



Speech By  
**Christopher Whiting**


**MEMBER FOR BANCROFT**

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Record of Proceedings, 16 May 2018

**MOTION**

**Water Prices**

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (5.24 pm): I rise to speak against this motion. What exactly is the LNP saying in this motion? They are saying that our solution to the question of water prices in South-East Queensland is to overturn the QCA's recommendation—in the name of political expediency let us just throw it away. 'We are the experts,' say those opposite. Any government has a right to choose a different outcome from one recommended by a body such as the Queensland Competition Authority, but that decision to choose a different pathway needs to be a balanced decision. It needs to be carefully considered. This is an area where politicians and elected representatives need to tread very carefully.

I know from my time in local government, when we did own the water and sewerage assets, that councillors kept themselves at a partial distance from budget decisions about the water and sewerage business. When deciding the budget the easiest thing to say is, 'Do we have to fund this water project this year? Can't we make the water connection fee a bit cheaper if we drop some water projects? Can't we put the replacement of that rising main back one year? I need that money for a parks project', or, 'Can we cut back on the pipe lining program as well? I need to finish a footpath program.' That is easy because no-one sees the water and sewerage assets. They are mostly underground or out of sight.

I take the point of the previous speaker that we have the cheapest rates. I know of a South-East Queensland council that used to pride itself on having low water and sewerage rates and when it was amalgamated the greater entity that inherited it had to spend an enormous amount of money getting their pipes and stations up to scratch.

There is no doubt bulk water assets are expensive. There is a lot of technology and concrete involved, as well as a lot of excavation. The process is expensive. People have said, 'Why is it so expensive? Water falls down from the sky. It is for free.' The truth is that that water has to be collected through huge engineering projects. It has to be treated in the best possible way to make it safe and that cannot be wrong. Then the water has to be transported. A water engineer once told me he was in the transport business. A cubic metre of water weighs a tonne and we are shifting countless tonnes of product all throughout our communities and that takes a huge amount of energy and dollars. We have to get it right every time we do it.

This comes at a time when the revenues of water entities are static because we are very careful users of water. If the revenue is not going up that affects the value of the assets. Plus, the bulk water companies need to replace or construct new assets to cater for our booming population. These are businesses with high levels of debt because of the incredibly expensive nature of the assets that they do hold. Asset replacement and price setting is complex and many experts carefully construct an assets program and a pricing pathway.

Why is the LNP wanting to trample over this like a demented elephant? I imagine this morning there were two minutes of detailed consideration where those opposite scrambled around asking what they were going to do for their motion today: 'What is on the front page of the *Courier-Mail*? No, we can't use that. Is there anything in the paper? No. Well, let us do this one.' Considered decision-making has never really been a hallmark of the LNP. The decisions the LNP made last time it was in government cost it its record majority in just one term. Opportunism is the badge of the LNP government under the member for Nanango. That is why those opposite are where they are and why they are going backwards.

The process whereby politicians seek and respect the advice of expert bodies is important in the age we live in. Their advice needs to be considered carefully and not tossed out all in the name of a brief debate. This motion by the LNP is wilfully ignorant of the positive work the QCA is doing. The QCA and Seqwater have identified hundreds of millions of dollars in savings and efficiencies and this has helped put downward pressure on our water bills. Anyone who knows the functions of the QCA will appreciate that the government will consider the QCA's recommendation and reach a decision accordingly. We will not be railroaded by this silliness this afternoon that is driven by sheer optimism from the opposition. It is interesting to hear those opposite talk down the Tugun desalination plant. As the member for Southport has said, it was one of the great programs—

*(Time expired).*