



Speech by  
**Curtis Pitt**

**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

Hansard Wednesday, 10 March 2010

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## **WATER RESOURCE (BARRON) AMENDMENT PLAN (NO. 1): DISALLOWANCE**

**Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (8.26 pm): I rise to speak against the disallowance motion in relation to the Water Resource (Barron) Amendment Plan (No. 1) 2009. Although Far North Queensland is the wettest region in Australia, sometimes people in the area take for granted that they will always have water. Almost 90 per cent of the rainfall in that area happens during the wet season, which means that the area's dry seasons can be very dry. Many people do not realise that we lose much of this rainfall due to run-off or evaporation before it can be put to good use. This loss of rainfall, combined with the population growth being experienced in the region, makes water planning and management essential to cater for future consumption needs, economic development and the protection of the environment.

I do not support the disallowance motion moved by the opposition. There is no more important issue for the long-term viability of Queensland than managing our water use. The Bligh government has consulted the community on the best way in which to achieve this viability, and this water resource plan is the result of that process. The development of water resource plans under the Water Act 2000 is essential for ensuring the security and sustainability of water supplies in the state, both now and into the future. The plans deliver on the principal aims of the Water Act to ensure the sustainable allocation and management of water in Queensland. The plans establish the framework to deliver the most efficient use of water through a system of tradeable water allocations.

Tradeable water allocations are separate to land and are held as titled assets that can be traded to new locations or uses. Trading is subject to some limitations to ensure that the environment is protected. Tradeable allocations allow water to be traded for higher value use and encourage more efficient water use. The plans ensure that any new entitlements issued will not adversely impact on the two primary planning goals which are, firstly, security of water entitlements, and, secondly, environmental flows.

The water resource plans specify the strategies and outcomes used to address the social, economic and environmental goals for the area covered by the plan. The plans specify outcomes for water use, such as the needs of agriculture, fisheries and industry, and outcomes for the environment, such as the needs of specific plant or animal species and the health of water-dependent ecosystems. The plans include strategies to achieve water use efficiency and best possible environmental outcomes. They also include monitoring and reporting requirements to ensure that the plans are working.

The Barron water resource plan, which was originally finalised in December 2002 and includes the town areas of Kuranda, Mareeba, Atherton, Dimbulah, Yungaburra and Tolga, is of course of regional significance. The plan provided a range of strategies for sustainably allocating and managing water resources to increase economic activity and at the same time protect the ecological health of the Barron and upper Mitchell catchments.

The amendment plan makes the entitlements and environmental flows framework for the Barron catchment the most comprehensive and flexible water-trading arrangements in the state. This has very important consequences for Queensland's commitments to the COAG water reform agenda, which is now absorbed into the National Water Initiative 2004. This amendment plan provides opportunities and benefits

for water users and those who may wish to access further water in the future. To deny this amendment would be to deny water users new opportunities and new benefits.

Minister Stephen Robertson recently announced the start of the planning process for the 10-year Wet Tropics water resource plan, which complements the Baron water resource plan. This plan for the Wet Tropics catchment is the last area in Queensland to have a water resource plan prepared under the National Water Initiative. As many in Far North Queensland would be aware, the first step on this plan was a moratorium put in place in January this year. The freeze on new licence applications will, of course, have ramifications but is necessary in order to provide a stable base of entitlements and improve certainty into the future.

I have made representations to the minister regarding the fate of those 'caught applications' that were already under consideration by the department when the moratorium was announced but had not been finalised. I have also raised concerns about the potential impacts on other stakeholders such as the drilling industry. While I await the outcome of these questions, I continue to support the sound planning principles that underpin this government's commitment to establish a water resource planning process for the region.

While in the short term the moratorium limits the expansion of irrigated agriculture in the Wet Tropics plan area, it is important to note that the moratorium protects existing town water supplies, our important ecotourism industry, commercial and recreation fisheries and a range of existing agricultural production.

Queensland's commitments to the national water reform agenda are principally met through the Water Act 2000. This act obliges the minister to plan for the allocation and sustainable management of water to meet the state's future water requirements, including providing water for the environment and providing greater security for water users. I say again that to deny this amendment would be to deny water users new opportunities and new benefits and place in jeopardy the water security of the broader Far North Queensland region. I cannot support the disallowance motion.