




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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**STATE DEVELOPMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND AGRICULTURAL
INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (3.39 pm): I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's 2017-18 water report. As I listened to the contributions of members on my side and members on the other side, I noted the stark difference in understanding about the value of irrigated agriculture. I doubt whether anybody seated to my left has visited a property that relies on irrigated agriculture. Judging from their contributions, I think that is backed up. What we are seeing, which does not surprise us much, is this Labor government persistently using state owned instrumentality as a cash cow or a secret tax so it can waste money on other things.

I will point something out to the government: irrigated agriculture is vital to our economy. If you allow it to function with reasonably priced water, it will flourish, grow and employ people who pay taxes and employ other people. It makes the economy tick along nicely. We are seeing a sustained attack on the cost base of irrigators in my electorate and the electorates of my good friends the member for Lockyer, the member for Scenic Rim and the member for Warrego. We understand that water is money. Water is jobs. Water is economic security.

This government is extracting a rapacious take from SunWater. According to the report, dividends have risen by an astonishing 490 per cent in one year. That sort of tax take might be hidden from your everyday Queenslanders, but it is hurting them nonetheless. We have very efficient world-class irrigated agriculture in the electorates I have just mentioned and elsewhere in Queensland. We need to have reasonably priced water. We cannot afford to have arbitrary price increases that impact producers' bottom lines and hurt the economy. We see that Labor included the dam safety and flood mitigation costs in their referral notice to the Queensland Competition Authority. That too will see significant price rises for farmers.

I have looked through the statistics and I note that the Macintyre Brook irrigation system will be facing a 34 per cent price increase, based on the Queensland Farmers' Federation's analysis of this report. Currently rural irrigation customers are staring down the barrel of significant price increases through the QCA review. A major factor driving those price increases is SunWater's mismanagement. If there was a 34 per cent increase in the price of water, perhaps it would be easier to swallow if it were not for the fact that it was being necessitated, apart from the tax gathering of the state government, by SunWater's mismanagement. SunWater had a 112 per cent blowout in nonroutine expenditure across all schemes from the QCA target for 2013 to 2018, totalling \$69 million compared to the actuals forecast totalling \$146,566 for the corresponding period. That is just one example.

I heard the carping from the member for Mount Ommaney, urging us all to embrace the government's reforms regarding the composition of boards for class 2 water authorities. I think the people in Labor have no idea what a class 2 water authority is. Those boards meet at the kitchen tables in people's houses. They are unpaid positions. The members of a board work together to provide

administration for the supply of water in their area to the ratepayers who require that water. This is not just a question of composition in terms of gender. Those boards are lucky to attract anyone at all, be they male, female or non-binary. The members of those boards work very hard. They are unpaid. They get up in the middle of the night to roll up their trouser legs and clear ditches. They replace pipes and turn on valves. Those are the responsibilities of a director on a class 2 water authority. They have come to me aghast at the way that they have been treated by this government.

Gender equity on boards is a noble and very defensible goal and I have no problem with it. However, those who pay the social security bill in this country are being subjected to ludicrous political correctness. As I said, you cannot get enough people on the boards no matter how hard you try, because those board positions are unpaid, they require hard work and they are not prestigious. It is not as if it is a position on the board of a cultural centre trust or Queensland Rail. I think this is another example of how little this Labor government understands water.