




Speech By
Bryson Head

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Record of Proceedings, 14 September 2023

WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HEAD** (Callide—LNP) (4.19 pm): In his contribution, the member for Bundamba spoke about a \$15 billion unfunded hoax. I was a bit confused because I thought the multibillion dollar unfunded hoax was the Pioneer pumped hydro project, which is his government's policy. Unfortunately, when it comes to water security and dams, the dams that the Labor government propose do not even help water security because they are for energy storage.

I thank the committee for their work on the report on the bill. I especially thank the deputy chair and good member for Lockyer, Jim McDonald, and the member for Burleigh for their contributions. I appreciate it when metro members such as the member for Burleigh really try hard to understand the plight of people in the bush and how tough it can get. Those members ask a lot of questions in the committee process when it comes to legislation such as this because not only do they want to understand; they ask so many questions that they do get to understand a lot of the issues facing rural and regional Queensland. I wish I could say that about the member for Bundaberg who is also a committee member. From parts of his contribution it is clear that he does not want to understand the issues that people in rural and regional communities are facing. He certainly is a blight on the people of Bundaberg and I know they cannot wait to sack him at the next election.

When I am talking about a lot of rural issues I note the blank looks I get from those opposite. In their contributions on this bill they have talked about the LNP and our commitment to the bush. The LNP is absolutely committed to the bush. We back the bush every day of the week. Time and time again, we see a failure from the Palaszczuk Labor government when it comes to the bush, when it comes to rural issues and certainly when it comes to water security.

Mr Furner interjected.

Mr HEAD: I take the interjection from the minister for agriculture. Maybe he should spend less time interjecting and more time fixing the problem that is fire ants. Maybe along the way he could learn how to hold a fishing rod.

We know that water security is incredibly important in Queensland. The LNP certainly knows that and I know the shadow minister for water, the member for Nanango, knows it as well. This bill relates to changes that are required under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. I want to talk about the history I have learned from talking to farmers and from not only living and growing up in the Murray-Darling Basin but also having ventured out to communities such as Dirranbandi and Saint George, and of course communities in the electorate of Warrego. The member for Warrego made a great contribution to the debate on this bill in support of her community.

Under the water buyback scheme, in communities such as Dirranbandi the government of the day compensated the farmers from whom they were buying the water. The problem with a water buyback scheme is that when you pay the farmer to stop irrigating you get less production on that agricultural land. When a farmer is producing less, they buy less stuff and they employ fewer people. In communities such as Dirranbandi and Saint George, as well as other irrigation communities involved

in the water buyback scheme, overnight businesses in town lost half their business but they did not receive a single cent from the government. This is incredibly important when the federal government is talking about more water buybacks. It is clear that this will hurt our communities and it needs to be done right. If you are going to buy water back from a community, do not just compensate the farmer, compensate the contractors who are losing their jobs, the rural suppliers, the cafes and everyone else who will miss out.

This bill is intended to assist in ensuring that we have water security in Queensland and, of course, I have been talking about the importance of water security. One thing that we do have concerns about is the cost of the implementation of the changes outlined in the bill. We already know how the government has stripped away property rights in this state, without adequate compensation in a lot of instances. Again, unfortunately this adds to that. If we genuinely want to improve water security in Queensland, let's look at building more dams to provide water security in Queensland and let's add Nathan dam to the list. Across Callide we could build plenty of weirs that would significantly improve water security in the state.

I note that this bill has taken a fair while to draft. I believe it was questions from the member for Nanango in estimates last year that prompted this bill coming before the House because, as I understand it, the Minister for Water has been the minister for some time but this is the first time he has decided to bring a water bill to the House. It is great to see that the member for Gladstone has finally drafted a bill on water and put it before the House. However, it has taken a long time. It has taken the LNP shadow minister kicking them into gear. That is what we see time and time again with this government. They refuse to act until they are forced to do so.

Mr Butcher interjected.

Mr HEAD: We saw that with the Gladstone maternity ward bypass. I take that interjection from the member for Gladstone. Maybe he did not bring a water bill before the House sooner because he was under a bit of pressure due to his own government's failings with the Gladstone maternity ward.

I note that, during her contribution to the debate, the member for Pine Rivers had a good go at the member for Nanango. The funny thing about that is that the shadow water minister was talking about how long the bill has taken to come into the House. It miraculously appeared only after she asked questions at estimates last year. The member for Pine Rivers said words to the effect that estimates was 'only a couple of months ago'. I encourage the member for Pine Rivers to read *Hansard* and check her facts before she comes in here and tries to make fun of members inside this chamber. She said that the member for Nanango needs to catch up. It was clear from her interjections that she is the one who needed to catch up.

Ms BOYD: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a matter of privilege suddenly arising. The member for Callide is directly misrepresenting my statements. I will be writing to you—

Mrs Frecklington: Well, write to the Speaker.

Ms BOYD: As is appropriate, member for Nanango, I am flagging it with the Deputy Speaker right now. I will be writing to you on these matters and seek your further guidance.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Member, you have the call.

Mr HEAD: I now turn to some of the submissions made on the bill. I note that in 2020-21 farmers in Queensland generated around \$8.4 billion in on-farm value of production. Just imagine how much better those figures would be if we had better water security and farmers were not having to fight biosecurity pests such as fire ants because of the failures of this government.

In their submission, AgForce stated—

AgForce are concerned about the costs involved in the proposed measurement requirements—these must be feasible within the context of the affected business and the outcome intended to be delivered

They also noted that there is a limited number of registered professional hydrologists in Queensland and this is a limit to cost and time effective implementation.

QFF represents more than 13,000 primary producers throughout Queensland through their member organisations. A significant number of farmers in Callide are represented by the QFF through industries such as cotton, pork and cane. They note—

Water is an all-critical input for the agricultural sector. QFF recognises that water metering is a necessity for the fair and equitable use of a high valued resource, and that the efficient management of water use should reduce costs to water users and suppliers and result in sustainable management of the water resource. However, it is also essential that the agricultural sector be able to reasonably comply with any regulatory requirements associated with the management and measurement of water. In particular, the cost of compliance should not result in agricultural businesses becoming non-viable.

The bill contains some changes to dam safety spillways. One thing that I note that is absolutely ludicrous is that, under dam safety laws in this country, you can have a dam in Queensland with absolutely no catchment so it only gets topped up by direct rainfall over the surface area of the dam yet it is required to have a spillway. That adds a significant cost to dams. It is something that even pumped hydro dams have to abide by. Let's look at some good legislation to get that fixed.

The shadow water minister, the member for Nanango, has foreshadowed some amendments to this bill to ensure stock and domestic water from overland flow is exempt from all of this legislation.

Mr Butcher interjected.

Mr HEAD: Even though we have been told that it is—I take that interjection from the Minister for Water—the best way to ensure something is exempt is to put it in legislation and not just say that it is. I encourage government members to support our foreshadowed amendments. On another note, we call on the minister to commit to a full review of this legislation after five years to ensure these measures are working and are not ineffective and costly. I urge everyone to support the member for Nanango's foreshadowed amendments.