




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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UTILITIES, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumbidgee—ALP) (11.58 am): I rise to speak to report No. 14 on the maintenance of water infrastructure assets. I have read this report, as has the member for Southport, who said it shows they did a great job of reining in costs. I take a different view on this, and that is the beauty of these reports. What I see in this report is that the Water for life program was a measured, very necessary response to the crisis that we were facing at the time.

I will just remind members opposite of where we were at the time. Like the member for Southport, I was there too. I was a councillor at the time and I will tell people the situation we were in at the time. We were one failed wet season away from we do not know what. In a lot of dams throughout Queensland, we were right at the bottom of the dams and we were drinking the last 10 per cent of the water that was there. I think it was a very measured response because action had to be taken and taken rapidly, and that is what I get from this report as well.

I have to say that the Gold Coast did lead the way on this, and I do congratulate them on that. We heard today the member for Southport talking about how they started the project in the Gold Coast City Council. That \$120 million or \$200 million project was taken up and it was certainly made bigger. From a Queensland perspective, I think that was the right thing to do. As I said, I think the member for Southport can congratulate himself on supporting this and being a supporter of this desalination plant.

From reading this report, it is very clear to me that these assets are not stranded assets; these assets will be needed very soon for Queensland. The report said that, because of this, the assets beyond 2030 are well and truly covered and that the desalination plant may be needed to meet the Gold Coast's capacity by 2020. That is only four years away. I hear criticism that it is just sitting there, but when we visited the desalination plant we found out that it is working all the time. Twice a week, it manufactures a certain number of megalitres of water—I think it is three megalitres—and that is put into the system on the Gold Coast. It is constantly working and supplying water to the residents of the Gold Coast.

This report shows that it has been used, and it was crucial that it was used at that time in the 2013 floods. It is good to see in this report that it can be used quickly in case of a catastrophe. These figures that are talked about are quite crucial. The desalination plant can get to 33 per cent within 24 hours and 100 per cent within 72 hours. If we are faced with another dire flood in South-East Queensland and in other parts of Queensland where our water treatment plants have been inundated, this plant can come on line quickly.

Our tours of the western corridor plant and the Gold Coast desalination plant were quite instructive. I do not think members can say this is a gold plated asset; it is a working water plant. There is a lot of concrete and a lot of stainless steel, but there is no gold plating whatsoever—metaphorical or otherwise. It is a working plant and it is a very good working plant. Like all the plants I have seen through this, it is basic and functional. I think Queensland should be proud of what we have produced with the western corridor plant and the desalination plant. We can be very proud indeed.

Once again, I emphasise what we were facing at the time. As I said, within council we were discussing what would happen if we had another failed wet season. It was unknown territory. As it was, we were taking water from the lowest part of the dam—that last 10 per cent or so from some of our dams—and the water had to be treated at such a high level and it was a very expensive process. I commend this report to the parliament.