




Speech By
Hon. Glenn Butcher

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Record of Proceedings, 12 October 2022

WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction

 **Hon. GJ BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water) (11.47 am): I present a bill for an act to amend the South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring) Act 2009, the Water Act 2000, the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008 and the legislation mentioned in schedule 1 for particular purposes. I table the bill, the explanatory notes and a statement of compatibility with human rights. I nominate the State Development and Regional Industries Committee to consider the bill.

Tabled paper: Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 [1630](#).

Tabled paper: Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, explanatory notes [1631](#).

Tabled paper: Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, statement of compatibility with human rights [1632](#).

Water is the lifeblood of Queensland's regional and rural communities, driving economic growth and job opportunities and supporting the social fabric of these communities. The Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 delivers a key milestone in this government's commitment to improve water management and ensures regulatory frameworks remain effective. The bill amends the Water Act 2000 to implement Queensland's strengthened non-urban measurement policy.

The primary aim of the bill is to establish a clear and transparent framework for implementing Queensland's strengthened non-urban water measurement policy. This will improve the way water take is measured and reported across the state. The updated measurement policy was developed with entitlement holders, industry and the community. There was broad support for better measurement and accountability for water use in Queensland. Having accurate information about how much water is taken from our river catchments and aquifers is crucial to sustainable water resource management. This ensures everyone can access their fair share of this precious resource.

The framework will apply to water users who have a volumetric surface water or underground water entitlement. For water users who take water directly from a river or stream or from an aquifer, this will mean having a meter attached to their pump to record how much water they take. The framework also contains provisions in relation to measuring complex water-take operations—for example, where a water user collects and stores overland flow water on their property.

The bill provides for measurement plans which will be required for overland flow water licences in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin. Irrigators with overland flow water licences in the Murray-Darling are supportive of this measurement approach because they know better than most just how precious water resources are. Measurement plans will detail how water take is measured on-farm and provide more accurate information about the amount of overland flow and the water taken in these catchments so its impact on river flows and water availability for other users can be better understood and managed more effectively.

The development of these important measurement systems has occurred in consultation with stakeholders and industry bodies. This has been important in getting the balance right, ensuring irrigators have measurement systems in place that work for them and that properly measure water take so that our water resources are managed for the benefit of all irrigation stakeholders and the community more broadly.

The regulatory framework established by the bill will also require water users to report metered information on water take more frequently. To facilitate this for some entitlement holders in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin, this will see the installation of telemetry devices on their meters. These devices transmit metered data in near real time and are especially useful to monitor take that is time and event based—for example, where water may only be taken when certain water flow conditions occur. The ability to capture and transmit regular data will also support irrigators because it allows them to better manage their water resources. Having this information will make it easier to monitor water take against their entitlement. This will support compliance action for anyone taking more than their fair share. Better information means better decisions about managing and allocating water. This will put Queensland in the best position to stimulate economic development in regional communities.

The bill also provides that standards can be made for meters, measurement plans and other measurement devices like telemetry. This will deliver confidence that measuring equipment is operating at an acceptable level of performance throughout its working life. Strengthened water measurement enabled by this bill is crucial to the Rural Water Futures program, which is driving more transparent and sustainable water resource management here in Queensland. Rural Water Futures is delivering projects to harness water data and to make it readily available online so water users have information about their water use, their entitlements and the water that they can buy or sell on the water market. Getting better water information in means getting better water information out. This will help water users, industry and businesses to access information they need to make informed decisions about best use of this precious resource to suit their business needs.

The bill will be supported by future regulation amendments that detail operational and administrative requirements. The bill also amends the Water Act to improve and synchronise administration of water authority boards. Amendments also ensure the chief executive can consider and decide water licence applications that may impact other water users, environmental water needs or the public interest. Minor operational amendments are also made to the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act and the South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring) Act 2009 to improve their operational efficiencies.

The bill makes minor operational amendments to improve underground water management on behalf of the Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Youth Affairs. The proposed amendments are compatible with human rights under the Human Rights Act 2019. A statement of compatibility has been prepared for the bill. I want to thank my department for its hard work and also the irrigation communities and the stakeholders who have worked closely with the department through this process. I commend the bill to the House.

First Reading

Hon. GJ BUTCHER (Gladstone—ALP) (Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water) (11.54 am): I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Referral to State Development and Regional Industries Committee

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): In accordance with standing order 131, the bill is now referred to the State Development and Regional Industries Committee.