



Speech by


**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

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## **MAREEBA-DIMBULAH IRRIGATION SCHEME**

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (3.34 pm): In the past month relift irrigators in the Mareeba-Dimbulah irrigation scheme have received their water bills. Relift growers have now been slugged with an \$18.39 per megalitre increase this year alone, with more increases planned. Farmers with medium to large farming operations, which contribute significantly to the Queensland economy, have been hit the hardest, with a \$44 per megalitre increase in volumetric charges. Before the election irrigators were promised that their irrigation cost would be CPI increased and any increases would be limited to \$2 plus CPI.

The government has made a big song and dance about making agriculture one of the four pillars of the Queensland economy, but the reality is that privatisation and corporatisation is threatening to tear down these pillars. Now, irrigators are realising that the figures quoted by this government prior to the election were nothing but spin and rhetoric. The Queensland Competition Authority has hit the road to give the impression that it wants to hear farmers' concerns and take on board recommendations, but the fact is that if the minister simply follows through on his party's election commitment to cap the water price increase at CPI plus \$2 for all irrigators, then farmers would be relieved of these crippling water costs.

Along with the increase in electricity, the cost of water is a major factor in a farmer's capacity to remain viable. Farmers are out there day in, day out trying to battle the weather, volatile markets, hostile foreign competition and an indifferent government corporation that is interested only in its own survival. There can be no equality or reasonable pricing of water when those who control the delivery of water are profit motivated.

I call on the minister and the Premier to abolish entities such as SunWater and abandon the corporate model of government. The persistent move towards the privatisation of water and energy will only inflate the cost of production. I urge members of the government to fight to regain control of our utilities from the hands of profit-hungry corporations. Farmers cannot pass on the increased cost to consumers. They have their backs to the wall. While the government turns up the cost of utilities on the one side, Coles and Woolworths screw down farm gate prices on the other. I am not talking about facts and figures; I am talking about people's lives. Their livelihoods, their history, their culture and their future is being taken away by the very government that promised to look after them. Primary producers are on their knees and many will walk away at great loss. Unfortunately, as farms close down our food security, the capacity of Queensland to feed itself and the rest of Australia will be compromised. The minister needs to implement the pre-election commitment of a cap on water price increases of CPI plus \$2 a megalitre as promised.