




Speech By  
**Jennifer Howard**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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**WATER (LOCAL MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (3.58 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Water (Local Management Arrangements) Amendment Bill 2016. We all understand the importance of having strong water irrigation infrastructure in place to meet the needs of the communities and businesses in regional areas of Queensland. Indeed, it is vital for supporting economic growth and stability within the communities in our rural regions.

The Water (Local Management Arrangements) Amendment Bill supports the Palaszczuk government's commitment to having a healthy and strong irrigation network across our regional areas. In addition to ensuring a robust channel scheme that services the rural areas, it also aims to transfer the ownership and management arrangements for our irrigation channel schemes from SunWater to local irrigators where it is viable to do so. This will empower local irrigation customers and communities to have direct input into the management of their own water supplies. It will enable local knowledge to be used more readily in decision-making to better service the regions and to add greater value to our agricultural sector. Through more informed decision-making, we will be better able to reduce costs and improve productivity. In addition to greater efficiency, it will put the respective irrigation channel operators in a better position to respond to changing customer demands. The irrigators are the No. 1 customers of the schemes in their area and, as such, are the best people to make decisions about how these irrigation schemes should operate.

The management of water locally has been happening over the past 20 years in New South Wales and in Western Australia, so it is not a new concept by any means. In fact in Mackay, the town I grew up in, Pioneer Valley Water has been a locally managed irrigation scheme since its establishment in 1996. The transition of ownership from SunWater to local management arrangements is being done through extensive consultation with stakeholders from each of our eight channel irrigation schemes, with the transition only coming into effect once the relevant local irrigation communities agree and support the final terms.

An equally important component of the Water (Local Management Arrangements) Amendment Bill is to ensure that all entities established to manage a channel irrigation scheme that are owned and operated by the irrigation customers in each scheme have the appropriate backing, provisions and tenure to operate the scheme successfully. To achieve this and to ensure ongoing successful management of these important irrigation schemes, the transitions will be carried out in a staged approach, starting with the Eton, Emerald, St George and Theodore channel irrigation schemes that are ready now to commence the transition. In these regions there is strong community commitment to local management of the irrigation schemes and the local operators have the necessary business structures in place.

The remaining four channel irrigation schemes would transition across after further local community consultations and further progression and revisions of the business proposals. I think this is a great example of what a consultative government the Palaszczuk government is and what outcomes you can get through that consultation. While the bill does not apply to dams and bulk water

infrastructure, weirs that are integral components of operations of the scheme will be covered. What the bill does specifically apply to is all irrigation infrastructure such as pipes, channels, pump stations and plant equipment necessary to operate the irrigation scheme.

The Water (Local Management Arrangements) Amendment Bill 2016 will help establish a more effective irrigation network through some of our key regional areas, thereby supporting future growth in our rural industry and agriculture enterprises in these communities. When I was assistant minister for local government I travelled to these rural and regional areas quite a bit and when I was chair of the agriculture committee I spoke to many farmers and many people in regional areas about this issue, and water is obviously a major issue. With 80 per cent of Queensland in drought, water is one of the biggest issues for people in rural and regional areas. Handing this control back to the actual irrigators to make decisions locally about the future of their water supply is integral to them being successful and keeping our rural and regional areas alive. For these reasons and more, I commend this bill to the House.