




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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WATER LEGISLATION (DAM SAFETY) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (5.24 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Water Legislation (Dam Safety) Amendment Bill 2016. As many people in this House may not realise, the electorate of Nanango actually has 10.377 per cent of the state's referable dams. This is a very important issue for the electorate of Nanango. Like I have said, we have nine of the current referable dams in the state seat of Nanango. If we take in the full South Burnett, that takes it up to 11. I will list those dams. We could be talking here about the 'electorate of the dams' or the 'electorate of the lakes' as people around Toogoolawah like to call it.

We have the mighty Somerset and Wivenhoe dams, which are South-East Queensland's major water supply and flood mitigation dams. We have Atkinson Dam in the Somerset Regional Council area. We have Cooby, Perseverance and Cressbrook dams—water supply dams owned and operated by the Toowoomba Regional Council. There are two mine operated dams at Meandu Mine and Tarong Power Station. We have Gordonbrook Dam in the South Burnett which provides the water supply to the town of Kingaroy.

Just to the north but still within the bounds of the South Burnett we have the water supply catchment dams of Bjelke-Petersen and Boondooma. For any members who like to go water skiing or camping, there is no greater spot than the beautiful, mighty Boondooma Dam, although the levels are quite low at the moment. Unfortunately, Tropical Cyclone Debbie did not quite dump enough into the catchment area. There is always one area that unfortunately does not get enough while another part of Queensland gets way too much. Those are the dams within my region in Queensland.

I certainly understand the importance and the pressures of landholders who reside around those dams. We all know, particularly those of us on this side of the House who do have a greater understanding of the importance of the agricultural industry to Queensland, that water is indeed a precious resource. We need more water. It is obvious, unfortunately, that the government we have in Queensland now is not interested in building dams. Only an LNP government would build dams. Water also gives life to our agricultural sector—our crops, our animals, our farms, our landholders and, most importantly, our people. Without access to water, many of our regional communities simply would not exist.

As I have mentioned, dams are a wonderful use of tourism and recreation. I was very proud to be able to campaign in the 2012 election on opening up the vital waterways of Wivenhoe and Somerset to make use of those. The Somerset Regional Council were very pleased when the LNP in government opened up those dams so that we could use them—so that they were not just a big mass of water sitting there. We stopped listening to those crazy green groups who said, 'Oh, no, we cannot have any recreation on the dams'—a massive supply of water—'because it may affect the water that people in Brisbane drink.' That debate has already been had and thankfully won. We also understand that our dams must be managed safely because in times of extreme rainfall events flooding can and does occur.

Following the terrible floods of 2011 it was the former LNP government that implemented recommendations from the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry to improve dam safety and flood mitigation. Much needed to be done to regain community confidence in our major water structures for those living downstream of the dam walls. Unfortunately, in 2015 following the impact of Cyclone Marcia on Wivenhoe Dam, water releases severely impacted primary producers in the mid-Brisbane Valley and Lockyer region. This is an example of where and how things can go wrong if dams are not managed properly. At 8.07 a text message was sent from Seqwater saying that they had commenced releases at 8 pm. The landholders received the message at 8.07, but the release was actually commenced at 8 pm. Then they said they would be slowly increasing the release to 400 cubic metres per second. This is well below the safe levels for pumps to remain in the river and the landholders knew that. At 8.20 pm, in the black of night, they then received a text messaging saying that controlled gate releases would increase, and overnight Brisbane River increased to 4.5 metres.

This has been executed by me in this House, and I spoke in the House on 19 May 2015 on that very important matter. It is important that it is raised again in this House to remind those living downstream that unfortunately it took this Labor government three weeks to even realise that major catastrophe had occurred. Finally, a review was conducted into the event which made 30 findings and eight key recommendations, including a safer warning system for those downstream.

This bill includes changes to the Water Act 2000 and the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008 to further improve dam safety. As mentioned here on several occasions, while the LNP supports the intent and the principles of the amendments, there are concerns which simply need addressing. Firstly, there are the unintended consequences of moving some liability onto local governments and local disaster management committees. The LGAQ also noted some concerns in relation to the financial impost on those councils as the responsibility for reviewing the emergency action plans would move to them rather than the local disaster management groups, which I would say would be much better funded and resourced than local councils. Secondly, there is the granting to the Department of Energy and Water Supply CEO the unfettered right to impose potentially unnecessary reviews on some dam owners resulting in unnecessary cost imposts. We are not talking about those major dams; we are talking about landholders who may or may not have referable dams; they may not even know. The impost and the cost to them is really quite unknown. Thirdly, there is the difficulty around understanding the notification process and the lack of guidance in respect of warning systems and safety signs, which has been spoken about by my colleagues in the House.

It is important to remember that it is not just local governments who manage these dams. Primary producers, our agricultural producers, are also dam owners and managers. It is concerning, therefore, that this Labor government has done no work to assess the additional costs on those farmers and whether those costs are less than the potential benefits of the reform. Certainly it is understood that no RIS has been done in relation to this at all. We are backed up there in that submission. I can see there are slight expressions of concern on faces just outside of the House, but this is backed up. I can rely upon the submissions of Cotton Australia. They strongly question whether any farm dams should be regulated as referable dams, the simple reason being the costs. Then there is the Queensland Farmers' Federation, which queried whether the referable dam framework is appropriate for dams given the level of risk these dams pose. However, Queensland Farmers' Federation did note, thankfully, that no deaths have occurred from farm dam collapses. I think it is important to note that.

I am also quite concerned about the lack of mechanism in the bill for people purchasing a property to be notified that the dam on that property is classed as a referable dam and, therefore, the need to highlight the potential costs and obligations to new owners.

On behalf of my constituents and the people I mentioned above—there are way more than 10 per cent given that there are so many other dams that we do not even know are referable dams—we would be seeking clarification from the minister around those issues to ensure that this bill does not impose any unnecessary extra red tape.