




Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 15 June 2011

FAIRER WATER PRICES FOR SEQ AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (3.38 pm): This lazy, arrogant government cannot fix the cost of living, because they will not admit why the prices are going up. I have had a gutful of my constituents not being able to pay their bills, facing situations—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Member for Maroochydore, your language is unparliamentary.

Mr Watt interjected.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Everton, member for Yeerongpilly, the member for Maroochydore has the call. I would appreciate it if you would accord her the courtesy to which she is entitled to.

Ms SIMPSON: These Labor members are so arrogant that they have no understanding of the distress they are causing constituents throughout South-East Queensland. People literally cannot pay their everyday bills. This government has added layer upon layer of unnecessary costs and is causing a situation where people are in financial distress. I hear the flippant laughter from the Labor backbenchers who are patting themselves on the back and saying they are doing something because this legislation says it is going to address water costs. However, none of them can seriously say that the \$7 billion spent on the South-East Queensland water grid was well spent. At least \$2 billion of that was wasted. I appreciate that those members are living in this little thought bubble of pollyanna land and that when their government mucks up the costing and delivery of infrastructure and then tries to foist the costs onto people who do not have their pay packets they do not understand the distress that causes. However, I see it happening in my electorate and throughout other electorates here in Queensland.

I will give members a bit of a breakdown of that \$2 billion—and that is just the figures we know about. An amount of \$600 million was wasted on Traveston Dam. More than \$500 million was wasted on another pipeline to nowhere that will never carry the volume of water for which it was designed. More than \$700 million was blown on the western corridor recycled water pipeline—beyond its original estimated value. We know that contractors talked about invoice tendering. There was no proper business case made for these projects, except the western corridor project and even then they blew the budget—no business case. What sort of an incompetent, lazy government spends billions of dollars without even doing a business case? There was no business case made for how they were actually going to make the South-East Queensland water grid operate.

When we say that this legislation does not address the real issue of overinflated costs of bulk water, we have the evidence, and that is only the \$2 billion worth of projects they we have outlined to date. What we are hearing from industry is that this was a complete white elephant. It was possible to provide emergency and ongoing drought proofing of Queensland with good planning, but to not even do a business case? No wonder Queenslanders are hurting. This government thought that with the so-called rivers of gold coming in and the fact that the economy was up they could do anything. Ultimately, what we have seen is that they cannot. Yet we see a situation where this legislation does not address the facts. You see, you cannot fix the cost of living unless you address the underlying problems. When this government

will not admit its mistakes, tries to cover them up, laughs them off and treats them so trivially, which I have witnessed in the form of interjections from members, we realise that this government does not have the answers. You have to cut waste and address the issues with regard to effective service delivery and infrastructure delivery to really take the pressure off Queenslanders, who are now facing some of the highest costs of living in generations.

I know also that some of the contracts that were let under this government involved spin doctors who were employed to go and try to chat up the local MPs and massage their response to overinflated infrastructure going into the local areas. More was spent on spin doctors than on business cases, and that is a disgrace. That is why today we see that there is a soaring water price. This legislation before the House will still not address the fact that the way the bulk water assets were not scoped or invoiced properly and the fact that they never had a business case—except for one project—are the reasons we see these outrageous water prices in Queensland.

We have outlined our plan with regard to addressing these issues because we do address the fundamental mistakes that have been made by this government. You cannot keep foisting all those incompetent mistakes on the taxpayer in the way of higher water costs. However, this government will not say sorry. All it does is tax more and tax more. We see small businesses closing around our state, but in South-East Queensland, with all the added layers of regulation—there has been a 13 per cent increase in regulation under this government in the last couple of years alone—this government has no understanding of how it is strangling our local economies and strangling people who once were so proud of the booming economy in Queensland and how they were a part of it. It is ironic that the Labor Party that said it was the party for the battlers is creating so many more battlers because of the way it is imposing costs on people who once were able to pay their bills but are now on the edge of poverty.

The rates of poverty are increasing in Queensland. We have seen recent QCOSS reports which clearly indicate the soaring numbers of people proportionately in our community who are falling below the poverty level. Do I care about the costs of living of my constituents and those in other parts of Queensland? Yes, I do. Will we stand up to see some fair dinkum response to those cost-of-living impacts by addressing the underlying issues? Yes, we will. By cutting waste and addressing the underlying problems, particularly with regard to the bad assets in the South-East Queensland water grid and the overpricing that has been forced onto customers, we are saying that there is an opportunity to relieve those costs of living. But this government not only will not say sorry; it will not fix the problem, it will not cut the waste and it will not cut people's real cost of living as a result.

Yes, I get angry when I hear people being flippant about the real issues behind the water crisis and the increase in the costs because this is not a legacy of which the government should be proud. I remember that when we voted against certain key aspects of this water grid and we issued warnings about the way it was being done, there was this flippant response from government. They said, 'Just trust us. It is all in hand.' Unfortunately, the concerns that we raised have been proven to be founded. Queenslanders deserve to know that their state can be the leading state again. However, at the most basic of levels, people need to know that they are not going to fall below the poverty line because of costs of living that have been imposed upon them by an incompetent government and a range of Labor members who have no idea what happened but are not going to say sorry. So they have no hope of fixing the mess.

I support my colleague the member for Buderim in his speech in which he outlined the position of the state opposition. I support our policy that we have made quite clear in this regard. There is a way to address these issues, and it is certainly not in the way that this government is handling it.