




Speech By  
**Scott Stewart**

**MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE**

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

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (4.20 pm): I rise today to give my support for the Water (Local Management Arrangements) Amendment Bill 2016. As we all know, and as we have heard over the last day or two, water is the lifeblood of any community. Nothing is more true, especially for farmers. Farmers know that there are three essential components for a good crop: good sunshine, good dirt and a good supply of water. When these three elements come together you get good agriculture.

I am an old Burdekin boy and up my way we grow sugar cane—and plenty of it—and in more recent times small crops like capsicums, tomatoes, zucchinis, melons and one of those amazing tropical fruits, the mango. More recently rice is on the table—pardon the pun—and a crop that may be returning to the area. All of those crops are grown with plenty of good sunshine, good dirt and, of course, that good water that we are all talking about. One thing I hear the farmers gripe about—and I have a number of Burdekin farmers in my extended family—is water, that lifeblood of the community and of the farming industry. Sometimes when they gripe about water they gripe about it raining on one crop when it should be raining on the other one. Unfortunately we cannot change that.

This bill provides the mechanism to implement local management arrangements, which is an important means for putting irrigation customers in charge of the channel irrigation schemes which are critical to their businesses. That means, for farmers like my aunts and uncles, my cousins and their families, they will be able to have more input into decisions which develop local solutions to meet their needs and therefore provide ongoing, affordable water for agriculture.

So many of those people out there, those naysayers, will tell you it is just like putting the mice in charge of the cheese factory. In fact, this bill will produce the exact opposite to the notion of children running the candy store. It will enable irrigators and other channel irrigation scheme customers the ability to determine appropriate service levels, adjustments and strategies for managing irrigation water prices. The introduction of this bill represents the accumulation of many years work investigating the viability of and local customer support for transferring the irrigation channel schemes from SunWater to local customer ownership. The amendments contained in the bill will enable four transition schemes to move to local management should agreement be reached between the schemes' customers and the government.

As a strong advocate for local jobs, which I have been very vocal about for my local region, I am assured that SunWater field staff will transfer to the new local entity under their existing conditions with job security guaranteed for three years in line with the government's commitment to no forced redundancies. This will ensure that their knowledge and expertise remains within the local community, where their family can remain as integral members of their community, where their kids can go to school, where their family can continue to do their shopping to ensure that local money stays within the local community. This is important. In regional centres across this state we are sick and tired of having work performed by contractors from the south-east corner or, worse, from interstate who come into town, do their work and leave, all because they were the cheapest multiservice site delivery option when the contract was offered for tender across Queensland.

Local management of channel irrigation schemes by the scheme's customers will benefit both irrigation customers and local communities by enabling goods and services to be locally sourced, potentially increasing work for local contractors and tradies. It is about time that our local mum-and-dad small businesses, like the tradies in regional Queensland, have the opportunity to do what they used to do decades ago: fix their own infrastructure. It means that tradies will be able to put on an apprentice and teach their skills in a local context. It means that local kids do not need to leave regional towns because schemes like this will provide opportunities for locals to manage their own infrastructure and keep jobs and skills in those regional areas.

This transfer of ownership and management of irrigation infrastructure will put those who know the irrigation scheme best—like my cane farming uncles, aunties and their sons, or my small crop growing cousins—in charge of the management and delivery of vital irrigation water. The implementation of local management supports the efficient delivery of irrigation water services and as a result supports agricultural productivity and the local community through employment opportunities. That means that towns dotted throughout our state, like Home Hill, Gumlu, St George, Emerald, Gindi, Eton, Homebush and hundreds of others, can continue to sustain local jobs and have a bright future through the effective management of their agricultural industry by managing the irrigation infrastructure for themselves by themselves. I commend the bill to the House.