




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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WATER LEGISLATION (DAM SAFETY) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (6.40 pm): I too would like to make a short contribution to the debate on the Water Legislation (Dam Safety) Amendment Bill 2016. Like the member for Condamine, this will have a huge impact on those in my area, those in the seat of Gregory, and especially the Central Highlands where we have one of Queensland's major irrigation areas—the Fairbairn Dam and large-scale irrigation. We use ring tanks and dams across the landscape.

Tonight I would like to pay tribute and remember Nelani Koefer who was swept to her death when an inflatable section of the Bedford Weir near Blackwater burst in November 2008. Following an inquest into the incident, Coroner David O'Connell recommended that the dam operator, SunWater, remove and not reinstate the rubber fabric dams made by Trelleborg, or, as it was known, Queensland Rubber. It was suggested that the serviceable life of the particular rubber barrier was 30 years. Within two years of the barrier being installed it had started to develop problems with ruptures in the foam and tears in the fabric.

The coroner recommended the inflatable rubber dam at the Bedford Weir be removed and never used again. The coroner also found a controlled wall of water was released when the barrier, which was about 1.2 metres high, ruptured with a loud bang and caused the shin-deep water that Nelani and her mother were in to quickly rise. Nelani's mother tried to move her to higher ground but little Nelani was swept away from the arms of another adult and found dead downstream the next day. I think every member in this House would agree that that is absolutely devastating. This four-year-old was at the start of her life. This tragic accident that happened in the small town of Blackwater was felt not only in the community of Blackwater but right around the Central Highlands.

Tonight I would like to pay tribute and remember Nelani and her family and acknowledge what they have gone through. It is certainly very sad. We need to make sure that this sort of infrastructure has the necessary safety provisions around it to ensure this never happens again.

In terms of the Water Legislation (Dam Safety) Amendment Bill 2016 I would also like to touch on agriculture and the Emerald irrigation area. That area is home to the Fairbairn Dam and is a substantial irrigation area in Queensland. I want to acknowledge the impact this legislation may have on farmers. I note the concerns of Michael Murray from Cotton Australia with regard to the regulation of dams.

Like the member for Condamine, I too have been involved in agriculture and certainly irrigation. I have also been involved in building these ring tanks. The amount of work and the amount of engineering that goes into them is substantial. They are very safe pieces of infrastructure.

Mr Rickuss: If they start to leak it is a slow leak.

Mr MILLAR: It is. I take that interjection from the member for Lockyer. When they do leak it is a slow leak. In 1992 a dam on my parents' place and a dam on our neighbour's place did go because of rain. What happens is that those dams fill up and the water goes over the top of the spillway and slowly erodes the soil. The water slowly goes away. They then have to be repaired.

I would like reassurance from the minister that farmers will not be hit with more regulation and more costs as a result of this legislation. It is quite an expensive exercise to build dams and to build ring tanks. The last thing we want to do is put additional costs, additional red tape and additional bureaucracy onto these farmers when it comes to constructing these dams. I hope the minister will be able to reassure us in the House tonight that that will not be the case.