




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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STATE DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (3.20 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the State Development and Regional Industries Committee report No. 33, *Examination of Auditor-General Report No. 9: 2021-22—Regulating dam safety*. I would like to thank the Queensland Audit Office and the Auditor-General and the committee members from both sides of the House for their work in relation to both the audit report and also the committee report.

Dams are significant infrastructure that provide safe drinking water, irrigation, flood mitigation and energy, and support the extraction of minerals in the state of Queensland. I am advised in the audit report that in Queensland there are 107 referable dams, and an estimated 790,000 people who live downstream would be at risk if these dams were to fail. Dam owners include state owned entities like Seqwater, Sunwater—which own around half of the referable dams—councils, mining companies and pastoral companies. These entities and local governments own 92 in total of these dams. Local governments own 28 of that 92. Some of these dams owned by local governments are 50 years old or even older.

Dams are critical to sustaining communities as we know them because water is absolutely essential. It is very difficult to have a vibrant community if the community does not have good quality water and affordable water as well. In my electorate we often have very salty water because it comes from the Artesian Basin, and it is very difficult to grow a lot of things because of the minerals in that water.

The regulatory framework for dam safety is established in the Water Supply Act. The aim of the regulatory framework is to minimise the risk to the public living and working downstream of dams resulting from dam failure.

The department has approved processes for collecting the information for the legislated safety requirements. However, the audit report found it is not effectively collecting the information on its dam safety upgrade schedule. The schedule, which was set back in 2005, gave owners targets to upgrade dam spillways, based on their capacity to safely release floodwaters. Further, the audit report states the department is not effectively monitoring the progress to ensure all the upgrades will be completed by the upcoming 2025 and/or 2035 deadlines. Eight spillways must be upgraded by 2025 and 30 by 2035, with total costs estimated at \$3.1 billion.

The audit report found the department's dam monitoring system does not effectively monitor compliance with all its safety requirements. The audit report also exposed some serious issues around the department's processes for record keeping, and they go to the heart of the service delivery issues that the LNP opposition has been raising for years. These dam safety upgrades have huge financial impacts for those local governments that do domestic water supply from those dams. Some of these councils have a very small rate base. They cannot raise the funding for the massive upgrades without

significant funding from other levels of government. They will struggle to meet the time frames that are specified by the department. Others will have to significantly increase rates or channel all of their funds towards the upgrades. There will be massive financial impacts on consumers if there remains no additional assistance from other levels of government, that being state and federal government.

Local governments want to be good neighbours. They want to work with the communities that are downstream. The reality is the benefit of the works is not necessarily with the community that will have to pay for it. In this case, it is with downstream communities. Further, we need to have a long, hard look at the additional costs that will be placed on local governments for this purpose. The repairs and safety upgrades are about ensuring communities are safe. However, we also need to consider the reliability and affordability of water supply. Local governments should not have to bear the full cost of the infrastructure upgrades, nor should the water users of Seqwater and Sunwater bear the full costs.

There has to be a balance kept here between safety and the affordability and availability of water which is essential for communities and also sustaining life in those communities.