




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

LAND, WATER AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (5.52 pm): I rise to speak to the Land, Water and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The policy objectives of the bill are to progress the recommendations of the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry that relate to levees, reduce red tape and regulation, facilitate the conversion of water authorities to a two-tier operational structure, address concerns raised by stakeholders during the parliamentary committee hearing into the Mines Legislation (Streamlining) Amendment Act 2012 regarding pipelines carrying produced water, clarify an amendment made to the Regional Vegetation Management Code in 2009, extend time lines for the interim assessment process for water and sewerage issues for the South-East Queensland distributor-retailers and their owner councils to 1 March 2014 and implement a number of other miscellaneous amendments to address operational issues necessary to provide for continued effective implementation of a range of legislation.

I believe that this is good legislation as it will remove red tape, especially with regard to farm management, rural properties and vegetation management. It is good to see the removal of the riverine protection permits under the Water Act, and I think this is very important. These permits have been a thorn in the side of landowners, especially when they wish to clear vegetation in some of these areas. Honourable members need to remember that monsoonal rains fall in these areas and they need to consider the magnitude of those falls and the amount of thick regrowth of vegetation that grows within those creek systems, river systems and gullies. I give the example of Homestead where the whole railway track was destroyed during one of the recent floods because the vegetation growing in the creek that built up over the years had turned it into a form of dam and it filled to the point that it took out the railway track. It was a similar situation in Pentland where about 10 homes were flooded as a result of the vegetation that had built up in Betts Creek.

This bill will provide these landowners and local councils with an opportunity to clear vegetation in those riverine areas and creeks without being tied up by red tape. I do have to acknowledge that this is not about clearing remnant vegetation because it comes under the Vegetation Management Act. This is about doing something constructive and positive without being tied up with red tape.

I also believe that the repeal of the future conservation area provisions is a good move. I know that landowners were very concerned that their best land could be locked up. When I say 'best land', I am talking about the best land that they utilise, and they need to access that best land. We have seen legislation like the wild rivers legislation where the landowners were kicked out of the river system, which contained the prime land that they use. The very people who look after those river systems are the landowners. Likewise with those proposed conservation areas, the very people who appreciate them are the landowners. The best prime grazing area to utilise is probably those conservation areas. I believe this is good legislation.

I turn to the provision that will facilitate the conversion of water authorities to a two-tier cooperative structure. I feel this is also a good move. There is always a concern with regard to a corporate system of water delivery, and I use SunWater as an example. In the example of the

Dimbulah-Mutchilba relift water irrigators, there is a concern that the price has increased by up to \$18 a megalitre when the LNP government promised that it would only go up by \$2 a megalitre plus CPI. What concerns me with regard to those irrigators—and I can see that this is a good thing—is that the government is giving those irrigators the opportunity to take on some form of cooperative arrangement and take ownership of the channels and run-down channels. However, they still have to fight for—and the minister might be able to clarify this—a percentage of water from the corporate provider such as SunWater. I will use the example of the Tablelands. The infrastructure costs \$1,000 a megalitre to provide water to the Cairns area, whereas it costs about \$40 a megalitre to provide it to the Tablelands irrigators. Therefore, it is going to be more viable for the corporate—even if it is sold—to provide that water where there is more money. My big concern in relation to these relift irrigators, who are now paying up to \$18 more a megalitre when they were promised a capped increase of CPI plus \$2, is that they are being given the opportunity to take ownership. In the Bjelke-Petersen government water was a public utility and was delivered at cost price or below what it cost the government.

It was then foreseeable that if you could provide water at affordable rates then farmers would invest in water infrastructure and there would be flow-on effects to communities and money would also flow back to the government by way of land sales and stamp duty. Water should be delivered at or below the cost of production to give landowners a chance to be viable and productive. If agricultural production is to be doubled over 40 years, we need to ensure that water is affordable to those irrigators.

My concern is that this has given the opportunity for those landowners to take ownership, but if they do they will own a run-down system. They will still have to fight for the allocation for all those irrigators but if they do not opt in the government will say, 'We are kicking the guts out of you, because we have increased prices by up to \$18, but you had the opportunity to take ownership yourselves.' This is a big concern.

I do commend this initiative because we want to see management in all different areas localised and removed from the state. At the same time, I believe that farmers want water delivered below the cost of delivery and back in public ownership, not corporatised. Water should never be a commodity; it should be provided and delivered to be utilised for the benefit of Queensland.