



Speech by

Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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SOUTH-EAST QUEENSLAND WATER (DISTRIBUTION AND RETAIL RESTRUCTURING) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (5.21 pm): This afternoon I rise to speak to the South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. Of course, I will keep my comments short as today, once again, democracy has been slapped in the face by the Bligh Labor government. The good electors of Kawana would expect me to stand in this place with the opportunity of delivering a 20-minute speech, but we have been cut down and guillotined by the government. This has happened time and time again.

Mr Pitt interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: Quite a number of constituents in Kawana watch on the tube. This bill will amend 11 pieces of legislation, including the South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring) Act 2009, the Environmental Protection Act 1994, the Water Act 2000 and the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008. The bill is the government's final step to effect its water and wastewater reforms. The bill aims to provide for the regulatory framework to enable the three newly established and council owned distributor-retailers—Unitywater, which impacts on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland Urban Utilities and Allconnex—to commence operations from 1 July 2010 and to deliver water and wastewater services to customers within South-East Queensland. It will allow for the making of the grid contracts to allow for the effective management of water restrictions. It will introduce a regulatory regime to improve the environmental management of water produced while exploring or extracting coal seam gas and, of course, will enhance the regulation of drinking water and recycled water.

Prior to amalgamation, the 10 local governments in South-East Queensland operated their own entities to distribute water and waste water. Like all dictatorships, the Bligh government initially intended a full state government takeover of those entities as part of its water and wastewater reforms. I recall it was another one of those state government crisis—

Mr Kilburn interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: The member for Chatsworth wants to hear it again, so I will tell him. At the time it was another of those crisis management solutions undertaken by the government of the day. However, following local governments lobbying extensively on this issue, the state government has now agreed to the council owned distributor-retailers. Talk about backflips! First, the local councils owned the water entities, then the state government took control of them and now the state government is returning ownership to the local councils, of course making sure that the state government takes its cut of the future profits before handing them back to council. I must say that the number of backflips that we continually see from the Bligh government indicates that it will be well and truly ready to compete in the gymnastics at the next Olympic Games in London in 2012. Of course, the decision to take control was made without proper consultation with Queenslanders and local governments. This is what Queenslanders have come to expect from Labor governments, whether they be federal or state. It is policy on the run. I might add, it is bad policy on the run with a lack of long-term planning.

In his second reading speech on this bill, the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade said that the state owned South-East Queensland water grid will deliver high-quality water to three locally owned council distributor-retailers. The distributor-retailers will in turn deliver high-quality and responsive customer services. What the minister did not mention was the increase in costs to the consumer that will result from the introduction of a middleman. This is the result of the state government's takeover and continual backflips. Already under this government we have seen living expenses spiral out of control. We have seen water charge increases, vehicle registration increases and local government rate increases as a result of the amalgamation. The price of electricity has increased, as have fuel prices imposed on all Queensland motorists. Licences are set to increase by 108 per cent. Queenslanders are hurting in the hip-pocket as a result of this government's mean-spirited higher taxing agenda.

In his second reading speech, the minister did not mention the fact that the councils have been directed by the state government not to refer to bulk water charges as a state government charge. If it is a state government charge, why not tell it how it is and say so? Again, another characteristic of this and all Labor governments is spin, spin, spin and no substance. This minister is like a mouse on an exercise Ferris wheel. He goes around and around but he never gets anywhere.

Mr Reeves: That was funny! That cracked them up!

Mr BLEIJIE: It was not meant to be funny. It was meant to point out that the current minister is on a Ferris wheel that is going around and around but does not go anywhere. He got off the Health one, which he left to his mate. Now he is on another one and he cannot get off.

The bill seeks to enhance the regulation of drinking water and recycled water. In 2008 new regulatory frameworks were established for recycled water and drinking water. However, in April 2009 we saw the Bligh government's complete inability to manage Brisbane's water supply by the release of too much fluoride into the drinking water supply at North Pine Dam. On some estimations, up to 20 times the allowable dose was put into the dam. While enhancing regulations may be needed, once again the Bligh government cannot guarantee to deliver safe water under the current regulations.

My time is short because democracy has been slapped in the face by this government again today and we do not have the opportunity to speak for 20 minutes on bills that are being rushed through the House. However, I point out to honourable members opposite that the water supply to Caloundra City, where I have lived for 21 years, was effectively managed and controlled by the local council. People paid reasonable fees for their water. Of course, in another crisis management situation, the government of the state thinks that it can do everything—

Mr Reeves: What would you do? Get on your knees and pray for rain?

Mr BLEIJIE: In this House whenever the government is criticised its members say, 'What would you have done?' They cannot cop the criticism. The minister cannot deny the fact that the government must not only make the decisions for the people of Queensland but also accept responsibility for the decisions it makes. Government members cannot do it. They cannot accept the responsibility.

As I said, the Caloundra City Council ran water efficiently and effectively, and people paid a reasonable price. Under the crisis management of the Bligh Labor government and the Beattie-Bligh government, the government thought it could do a better job than the local councils so it took over the management of water. As we know, that has turned out to be a complete failure. This is a crisis management government. Three council owned bodies will now run our water. Let us hope that they are in a position to effectively run water as it used to be run on the Sunshine Coast and not as this crisis management government ran it.