxton have every right to feel concerned that their property will never be the same again, especially when plans suggest the pipeline will do rather bizarre things such as reappear above ground to traverse one of the dams on their property. They and I alike hope and pray that the government has learned from the mistakes of NPI1—mistakes like those committed on Mr Roberts's property. They hope and pray that they will continue to have a fully functioning and profitable orchard at the end of the construction.

While on pipelines, I would again remind the government that if it builds these things they must include two-way pumping stations. A tokenistic promise that such stations will come is cold comfort for the thousands of water users on the coast who are watching their precious water head south with no guarantees and no way for it to come north if or when we may need it.

I would like to briefly touch on another key project within what the explanatory notes refer to as the SEQ water reform program—the Traveston Crossing Dam. I recently had the privilege of attending the Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee AGM in Gympie. The Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee, or MRCCC, is a fantastic organisation. It is an incredibly successful, massively supported organisation that is really achieving some amazing outcomes for communities along the Mary River.

At the AGM I was able to hear firsthand updates on a wide range of projects, including the SuperGraze initiative that is looking at improving the profitability, the resource condition and the sustainability of grazing enterprises as well as some significant environmental outcomes. There was also a collection of FarmFLOW field days and training activities, conservation partnerships programs, some special living with threatened species studies and community based water-monitoring activities.

But the particular project I would like to highlight is one that brought home to me the environmental consequences of the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam. It is clear that the environmental consequences have begun. The MRCCC has been contracted by the Queensland department of main roads to prepare a report on the baseline conditions of the Skyring and Coles Creek catchments in the Federal area as part of the Cooroy-Curra Bruce Highway upgrade. This highway upgrade is necessary because of the dam, but the road realignment itself will also have massive impacts on the Mary River catchment.

The realignment includes what is commonly referred to as straightening what is currently the meandering watercourse of Skyring Creek to facilitate a bridge construction. So MRCCC has been tasked to determine the physical and chemical water quality of the creek, its turbidity, its habitat and fish, frog and macroinvertebrate communities, both up and down stream of the proposed straightening. My studies tell me that when we straighten a meandering creek we dramatically increase the water flow and change forever the ecosystem. It is clear that the environmental damage and disaster that is the Traveston Crossing Dam has well and truly begun. Thank goodness for groups such as MRCCC, who will be there to record just how disastrous it will be.

So after these catastrophes it is with some trepidation that we consider this stage 2 legislation. I am pleased, however, to see that the request made by the council of mayors has been acknowledged and that the two councils I work with, the Sunshine Coast Regional Council and the Moreton Bay Regional Council, will be able to form a corporate entity for water distribution and retailing. This is a most sensible outcome and one that we are applauding on the coast.

The amendments to the Land Act 1994, which are to allow for an additional purpose for renewable energy projects to occur on leasehold lands, are eminently sensible. Regardless of one's views on climate change, renewable energy is the way of the future. I am a passionate advocate, as I know the LNP is, of renewable energy.

As the bill states, allowing renewable energy projects to occur on leasehold land makes it possible for wind farms to proceed. Wind is a particularly clean energy source. I note that Thursday Island now operates two 22-kilowatt wind turbines with its diesel power station, replacing some 359,000 litres of diesel per year. Similarly, Queensland's largest wind farm—the 20,600-kilowatt turbines at Ravenshoe on the Atherton Tablelands—produces some 12 megawatts of energy.

If we look further afield across Australia we find that the city of Albany in Western Australia, which has a population of 30,000 people, now receives some 75 per cent of its energy needs through twelve 1,800-kilowatt turbines. Wattle Point in South Australia, Australia's largest wind farm I understand, uses its 55 turbines to produce 91 megawatts of energy—the equivalent of the energy requirements for 55,000 homes.

I think this is a great amendment as it creates a win-win situation for graziers and the renewable energy sector, not to mention Queenslanders as a whole. I am interested, though, and would seek some clarification from the minister as to whether the renewable energy types allowed under this bill are limited to wind. I understand that the sticking point may be the complementarity of the industry and the energy source but would appreciate some clarification. For example, I was recently shown a map, which no doubt the minister has also seen, that indicates Queensland also has some of the best sites for geothermal or hot rock energy.

Geothermal energy is a relatively cheap renewable energy source, particularly once the drilling has been completed. Australia is a leading geothermal energy explorer and it would be great if Queensland could be at the forefront of this renewable energy source. So could the minister please confirm that other energy sources such as geothermal—and not to forget solar—are not omitted beyond the scope of this bill?

If I skip the valuation matter, as I know the shadow minister and many of my colleagues have already addressed it, I would like to conclude by briefly touching on the water supply safety and reliability amendments. I agree that improvements should be made in the recycled water and drinking water regulatory framework.

Ms Struthers interjected.

Mr POWELL: I take that interjection from the minister. I also acknowledge that those matters have been addressed by the shadow minister and other members on this side and the minister's side. I agree that improvements should be made to the recycled water and drinking water regulatory frameworks. I support the bill, which regulates the powers to prevent another fluoride-dosing incident, such as the North Pine episode, and enhances the regulator's power to manage future water supply incidents. The amendments made to the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008 are reasonable. The regulator will have powers to obtain information from the SEQ Water Grid Manager, among other entities, to share information about particular entities involved in the supply of drinking or recycled water and to prepare and publish reports.

The fluoride-dosing incident of April 2009 was clearly an embarrassment to the government, and rightly so, given the assurances that it had given Queenslanders when it introduced fluoride in the first place. Situations like that bring the ongoing debate on whether fluoride should be added to public water back to the fore. Constituents raise valid arguments on both sides of the fence, but one particular issue that I would like to raise is the unavailability of fluoride tablets for those residents who are solely on tank water. Whereas previously residents on tank water who wanted to add fluoride could purchase tablets from their local pharmacy, those same residents are now being told that they cannot buy tablets because fluoride is being added to the public water system. For those on the water distribution network, I can understand that approach but—and I conclude with this request—I ask the government to look at ways in which those not on the grid who choose to add fluoride can access the necessary tablets.