



Speech by  
**Jarrold 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) (5.19 pm): Tonight I rise to talk about the South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2011. Members may note that originally I was not on the speaking list, but I have been so incensed by comments from government members, particularly the members for Broadwater, Southport and Albert, who just spoke, that I had to get up and speak.

Water is a particular interest of mine as, of course, the Sunshine Coast has been subjected to the flip-flopping of the government on the issue. On the Sunshine Coast we have Unitywater, on the Gold Coast and the bay there is Allconnex and there is also Queensland Water Utilities. A little later I will come to the contribution of the member for Broadwater, but now I must ask myself how those members opposite can sleep at night. I have read past contributions from those members—

**Mr Lawlor** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection from the member for Southport. I sleep quite well at night knowing that I am a member of a party that every day advocates for the easing of cost-of-living pressures on Queensland household budgets. I am proud to be part of a team that advocates for that. Certainly I would not want to be part of a team that flip-flops on water, and on this issue it has no integrity at all. However, what else could one expect with a minister such as theirs? The minister himself has no integrity on this issue. When a minister lacks that form of integrity, what else could one expect for water in Queensland? One could expect a systematic failure and a flip-flopping on the issue. I can tell the House why that is so.

**Mr Lawlor:** Explain the letter by Campbell Newman, signed by your leader.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I will get to the letter and I will come to another letter, member for Southport, that you did not talk about in your contribution.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms O'Neill): Order! The member will speak through the chair.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I did refer to 'the member for Southport'. I take the interjection from the member for Southport and I refer to another letter that he conveniently left out of his contribution. In 2007 Don Aldous, who was a Sunshine Coast mayor at the time, described the water reforms as the great water swindle. We had a huge debate across the state on this issue. The government said that it was going to set up bulk water retail entities and the community would not have a say with respect to their running. Despite being owned by the councils, the community consultation and input was nil. In fact, I believe that council input is virtually nil on these issues.

In their contributions the members for Broadwater and Southport talked about a letter that I note the member for Southport tabled despite it being tabled in the House in September last year. Last year I also tabled a letter that I obtained under a right to information request. It was from the Premier. For the benefit and reading pleasure of the member for Southport, I will table another copy.

*Tabled paper:* Letter, dated 2 January 2008, from Hon. Anna Bligh MP, Premier of Queensland, to Councillor Campbell Newman, Chairman, Council of Mayors South East Queensland, regarding aspects of the institutional reforms underway in the South-East Queensland urban water supply industry [6445].

That letter is dated 2 January 2008 and it is from the Premier, Anna Bligh, to Campbell Newman as chair of the Council of Mayors South-East Queensland. In that letter the Premier said—

The Government has no intention to revisit the structural form of the water industry that I announced on September 2008 which provided for:

...

... water entities and sells water to retailers and the existing power stations;

- between three and ten retailers, which will be structurally separate from Councils by no later than 1 July 2010; and
- a distribution entity which provides distribution services to retailers through local pipe networks and portable storage reservoirs, which will be structurally separate from Councils by no later than 1 July 2010.

So, in 2008 the Premier said that the government had no intention to revisit the structural form of the water industry that she announced in September. That is why I talk about the government flip-flopping. Across Queensland we have had a situation where councils, through whatever bodies they had, looked after the retail distribution. Then the government forced the councils into these positions—virtually with a gun to their heads—and set up the three water entities without community consultation or input and without making them accountable to the people. There are no councillors on the boards. The boards are appointed and the community has no say over what they do. There is no accountability because the community cannot get rid of them through elections.

After the three retailers were set up, there was an outcry because people's water bills were skyrocketing, despite promises that water costs would be lowered under these great plans. Then we had the minister defending the situation. I believe it was the minister at that time who said, 'Let's end the blame game for water distribution in Queensland.' Then the Premier said, 'Let's end the blame game for water distribution in Queensland.' Then the honourable minister came in, I suspect after some pressure was applied. I would have loved to have been a fly on the cabinet room wall after the public outcry in relation to Allconnex and water bills. I would have loved to have been a fly on the cabinet room wall when the Premier demanded that her minister go back to the drawing board and rip up what they had done in terms of legislation, which is how we have reached the point that we are at today. The minister has allowed the councils to vote on whether they want to get rid of the same structures that the government set up. Talk about flip-flopping on issues! It is the height of hypocrisy for Labor members to stand in this place and tell us how great their legislation is because in fact they have led us to this point. I believe the member for Southport talked about the number of positions that have been taken on this and this is probably the fourth position. The Labor Party has form in this regard, because if anyone has had issues and taken positions, certainly it is the Labor Party.

The member for Southport talked about consultation. With the great water swindle of 2007, what consultation was held with the electors of Queensland who now fall under these three water entity distribution outlets? What consultation did they have? Absolutely none! It was rushed through, it was ill-conceived, it was illogical and it was from an incompetent minister, so what would you expect? Nothing less! Now we are at a point in time where, basically, we are semi-undoing everything that the government set out to do in the first place. What is the difference here? The difference is that the LNP has a plan to ease cost-of-living pressures in Queensland. This is a cost-of-living increase.

**Ms Johnstone** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection from the member for Townsville, who asked, 'What is it?' If the member for Townsville had been listening at all during the past six hours, I am sure she would have ascertained the plan.

**Ms Johnstone** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I will. It is an interjection that I have absolute pleasure in taking. For the benefit of the member for Townsville, I will explain what the LNP plan on water across Queensland is. Of course, we know that the government's policies for water distribution have cost approximately \$7 billion. That is Labor Party waste. We have had skyrocketing increases in water, electricity and registration costs. Nearly a year ago Campbell Newman was out with the LNP team and clearly articulated the answer to the problem of water issues, which is the four-point water action plan. The first point is to amalgamate the four bulk water entities into one entity to reduce the costs of supplying the water. Second, hand back control of water distribution and retail to councils, which previously did a better job of managing water resources than the government. At the time that point was attacked, but as I said after more flip-flopping, the minister decided to give councils the option to take back control. Third, write off non-performing water grid assets to reduce

water prices and, fourth, adopt a 40-year price plan to repay the government's \$7 billion water grid debt over the economic life of the assets, which will also reduce the cost of water.

You cannot be any clearer than that. I say again, as the honourable Leader of the Opposition said this morning in this place, when Queenslanders who are covered by these three entities go to the polling booth they should lay the blame. Let us not end the blame game, as the minister wants; let us start the blame game. The blame lies at the feet of every Labor Party member who sits on that side of the House. The member for Morayfield has this at his feet. The member for Southport has this at his feet. The member for Chatsworth has this at his feet. The only way to change it and to get Queensland back on track is to vote LNP.