




Speech by

Michael Crandon

MEMBER FOR COOMERA

Hansard Thursday, 29 November 2012

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

 **Mr CRANDON** (Coomera—LNP) (3.47 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the bill at hand, the South East Queensland Water (Restructuring) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. As the chair of the Finance and Administration Committee, my role and the committee's role was to review this legislation prior to it being debated in this place. I must say that we were put on a very tight time line. I seem to be a broken record when I get up and talk about these matters. But we do really need to start to address some of these short time frames from the perspective that it puts undue pressure on other work of the committee and certainly on the people who are supporting us in that committee role—our executive who are working very long hours at times to ensure that the committee reports on bills are delivered on time.

The report presents a summary of the committee's examination of the South East Queensland Water (Restructuring) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. The committee's task was to consider the policy outcomes to be achieved by the legislation, as well as the application of the fundamental legislative principles—that is, whether it has sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals and to the institution of parliament. The public examination process allows the parliament to hear the views from the public and stakeholders that may not have otherwise been heard, which should make for better policy and legislation in Queensland.

Although the issue of whether or not fluoride should be in our water supply was outside the terms of reference for my committee, it was interesting that most of the submissions were in relation to that specific issue—to not have fluoride in their water. Indeed, the CEO and one of the councillors of Bundaberg Regional Council appeared as witnesses in the committee process. They came along to tell us all of the financial and economic reasons why there should not be any fluoridation in their water supply.

As we went through the process we discussed the actual dollars involved. Many of the dollars were being provided by the state under the terms that expire on 30 June 2014. From memory, I think there was something like a \$1.3 million cost to the council and an ongoing cost in the order of \$600,000 to \$650,000 a year. They were fighting hard on the basis of that economic cost to the local community and argued that that money would be better spent on other infrastructure and so forth. Interestingly, when we put the assumption to the councillor that the state government says to you, 'It is going to cost you nothing. We will pay the full cost of implementation and we will pay the ongoing cost of maintaining the fluoride treatment. Would you then be happy with the fluoride treatment plants to be put in place?', it became evident then that the concept of arguing about the cost was simply a smokescreen. The reality was that the people of Bundaberg, and indeed the councillor who was with us on the day, were very clearly against the concept of having fluoride in their water at all. They indicated they would prefer not to have it.

It is interesting that the committee system had something brought to it that was outside the terms of reference and this was what was most likely the catalyst for a change and the proposed changes that have been announced today that will provide choice for all local governments across Queensland on whether to implement or continue with the fluoridation of their drinking water supplies. We had a very tight time line.

We had to have things in place by 1 January or the last day of December. That has now gone out the window. There is no real need to concern ourselves with that now, because we are now proposing to change the fundamental issue of whether or not fluoride is required in the water at all right around Queensland.

The committee process formed part of the decision making of the government even though there were no recommendations because we could not make recommendations as it was outside our terms of reference. So there were no recommendations in that regard in the report. The fact that it came before the committee and people had a voice and an opportunity to speak their mind in that committee process gave enough emphasis to the cause, if you like, for the government to reconsider the whole situation and over the last 48 hours do a complete turnaround on the whole issue.

Without taking up a lot more time here, I think all of the issues have been covered. I note that three of the four recommendations made by the committee have been accepted by the government. The fourth recommendation—recommendation 3—is no longer applicable because the requirement of the deadline date, the last day of December, is no longer applicable. So recommendation 3 is unimportant now.

Once again I think it is a reflection on the committee system—and I want to spend a couple of minutes on this—which has again been proven to be working. At the beginning of this parliament when the committee system was being changed we heard from the other side about the 6:2 ratio and the problem that was going to create: that the LNP was going to dominate committees. That is not so in the Finance and Administration Committee. In this committee, with me as chair and the deputy chair from the other side, we work well together in a bipartisan way with all of the work that we do. We do not always necessarily agree at the end of the day, but we work civilly together through the process and find ourselves working and treating one another in the way that we would expect to be treated and we come up with some very good recommendations for this place to consider.

I want to thank the committee. I want to thank all of the members. Indeed, I want to make particular note of the member for Greenslopes, who was on three committees for a while, but he always made an effort to come to the Finance and Administration Committee meetings. He quite enjoyed his time with us. It gave him a little bit of sanity, I think, because we are all nice, calm and collected people. We are losing him. He is off to greener pastures. We have taken on board the member for Moggill. The member for Greenslopes is sitting next to the police minister. I was looking at his seat and he was not there. The member for Moggill is coming on board, and I look forward to working with the member for Moggill into the future.

I thank the committee members very much, but in particular I want to thank the secretariat. The effort that the secretariat has put in on not only this particular bill but on every bill is incredible. We are doing a huge amount of work on the workers compensation review process on top of what we have done in absolutely ridiculously short time frames, and that could only be achieved with a totally dedicated secretariat. I want to thank each and every member of the secretariat, one of whom, Marilyn, is retiring on 4 January after 5½ years with the committee office. We have thoroughly enjoyed her time with us. I know she has enjoyed her time here, but she is off to Toastmasters. She is going to be heading up Toastmasters around Australia, I think. She is a very good speaker in her own right. We have never had an opportunity to really listen to her, but I wish her well. Indeed, the whole committee wishes her well on her future with Toastmasters. I close by saying that I commend the bill to the House.