




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr O'ROURKE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (12.34 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Water Legislation Amendment Bill. This bill will amend the South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring Act) 2009, Water Act 2000 and the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008 and other legislation as per schedule 1. As we all know, water is the lifeblood of Queensland's regional and rural communities. Central Queensland boasts a diverse range of agricultural industries. The region is known for its fertile soils, favourable climate and water resources, particularly as we have seen the Palaszczuk government invest in water infrastructure like Rookwood Weir which makes it an ideal location for agricultural production.

One of the key agricultural industries in Central Queensland is beef. The region is home to some of the largest cattle producers, with the industry playing a significant role in the local economy. The region's beef cattle are known for the high-quality meat which is used for domestic and international markets.

Mr Perrett: You're wearing your beef tie.

Mr O'ROURKE: I have my beef tie on, yes. It is this year's! Rockhampton has two meatworks that employ quite a few hundred people. We have Teys and JBS which is really great.

Ms Boyd: Great places.

Mr O'ROURKE: It was wonderful to have you up there just recently. 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 updated measurement policy was developed in consultation with water entitlement holders, industry and 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 an aquifer, this will mean having a meter attached to their pump to record how much water they have taken, and the vast majority of landholders already have this in place.

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 that irrigators have measurement systems in place that work for them and that properly measure water taken so that our water resources are managed for the benefit of all irrigation stakeholders and the community more broadly.

Strengthened water measurement enabled by this bill is critical to the Rural Water Futures program, which is driving more transparent and sustainable water resource management here in Queensland. The Rural Water Futures program is a significant initiative by the Queensland government that aims to provide sustainable water solutions to rural and regional communities in the state. The program has been designed to address the challenges faced by these communities in terms of water security and supply, which is critical to their livelihoods, economic growth and social wellbeing. The Rural Water Futures program has several objectives including improving the water supply infrastructure, increasing the efficiency of water use and supporting innovation in water management.

One of the key focuses of this program is to enhance the resilience of rural communities to droughts and other extreme weather events. Queensland is known for its unpredictable climate. The state has faced severe droughts in recent years which have had a devastating impact on rural communities. The program aims to provide drought-proofing solutions that will help these communities better cope with future droughts.

Another significant objective of the program is to improve the efficiency of water use in the agricultural sector. Agriculture is a critical industry in Queensland and water is a vital resource for farmers. The program will provide funding for projects that aim to improve water use efficiency in agriculture such as the use of precise irrigation systems, water recycling and the adoption of drought-resistant crops. The program also supports innovation in water management, with a particular focus on new technologies and approaches that can improve water security and sustainability. This includes: the development of new water storage technologies, the use of renewable energy in water supply systems and the adoption of water-efficient technologies in households and businesses.

The Rural Water Futures program will have a significant impact on Queensland's rural and regional communities, providing them with the tools and resources they need to manage their water supply and build a more sustainable future. The program will create new jobs in the water sector and support economic growth in rural areas. The Rural Water Futures program is a critical initiative of the Queensland government that addresses the critical water supply issues facing the state's rural and regional communities. The program's objectives include: improving water supply infrastructure; increasing water use efficiency; supporting innovation in water management; and enhancing the resilience of rural communities to droughts and extreme weather events. With funding from both state and federal governments, the program will create new opportunities for economic growth and support the long-term sustainability of Queensland's water resources. I commend the bill to the House.