




Speech By
Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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**PROCLAMATION MADE UNDER THE WATER REFORM AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT ACT**

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (7.56 pm): I rise to speak against this disallowance motion moved by the member for Hinchinbrook. As the member for Townsville in North Queensland, I am all too aware of how vital it is to secure and protect Queensland's precious water resources. My electorate is bordered by the treasure that is the Great Barrier Reef, which contributes so much to the state's natural beauty and the state's tourism industry. My electorate is also surrounded by the agricultural centres of North Queensland which are indispensable to the Queensland economy. However, both require the ongoing sustainable management of Queensland's water resources. Additionally, the state is looking down the barrel of a drought that is affecting families and impacting on communities. With 80 per cent of the state currently drought declared, we cannot afford to take risks with our water resources. It is for those reasons that I am most concerned about the former government's Water Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and why all members should vote against this disallowance motion.

During the parliamentary committee process and the parliamentary debate, the government, then in opposition, raised concerns about particular provisions of the WROLA Bill. These concerns were not just those of the Labor Party but also those of a wide range of stakeholders, including landholders and the agricultural, mining and conservation sectors. Those concerns were consistently raised and consistently ignored by the former LNP government. As the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines pointed out on 3 June, when a motion was previously moved by those opposite on this matter, aspects of these laws were of concern to those groups.

I am very concerned about the removal of important principles of ecological sustainable development from the purpose of the Water Act. I cannot support removing those important principles. Those principles ensure appropriate consideration and balance between economic, environmental, social and equitable considerations. They ensure that water systems are enhanced for future generations and these principles ensure the ongoing biological diversity and ecological integrity of all systems depending on Queensland's water supplies. No amount of window-dressing can hide the fact that the replacement definitions seriously undermine the act and remove essential and environmental sustainability protections.

Additionally, I cannot, and members should not, support the provisions of the water development option. These provisions allow commitments to water to be made to major water infrastructure projects without appropriate consultation and outside the water planning process. Queensland has a comprehensive and rigorous water planning process undertaken by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. Each water resource plan is periodically reviewed, using best available science to determine an appropriate balance between environmental flows and consumptive use.

Decisions regarding consumptive use for irrigation should take place in the water planning framework, not through the environmental impact statement. I am also extremely concerned that

consultation is deferred until after the grant of a water development option. For such a significant undertaking I would have hoped that consultation with potentially affected stakeholders and interested parties would be guaranteed in legislation. Instead, we find that it is deferred to a later EIS process outside of the water planning framework. I share the concerns of many stakeholders with this framework and I cannot support it.

All Queenslanders should be concerned about the risk of overallocating water resources and impacts on the Great Barrier Reef. The water development options and the watercourse provisions that allow watercourses to be deregulated seriously increase these risks. I would have hoped that the LNP government would have had time to reflect on their experiences with the WROLA Bill and come to this House with new policies, new frameworks and new proposals. Instead, here we are discussing the same issues that got those opposite in trouble last year and led to the stinging rebuke on 31 January.

The government, when in opposition, delivered a dissenting report in the Agriculture, Resources and Environmental Committee's report on the WROLA Bill. Despite this opposition and the support of many members of the wider community on our stance, the WROLA Bill was passed and the majority of provisions were proclaimed to commence on 18 February 2015, excluding the groundwater reforms for the resource sectors.

On taking office, one of the government's first actions was to bring forward the amendment proclamation to prevent these questionable water reforms from commencing. This was an important action to meet our commitments to Queenslanders, commitments that the Palaszczuk government takes seriously, unlike those opposite. This proclamation amendment allows the government to properly consider these provisions in the WROLA Act and ensure they align with our policy commitments to Queenslanders before they are allowed to commence. The government has been taking action and I know that my colleague, the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, has been making substantial progress in reviewing the WROLA Act with the commencement of some beneficial provisions only last week. These include the watercourse identification map and new processes for the release of unallocated water.

The minister has also advised of his intention to bring forward a bill soon to address the government's remaining concerns with the provisions of the WROLA Act. This provides those opposite, and indeed the entire House, the opportunity to scrutinise and contribute to the bill. I know that my colleagues on the Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee will undertake a thorough and comprehensive examination of proposed changes, taking on feedback from the wider community.

I also noted that the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines has been extremely active on water issues. Not only has he reviewed and commenced the aforementioned components of the act, he has also been working to deliver sustainable water resource development that will benefit the state. For example, the minister has been working diligently to recently deliver the finalisation of amendments to the Gulf Water Resource Plan. I know that this will be a significant boost to the far north. The minister has also initiated the water planning process to deliver increased opportunities in the Burdekin Basin up my way.

This is a government that takes the sustainable management of water in this state extremely seriously, as have all Labor governments in this state. This is unlike those opposite. The member for Hinchinbrook, in moving this motion to disallow the amending proclamation, stands to impede the legitimate mandate of the government to meet its commitments to Queenslanders. What is more, the member for Hinchinbrook is moving a motion advocating for the commencement of provisions that are quite troublesome and place at risk Queensland's precious water resources. For these reasons the disallowance should not be supported and I will be voting against this disallowance motion.