



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Thursday, 25 November 2010

WATER AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms SIMPSON (Maroochydore—LNP) (12.46 pm): When this government has a crisis it creates a bureaucracy. It is this spaghetti network of water bureaucracy that is adding to bloated water bills gouging ratepayers. Half-a-million-dollar salaries for water bureaucrats, multiple water empires and a high cost of governance is adding to the pain that ratepayers are already feeling with the skyrocketing cost of living under the Bligh Labor government. The hike in water bills that my constituents and others across South-East Queensland are facing is unconscionable. The cost of the bulk assets and the blowout in the construction of the South-East Queensland water grid are the main reasons for the added costs.

This week Deputy Premier Paul Lucas said that, if you blow your budget, someone else pays. It was a quotable quote. For once it told the truth. This government blew its budget and taxpayers are paying the price. The government blew its budget on the bungled Health payroll system, a \$60-million system that will cost more than \$210 million to fix. Queenslanders are paying for this mistake. The government blew its budget on a new Queensland driver's licence that started out at zero cost, we were told. Then it was \$20 million and now it is more than \$120 million. I note that the transport minister claims that she was being honest about any problems or cost issues. Given the large number of documents the government is blocking under RTI laws, her protestations of innocence are hard to swallow. Release the business cases and then we will see the truth. Release the cost blowouts that have happened since then.

In relation to the water infrastructure assets, I would call for the business cases to be released as this is about value for money. The problem is that the majority of the water infrastructure that was constructed under the \$9 billion water grid had no business cases. There were no business cases, except for one piece of infrastructure that I am aware of. This government did not do its due diligence in regard to ensuring value for money or ensuring there was a cost-benefit analysis that demanded that that was done in a way that did not end up costing ratepayers an outrageous amount of money.

I table one document that confirms that they did not do business cases in regard to these measures, even though some of these so-called water grid assets that it blew money on in the name of drought were started after the drought had broken.

Tabled paper: Copy of letter, dated 28 May 2010, from Ms Karen Waldman, Executive Director, Queensland Water Commission to Ms Fiona Simpson MP, member for Maroochydore, regarding information requested at a meeting with Mr Daniel Spiller, former Acting Executive Director of the Queensland Water Commission on 1 February 2010 [\[3670\]](#).

In regard to the business case issues and this government's wanton disregard for value, I refer to Minister Robert Swarten who recently said in the parliament that business cases were 'pious nonsense'. That was said by a senior minister of this government. Once again, we see that there is a systemic issue with the government's disregard of its spending of taxpayers' money. Remember, if you blow the budget somebody pays for it. Taxpayers are paying for this government's disregard for blowing budgets and spending money in a way that could not be sustained, while failing to demand value for money in the water assets it is building. This government blew billions of dollars on wasteful, poorly planned and rushed infrastructure. If you are running a business, you would sack the people who made those bad decisions; you would not allow them to keep making them. However, as we have seen, this government has continued with a litany of such mistakes. There was the \$600 million blown on the Traveston Dam,

\$450 million was blown on NPI2 and \$2.4 billion to \$2.5 billion was blown on the western corridor recycled water pipeline, which did have a business case but cost over \$700 million more than was initially estimated. The Gold Coast desalination plant blew more than \$1.2 billion and the list goes on. Most of those pieces of infrastructure are either not delivering water or are failing to deliver water in a cost-effective way. Despite that, the government is still planning the Marcoola desalination plant, which should be rejected on many grounds, not least of which is the fact that there is now time to consider all other water options for the future.

I bring to the attention of the House the fact that this government has no aviation strategy. It published one in about 2002 and then promptly ignored it. The government puts water infrastructure in locations such as airports without giving any consideration to a properly planned general aviation strategy for Queensland. This government has no critical planning in regard to infrastructure delivery and cost-effectiveness into the future. We have seen that also with the Gold Coast site.

There is a lot of concern that this government continues to make mistakes in regard to how it costs, assesses and delivers infrastructure. Certainly taxpayers are paying the price. The government has one hell of a cheek to stand in this place and try to defend the costs that it has foisted upon taxpayers, when still it has no business cases for the infrastructure that it built. It blew the budgets on those projects and now asks people to pay. We continue to raise issues and concerns about the way the government is mismanaging water policy in this state, because our constituents are paying a heavy price for the way that it has mismanaged the budgets. Ultimately, our constituents pay for it through their rates.