




Speech by

Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Hansard Wednesday, 23 March 2011

MOTION: WATER ENTITIES

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (5.34 pm): I move—

That this House notes the anger and concern in the South-East Queensland community that has been caused by the operation of AllConnex, Queensland Urban Utilities and Unitywater and calls on the Bligh Labor government to take urgent action to address the genuine concerns of Queensland householders about the operations of these retail water entities.

The issue of water costs as a cost-of-living expense has significantly affected the budget of families across the South-East Queensland region, and there is no excuse for it. There are few certainties in life, but there is one certain thing about this 'can't-do' Bligh Labor government—that is, we would expect it to play the blame game. It balloons a bureaucracy. Anything it touches turns into a toxic balloon of bureaucracy. No matter who this minister tries to blame, Queenslanders know that the blame lays solely at the feet of this 'can't-do' minister and this 'can't-do' toxic long-term Labor government. On many occasions in this parliament this minister has said that he is not to blame and that this Labor government is not to blame. Who does he blame? He blames the poor little councils.

Government members interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: For those interjecting members, particularly the member for Broadwater, let me again put on the record of this House and remind those opposite what is already on the record of the House from 2007. In a freedom of information request I put on the Sunshine Coast Regional Council, I have obtained the ministerial statement that was made by the Premier at the time and delivered by facsimile to the Lord Mayor's office on 13 March 2007. That facsimile and the ministerial statement that the then Labor Premier made in this House states—

That is why my government is prepared to take full responsibility for water.

He said 'full responsibility for water', yet we have this toxic current minister saying that he is not responsible and has nothing to do with it—so much so that he is now the Minister for Water Utilities! The ministerial statement by the then Premier went on—

It has to stop.

Today I am announcing that my government will shake up this cranking, rusty old system operated by the councils and we will drag it into the 21st century.

If this is what it is—if this is the rusty old system that is dragged into the 21st century that costs ratepayers and hits the hip pockets of Queenslanders—then Queenslanders should be very worried about any reform from the Labor Party, because we have seen time and time again in Queensland that whatever it touches—whatever it touches, despite its machinations about working for the working class and the average Queenslanders—ends up costing Queenslanders more and more money, yet it continues to say that it is not to blame.

For the past two decades Labor governments neglected the issue of water security across the broader region, particularly in South-East Queensland. We on this side of the House know the history of the great water swindle whereby council water assets were taken or effectively stolen by the state Labor government as part of a bungled, rushed job to address the urgent water security needs of Brisbane. But nothing has changed: the government had a plan. Nothing has changed: it was reactionary. For any issue

that arises in Queensland the government has a reactionary approach because it has no competence for working out future plans. The 'can't-do' Bligh Labor government introduced three water retail outlets: Allconnex, which services the Gold Coast, Logan and Redlands; Queensland Urban Utilities, which services Brisbane, Ipswich, the Scenic Rim, Somerset and the Lockyer Valley; and Unitywater, which services the Moreton Bay and Sunshine Coast regional council areas.

Since that time members opposite have had the audacity to blame all of the water pricing increases and all of the implementation on the councils, and I have said it before: the former Premier said in this place in 2007 that he and the Labor government would take full responsibility. But when things go wrong, when things cost money, they do not take any responsibility. They took the water assets. At the last parliamentary sitting in this place the member for Pumicestone—in that great speech she made that I am sure members remember—said that the Labor Party invented the word 'consultation'. At the time I said—and my colleagues will remember this quite well; it is one of those jokes that you never get out of your mind—to the member for Pumicestone that that was the classiest and funniest joke I had ever heard. When we look back at the history of water utilities and water infrastructure across Queensland, when we look at what happened with the Labor Party taking the assets from the councils—and I hope the member for Pumicestone is speaking in this debate—I ask the member for Pumicestone: what consultation took place? To use the term invented by the Labor Party, so the member says, what consultation with councils took place? What did they say? They sent a fax. They sent a ministerial statement that said, 'We are dragging this into the 21st century and it is going to cost Queenslanders more money'—and they are proud of it.

The members on this side who represent the Sunshine Coast, which is covered by Unitywater, would know. Since the bills first went out in July last year, we have been bombarded with complaints from constituents about increased water prices.

Mr Elmes: Four hundred in my office.

Mr BLEIJIE: Four hundred to the office of the member for Noosa. The member for Noosa and I held forums across the coast. Four hundred and fifty people showed up, and they showed up with their water bills. The pensioners, the seniors asked questions about what they could not work out. Last week at my mobile office they came and asked, 'Jarrod, I have a water bill here. I have used \$30 in water consumption. Why is my bill \$600 to \$700?' When you look at the bill you see that they are charging for water access and sewerage access.

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: It is an absolute condemnation of this Labor Party state government when seniors in the electorate of the member for Brisbane Central—her seniors—come to electorate offices with \$30 to \$50 in charges for water consumption, yet their bills are being ballooned by these charges that have been established by the Labor Party government. Member for Brisbane Central, you may say that they are not your charges, or the government's charges—

Mr SPEAKER: Direct your comments through the chair.

Mr BLEIJIE: Absolutely. I get a tad carried away with this, because I am passionate about it. I am passionate about making sure that we bring into this House the issues that are impacting on water bills across South-East Queensland, particularly in the electorate of the member for Brisbane Central. People are struggling with the family budget. There have been recent surveys undertaken, particularly in Brisbane, where people have been asked how their cost of living pressures are going. Seventy-six per cent of respondents to those surveys have said that they are struggling. Why are they struggling? Because of a 'can't-do' Labor hypocritical, incompetent government that just cannot plan for the future.

Last year the member for Callide said in this place that this is going to hurt consumers. He was right, because consumers all around Queensland are being hurt—so much so that, despite a glossy front page on the *Women's Weekly*, recently on the Gold Coast the Premier was lambasted, booed and jeered.

Mr Watt interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: What were the people there protesting about? I ask the member for Everton: what were they protesting about? They were protesting about water bills and no glossy brochure from any of these retail water outlets, no glossy brochure from the government, will save this government from Queenslanders blaming them. They will blame this minister and we would encourage them to blame this minister, because Queenslanders know that the only way they can have a reprieve on their water bills, the only way that they can properly plan for the future, is to have a can-do LNP state team with a plan to get Queensland back on track. I say to Queenslanders: bring your water bills to the ballot box and show this toxic 'can't-do' Labor government that it is unacceptable and that we will fight back.

(Time expired)