




Speech By
Brent Mickelberg

MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

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WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (4.59 pm): I rise to address the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This is the first time we have heard from the Minister for Water. When you couple that with the fact and the knowledge that the state government has not built a single dam in nearly nine years it tells you everything that you need to know about where on the list of priorities water infrastructure falls for the Labor state government.

A government member interjected.

Mr MICKELBERG: Not a single dam. Despite Emu Swamp Dam probably being mentioned in this House more times than any other project in the state, funded and laid on a platter they could not bring themselves to build a dam. We have heard about the ALP's record when it comes to dams. We heard from the member for Bundamba earlier about how great Labor is at building dams. The member for Logan said it too. Who can forget the Traveston travesty? The Labor government absolutely destroyed the Mary Valley and those communities. People took their own lives as a consequence of the Labor government's incompetence. I acknowledge that many of those here were not in the House when that decision was made, but it is a decision whose legacy lives on. The Traveston travesty has destroyed the Mary Valley. It continues to be a problem to this day, and it is as a consequence of Labor's haphazard approach to building dams and resolving any issue at all. It is all about political spin rather than substance. I would dare say that this government's Pioneer Valley proposal will be Traveston mark 2.

Mr BUTCHER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance, 118(b). The member is way off the mark. He is not talking about this bill and he needs to get back to it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): Member for Buderim, you are straying somewhat from the long title of the bill. I urge you to come back.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you for your direction, Mr Deputy Speaker. For the minister's benefit, 118(b) is just for question time, mate.

As the shadow minister for water indicated in her contribution, there are aspects of this legislation that are reasonable and considered, and we support those provisions. Unfortunately, however, based on the track record of the Palaszczuk Labor government I personally have concerns about the vague reassurances from the minister that this bill will not result in the regulation of farm dams and captured overland flow outside the Murray-Darling basin; that is, water that is captured and used for stock and domestic purposes outside of the Murray-Darling Basin. I do not have confidence that this bill will not extend to the regulation of those areas in the future.

An expressed objective of this bill is to 'provide for farm scale measurements of overland flow water take'. I have serious concerns with that objective, particularly with regard to how it is going to be implemented. It is ambiguous whether the measurement of overland flow relates only to the

Murray-Darling Basin catchment or whether it relates to all dams, including stock and domestic dams, across Queensland. The Queensland Farmers' Federation warned in their submission—

... how this will be implemented throughout the remainder of Queensland has yet to be identified in relation to the evaluation for metering requirements.

The QFF went on to say—

There is considerable concern around how this may be measured, as a number of dams are likely to store captured overland flow, Sunwater allocations and/or spring water.

The configuration of metering to avoid double counting of water moving in and out of the system has the potential to become cost prohibitive.

As I understand it, this bill does provide the minister with a head of power that would enable him to establish regulations that could require the measurement and reporting of farm dams that sit outside the Murray-Darling Basin and are not currently regulated. That is the case in New South Wales, where graziers find themselves in the situation where longstanding farm dams are regulated. Their take from those dams is regulated.

In Queensland, dams where the dam wall is higher than 7½ metres already require approval, so it is my view that regulating existing farm dams that are used to support grazing is an unnecessary and excessive step. I think I heard the member for Aspley say earlier that farm dams under four megalitres would not be impacted under this legislation, but I note he did not say if that was four megalitres per dam or per property. I would also note that four megalitres is a drop in the ocean. Four megalitres is around 1½ swimming pools. Just about every single commercial cattle operation in the state would have a farm storage greater than four megalitres. Four megalitres would support between 125 and 150 head of cattle for a year. That is not a viable commercial cattle operation in Queensland. To suggest that four megalitres of water is what is required to support a grazing operation is a joke.

I acknowledge that the state government has made commitments in relation to the Murray-Darling Basin, and the submissions to the bill were broadly supportive of the provisions to implement those commitments. My concern sits with the fact that this bill provides scope for the state government to go further. I ask the minister to categorically rule out further moves to regulate existing farm dams that are not currently subject to measurement regulation outside the Murray-Darling Basin.

Another issue I have concerns with is the cost of implementation to landholders. The feedback received suggests that state funding will not be sufficient. At a time when escalating inflation is already pressuring family budgets, such an approach will only result in more expensive fruit and vegetable prices as commodity producers pass it on in increased costs. It is all because the state government has decided they are going to whack primary producers with another cost, another regulation, without adequately compensating them. I note that both AgForce and QFF also share concerns in this regard.

While we are debating the regulation of water across the state, specifically the metering of water use, I also want to raise the concerns of my constituents regarding proposed changes to their properties. Residents are concerned that they are going to be slugged to replace their existing water meters. It is important to note that those residents own their property freehold. Their properties are individually metered and each property owner currently pays water access charges to Unitywater, the regulated water provider. Despite this, they will be required to pay between \$450 and \$600 each to replace their existing water meters. Such a situation does not exist with the property owners who live in houses next door and who are in the exact same situation. Those residents will have the cost of replacement meters paid for by Unitywater, as they should. However, the retirees who live in areas of my electorate will be out of pocket many hundreds of dollars when they are in the exact same situation. It is not an equitable situation. I have written to the Minister for Water, and I call on the minister to ensure that every Queensland property owner is treated equally and fairly. Residents such as those I have just described should not be meeting the cost of replacing existing water meters when others are not required to do so.

Finally, I want to call on those opposite to support the amendment moved by the shadow minister for water. The amendment seeks to provide assurance that the concerns I have articulated in my contribution today—that the measures that are implemented in this bill will not go further than what the minister has described and those opposite have assured us is not the case—is the case. If those opposite are genuine when they say their intention is to ensure the regulation of the Murray-Darling Basin and that this will not extend to stock and domestic and farm dams outside of the Murray-Darling Basin, then they will support the shadow minister's amendment.

With the indulgence of the House, in the short time I have left I would also like to acknowledge my electorate officer, Gina Measures, who is retiring today after a long career in the Public Service. Today is Gina's last day. I am devastated that she is on her way. Gina has been my EO for over five

years. She was there through COVID dealing with me and constituents. As you may appreciate, some days were good; some days were bad. Gina has always been there. She has been a sounding-board and invaluable support for my constituents. She is the ultimate professional. Gina had a long career with Queensland Health before she came to the Parliamentary Service. On behalf of the community and personally, I would like to wish Gina and her family all the best in retirement.