




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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WATER REFORM AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (10.15 pm): I rise to support the Water Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014. The management of the state's water resources is an issue that concerns all Queenslanders, and so I welcome this bill, which delivers on the government's commitment to balancing economic, social and environmental outcomes for the benefit of all.

The large number of submissions made to the committee's inquiry reflects the fact that the responsible management of water is a topic close to the hearts of many people who depend on it for their livelihood. I thank the committee for their time in considering the large number of voices who weighed into the public consultation process.

With the face of the state's economy having changed significantly since the Water Act 2000 was enacted, it makes sense to make some significant reforms that reflect the current best practice standards and keep pace with the changing needs of the agriculture and resource sectors, all the while responsibly maintaining our environment—without which we have nothing to begin with. The co-existence of resources and agriculture in rural and regional areas is a relationship that has water at its very heart. As we have seen in some parts of the country, it is a relationship that has not always resulted in favourable outcomes for some parties.

I commend the Queensland government, in particular the minister and staff of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, for actively taking the lead on this issue by implementing responsible legislation that seeks the best possible outcome for all.

There are a few key points in the bill that I believe are worth highlighting. The first is the establishment of a consistent framework for managing the impact on underground water due to resources activities. In particular I note the provision which ensures that a statutory make-good obligation applies for any landholder whose water supply bore is affected as a result of mining operations. Currently these make-good obligations only apply to petroleum and gas operations; however, landholders need to have certainty that any impacts to their bore water supply will be remedied in an agreed statutory manner.

The bill also amends the cumulative management area framework in the Water Act to ensure that the impacts of mining operations are soundly managed where it is predicted they will have a cumulative impact on underground water resources. I note that the minister identified the Galilee Basin in Central Queensland as an area where a future cumulative management area declaration may be beneficial. While this would be a future decision for government, I commend the department for their foresight in identifying this need and putting the necessary framework in place now.

Another significant reform in this bill will mean that for the first time the petroleum and gas sector will be bound by the same rules as everyone else when it comes to taking groundwater for all operational purposes other than where the water is an unavoidable by-product of the extraction process. As the minister pointed out in his introductory speech, this reform will be especially important as the sector looks to expand into parts of Queensland where water from the Great Artesian Basin is

the lifeblood of many communities and pastoral operations—something that many areas of the Burnett electorate will be particularly interested in.

While the legislation establishes a better framework of control over water resources, it is certainly not designed to disadvantage the resources sector. In fact under the legislation, responsible operators across all sectors will be rewarded with significant reductions in red tape, which clearly fulfils the core objectives of this government to reduce bureaucracy and promote economic development. Some of these measures include: streamlining the process for water licences, in particular where an existing licence holder seeks changes to their licence; the simplification of the process and reduction of timeframes for releasing unallocated water; the provision for category 2 water authorities to enjoy more autonomy and efficiency; and the development of a watercourse identification map to provide clear and easily accessible information to stakeholders.

In conclusion, as we have seen in recent years here in Queensland nature can be harsh, and at times parts of the state are flooding while others are suffering the effects of drought. Water is a precious resource that does not always come along where we need it or when we need it. It is therefore vital that we take care of it responsibly and make the best possible use of it. Having said that, the responsible management of our water resources and the enjoyment of the economic benefits of strong agricultural and resource sectors do not have to be conflicting interests. By passing this bill we will be putting in place a sound framework for balancing economic and environmental outcomes.

On a personal level, I am excited by some of the possibilities that exist within my electorate to take it forward economically but I also recognise the need to protect the water assets that characterise the region. I therefore thank the minister, his departmental team and the committee for their hard work and diligence in bringing this bill to the parliament. I look forward to seeing and experiencing the rewards it will bring to Queensland.