




Speech By
Michael Hart

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

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MOTION

Water Prices

 **Mr HART** (Burleigh—LNP) (5.39 pm): It is just bizarre. Those opposite reinvent history to suit their own argument. Mr Speaker, on 8 August 2017, when you were treasurer of this state, you said—

I wish to state clearly that the Palaszczuk government will be making decisions that ensure no avoidable or unnecessary costs are passed on to SEQ water bills. There are options open to the government to ensure that water bills do not rise, including extending the 20-year price path for repaying the cost of the water grid. We will need to assess those issues when we receive the QCA recommendations.

Those recommendations have come through now. The government should be assessing what they can do about this.

I will address a couple of things that previous members have said. The member for Bancroft said that the LNP was being wilfully ignorant. I think the member for Bancroft needs to have a look at his statement where we said that we should not be overturning the QCA's decision because they are the right authority to make the decision as to what is to happen in the future.

That is exactly what the government did with the QCA's decision on the last lot of electricity prices. They injected \$770 million to pay for the Solar Bonus Scheme for the next three years and then sent it back to the QCA and said, 'Redo all your numbers.' They artificially lowered the figure and they can do exactly the same thing here if they choose to do it. It sounds to me as though the minister has already ruled that out. He is going to let this increase flow through to the people of Queensland.

There is only one reason water bills cost so much. That is because of the amount of debt Seqwater has. According to the Auditor-General's report of 2016-17 into water costs in 2015-16, Seqwater has \$11.1 billion worth of assets and \$9.4 billion worth debt.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr HART: I will take that interjection. They are capitalising on the interest on that. I say to the member for Gladstone and the member for Bancroft that no-one is paying down this debt. They are just paying the interest on it. In fact, they are adding to the issue by drawing dividends out of these companies which cannot afford them. It is all borrowed money. It is all on the credit card.

Let us look at a couple of things they did. Some members in here might remember Peter Beattie rushing off to an election in 2006 because Brisbane city was facing a shortage of water and they were moving on to level 4 water restrictions. Peter Beattie rushed off to that election. He then stuck his head up, had a look around and said, 'We need some water, don't we? What will we do?'

The Gold Coast City Council had actually planned to build a \$300 million desalination plant. The government got the plans and studied them. They sent them back to the original planners and said, 'Double the size of the thing and build it quickly. Don't worry about a business case because we don't need one of those. We will just go out and do it and borrow the money.' That \$300 million turned into \$1.2 billion. It was all borrowed. It went straight on to the credit card.

Peter Beattie flew in a helicopter up to Gympie. He flew over the Mary River and said, 'There's a good site for a dam. That is a great area for a dam. Let's build a dam here.'

Mr Last: How much?

Mr HART: Some \$715 million was wasted. Some \$550 million went in land resumptions alone and then the government had to go and sell those.

An opposition member: And destroyed the community.

Mr HART: It destroyed the community that the member for Gympie represents. Then we had the Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme. We were running short of water so they thought it was a great idea to take recycled water and put it through a few treatment plants—some of them had never been turned on, never been tested and they did not know whether they would work. They threw a couple of billion dollars at that. It was all borrowed money.

Now water bills have to go up. People cannot afford the water so they are using less, but even though they are using less they are paying more. This is ludicrous. Those opposite should be supporting this very sensible motion.