




Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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### **WATER LEGISLATION (DAM SAFETY) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (5.34 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the Water Legislation (Dam Safety) Amendment Bill 2016. The issue of water usage and storage has never been more relevant or more important to the future of the state. There are a couple of dams that directly impact my area in North Queensland. The Ross Dam is the primary water supply for Townsville, which is almost dry at present, and there is ongoing debate surrounding the Burdekin Falls Dam—and the Burdekin River runs right through the centre of my electorate—and what the raising of that dam wall might mean not only to the water supply of Queensland but also in terms of ongoing development in the agricultural sector between Home Hill and Bowen through the Elliot main channel and other schemes as well. It is very relevant in my area.

In relation to the Ross River Dam, during my time on the Townsville City Council they lowered the spillway of that dam to improve the safety and to reduce the impact on downstream residents should that dam experience a significant wet weather event. During a couple of those wet weather events when I was in Townsville on council and as a member of the local disaster management group, the automatic opening of the gates which allowed water over the spillway was certainly a bone of contention. It caused a lot of very anxious moments within the disaster management group and certainly with the residents of Townsville. I am pleased to see that this legislation formalises that process. I think that is important going forward.

The safety of water supply dams is regulated through that water supply act. We certainly never want to see a repeat of the floods in this area of the state in 2011, which were exacerbated by the lack of integration between dam safety emergency planning and community emergency management planning. There is a need to ensure our dams are safe and that their structural integrity will withstand wet weather events. However, it is even more important that appropriate measures are in place to protect our residents when water is released from those dams.

As a former deputy of the Townsville disaster management group, I know firsthand the importance of having an emergency action plan for dams and the need to ensure regular reviews are conducted of those plans. Those plans should not exist in isolation and should be prepared in consultation with disaster management groups and the broader community. There should be no secrets regarding those emergency management plans for our dams.

I participated in a number of debriefs following cyclones and wet weather events. Almost without exception the single biggest issue identified is that of communication. Communication that is consistent between legislation, policy guidelines and plans will go a long way to ensuring a transparent and effective process is in place around this legislation. Given the risks and potential ramifications of an unauthorised or poorly managed release of water for downstream residents, there needs to be a robust and stringent process in place regarding the approval process. That is to say that the process that the regulator applies to ensure emergency action plans comply with legislation and guideline requirements needs to be transparent and in accordance with legislative requirements.

I note that an event can be treated as a dam hazard event but can also be treated as an emergency event if and as the situation escalates. Other events can be treated immediately as an emergency event. This means that a dam owner can plan when to notify the community, including leading up to and when there is a dam hazard event or emergency event, and when to warn that particular community.

I have listened to the debate tonight about referable dams and I, too, share the concerns of members on this side of the House about the potential impact that will have on some of our dam owners and operators across the state. Certainly when we talk about risks, there are dams on private property, on farms et cetera, of a significant size. There is certainly a big question mark about the costs involved if someone is designated to have a referable dam. I would draw the minister's attention to that tonight.

The management of water in our dams is vitally important to the protection of downstream users, and we do not want a repeat of the disaster that developed during the 2011 floods. I support any measure that aims to improve dam safety, and I support the changes that are outlined in the bill.