



Speech by

Mark Ryan

MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD

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

Mr RYAN (Morayfield—ALP) (9.56 pm): I rise to make a positive contribution to the debate tonight—and I emphasise ‘positive contribution’, because all we have heard tonight from members of the opposition is a negative, bipolar contribution. It is like Vicky Pollard—‘Yeah, but no, but yeah. We hate all of this stuff, but we’re going to support the bill. You guys have mucked it all up, but we are going to support the bill.’ The members opposite have made just crazy, negative contributions.

The reality is that the world has changed. I remember the time when I used to play slip and slide in the backyard. I would get out the tarp and the water and slip and slide all afternoon. But the world has changed, and that is pointed out in the explanatory notes. I refer to what I think is one of the more instructive statements in the explanatory notes—

Water was generally considered as an unlimited resource and was therefore used and consumed with little thought to conservation, efficient use or re-use.

The population growth in Queensland, climate change, the one-in-1,000-year drought—all of those things have changed the world. We need to think differently about how we manage water, we need to think differently about how we supply water and we need to be smarter about how we supply water. We also need to be positive and welcome infrastructure investment.

I will share an anecdote with members. Recently the Burpengary Police Station was opened in my electorate—and I thank the Minister for Police for attending that opening. But the next day I received phone calls in my office from people saying that there are too many police in Burpengary. I told those people that I would rather have more police than fewer. It is the same with infrastructure. I would rather have more infrastructure than less. I would rather have more investment in water infrastructure. I would rather be planning for the future than looking to the past.

So often we hear about infrastructure failing to keep up with population growth. But here we have a plan—a \$9 billion water grid network that is planning for our water security future, and I welcome it. I welcome the Western Corridor Recycled Water Project, I welcome the desalination project and I welcome all the pipeline projects, because they are planning for our future. They are an investment in our future and I welcome that.

I also welcome the changes that are foreshadowed in this bill to the way we manage and distribute water in the South-East Queensland region. I welcome the core objectives for those changes: improved region-wide service delivery; the economic regulation to ensure the lowest possible prices; asset regulation to ensure high-quality service; efficiency gains through economies of sale; and the establishment of commercially focused entities accountable to council owners, ratepayers and customers. Those objectives were taken from the minister’s second reading speech. It emphasises the importance of these changes and the need to look to the future.

Some of the great benefits that will flow from these changes will address concerns relating to the previous management of water distribution in our areas. In relation to the lack of regional focus, this

legislation provides for the establishment of three distributor-retailer entities for South-East Queensland. That in itself will help better coordinate the delivery of water supply in South-East Queensland. It will bring specialists in water and waste water together, it will create economies of scale, it will promote the development of technical skills and a stronger focus on customer service delivery, it will provide a regional focus to planning and asset management, and better use and sharing of resources. Under the previous regime we had ad hoc approaches by the individual councils and no clear focus on developing economies of scale and providing great service delivery to South-East Queensland as a whole. We will also see clearer accountability. Whilst we will see the distributor-retailer entities remain under local government ownership, there will be a separate legal entity reporting to the board, creating more accountability. The entities will need to comply with all relevant regulatory controls, such as asset management and water quality, and all profits will be returned to local governments which can be redirected to where they are most needed.

I welcome the employee framework that will accompany these amendments. I welcome the safeguards for any transferring staff. They will be transferred on the same employment terms and conditions. I also welcome the provision that there will be no forcible retrenchments because of any transfer. I conclude by commending the minister, his staff and the departmental staff on their contribution to the bill. This bill is about planning for future growth and water security. This bill is also about improved water security planning, service delivery, enhanced customer service and clear accountability. I commend the bill to the House.