



Speech by

**Jarrold Bleijie**

**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

Hansard Thursday, 4 June 2009

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## **WATER AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (8.28 pm): I rise this evening to add my contribution to the debate on the Water and Another Act Amendment Bill 2009. The Queensland Water Commission was introduced by former Premier Peter Beattie in May 2006. Its role was to ensure sustainable water supplies by developing long-term water supply strategies, establishing a regional water grid, implementing water restrictions and managing water demand in the south-east region of Queensland. I submit to the House that there was another reason and this was a reactive, crisis bureaucracy set up by this government.

As I speak these words, my ears are burning because we have seen this happen over and over again for the past 11 years in Queensland. Last Saturday the government finally worked out that our state finances are not so good. Unfortunately, they are not as lucky as Kevin 07, who could dig into a hefty surplus left by a conservative government, because in Queensland there was no money. They had spent it all. They went bust in a boom. Now Queenslanders have to suffer because this government is going to have a fire sale of public assets.

This bill seeks to establish a single commissioner model for the Queensland Water Commission. We all know, however, that the original establishment of the QWC and the government's new-found crisis management strategy was to shield the former Premier from the crisis and purchase all of the assets from South-East Queensland councils at below market value to allow the state to control water centrally. One particular council on the Sunshine Coast referred to the government's takeover of water as the 'great water swindle'. It is quite strange now that the government wants to sell assets when regarding water all it wanted to do was buy them.

With respect to this bill and its downgrading of the QWC, I take this opportunity to remind the House that it was LNP policy at the last election to disband the QWC for what it was. Although the government report, which I will go into, recommended this course of action, this government has only taken a partial aspect of this recommendation. We still have a QWC but we just do not know exactly what it is going to do.

The good news in relation to the extent of rain that we have received in South-East Queensland means that our dam levels have reached 74.4 per cent as of nine o'clock this morning. The Baroon Pocket Dam has been at 100 per cent capacity for some time now. Whilst we are on the subject of this bill, I could not possibly let this chance go by without mentioning on the Sunshine Coast our very own 'Travesty' Dam. My apologies, Mr Deputy Speaker, that was a slip of the tongue. I meant the Traveston Crossing Dam. The dam is built on a sand base commonly known as unfit for the base of a dam of water, and yet the Premier had the temerity to stand before this House last month and tell the people of the Mary Valley region that with all the rain we have had their dam would have been filled seven times. I submit to the House it probably would have leaked and emptied in just the same amount of time.

The Mary Valley has some of the best pastoral land in Queensland, yet they have been told for three years that their land will be flooded for the common good of society. What a joke! To this date we still do not know what the situation is with the Traveston Dam.

**Mr Schwarten:** You don't.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection. Why don't you come clean to the people of the Mary Valley and tell the truth? I can understand why the government would be inclined to pass this bill at such a fast pace. The costs of running the QWC have increased dramatically. The initial budget of the commission was \$2.5 million. By 2007 it had blown out to \$18 million, and in the budget of 2008-09 the government had allocated \$27.8 million for the commission and its 85 staff. The government has let the commission exponentially grow in size and funding in its short life. In just three years the QWC has cost the Queensland taxpayer 14 times the initial amount set aside in 2006.

This piece of legislation will establish a single commissioner model for the QWC instead of the current chairperson plus two commissioners. We of course welcome the better efficiency of government bodies recommended by our own member for Southern Downs during the election campaign. The Weller-Webbe review was set up by the government in 2008. In the Premier's own words, the review 'has assessed the 459 current government bodies in order to identify which of those bodies may no longer be necessary and could be abolished'. The Weller-Webbe review recommended to the government that the Queensland Water Commission be abolished and its functions be transferred to the Department of Environment and Resource Management—again, an LNP policy.

This bill seeks to amend the Water Act 2000 and modify the composition of the Queensland Water Commission. The other real reason is that the truth has been exposed—the truth about this government wasting money and a blown budget. This blow-out impacts on our communities. The Sunshine Coast is due to have water restrictions placed on its residents and businesses at the end of this month. Despite these restrictions being implemented at the end of this month, Sunshine Coast residents are still in the dark with respect to these restrictions which go right to the heart of the bill because the bill is in relation to the Queensland Water Commission.

It is not acceptable in my view for the state to come along and take over the running of the water and its assets from the council and then tell the council, as the QWC, you must do this and you must impose these restrictions and take the public and political fallout from it because this government will not. It is another buffer for the government. Let the Queensland Water Commission buffer the government from its mismanagement of water in Queensland. When that does not work, put it onto councils, so the government is giving itself two buffers.

Despite this bill amending the Water Act and giving the QWC only one commissioner, there are still going to be issues. One area in particular that I want to draw to the parliament's attention tonight is those residents in community title and retirement village complexes. Not only have they been hit with water restrictions; the process of community title schemes is that they have individual lot ownership—freehold title in these community titles. These people will be sluggish because of an odd-even number system of restriction. Where you have a unit complex as No. 2 or an odd number of a street, they are having one pipe right into their complexes. One resident in my electorate has 86 unit dwellings in a community title scheme. They will have half an hour a week for 86 people because they are all considered as one, as an equal No. 2 on a street—86 people washing their cars and watering their gardens all at the same time. The Queensland fire brigade on the Sunshine Coast has said that the pressure in these pipes has already been fundamentally reduced because the pipes have not been looked after and we have seen bursting of pipes in recent weeks.

**Mr Kilburn:** They're run by the council.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Not anymore—the Water Commission. This bill amends the Water Act 2000. I would ask the minister to consider this position of community titles and use the same numbering system as residential, that is, odd-even numbers in the residential complexes of the units. They pay their rates, they pay body corporate fees and they pay a water based charge like any other resident. When the government sold the electricity assets interstate, it gave a guarantee that prices would not rise. We have seen prices rise. Registration of motor vehicles has increased and now water costs have blown out because \$4.5 billion has been wasted. When will this government give Queenslanders a break and stop driving up the cost of living in this great maroon state?