




Speech By
Hon. Glenn Butcher

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

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WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. GJ BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water) (5.25 pm), in reply: I thank all honourable members for their participation in this debate today and over a few weeks. The Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 delivers a key milestone for this government's state and national commitments to improve water management in Queensland. The Palaszczuk Labor government is delivering water infrastructure and water security right across Queensland. There is Rookwood Weir, the Toowoomba to Warwick Pipeline, the Fitzroy to Gladstone Pipeline and many more.

Our record at delivery for water infrastructure is \$5.2 billion invested since 2015, supporting 3,500 jobs, most of them in regional Queensland. In addition to delivering water infrastructure, this bill certainly demonstrates that we are also delivering better water management in Queensland and practical improvements to the way that we manage water, because we all know that fair and sustainable access to water is vital for Queensland's regional communities. It creates jobs, drives economic growth and supports good environmental and social outcomes.

At its core, this bill will strengthen water management in Queensland. It establishes a clear and transparent framework to implement Queensland's strengthened, non-urban water measurement policy. This includes implementing telemetry for some surface water entitlements, enabling water use data to be submitted in real time. It will also include implementing measurement plans for entitlements to take overland flow in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin. These management plans will improve our understanding of the impact of this take on river flows and water availability for other users so it can be managed more effectively into the future. This will ensure government and entitlement holders have access to better water use information. The Palaszczuk government is serious about strengthening water measurement, and the amendments will also support appropriate action where water is taken and measurement requirements are not met.

My department is also responsible for regulating Queensland's urban water resources. This bill has improvements to Queensland's urban water supply and distribution legislation to ensure it remains fit for purpose. These include amendments to clarify dam safety, drinking water and to clarify the audit and review arrangements for recycled water management plans for water service providers. The bill also makes improvements to water service provider registration, reviews of customer service standards, reporting and auditing arrangements and clarifies offence provisions.

The bill also modernises the administration of category 1 water authority boards to bring them into line with other government boards with similar governance responsibilities. In particular, the amendments will ensure that swift action can be taken to address poor performance or bad behaviour of board members. This is important for safeguarding service delivery and accountability of these organisations that manage significant publicly owned assets and large capital investment programs.

I would like to now turn to the specific issues raised by members during the debate. I refer to the member for Nanango's contribution to this debate. I welcome the member's acknowledgement that the LNP will not stand in the way of this bill. They accept that this bill is good policy that will deliver better

outcomes for Queensland water users. I note the member is proposing an amendment in relation to stock and domestic metering. We will be opposing that amendment because it is unnecessary. If the member knew anything about this legislation and the water plans that are in place in Queensland, she would also know that it was unnecessary. Let me be clear. Stock and domestic are already exempt from the metering requirements. Other low-risk new entitlements of five megalitres or less per year are also exempt. This is all set out in the policy that sits alongside the bill. Let us remember section 96 of the Water Act already permits landowners to access water for stock and domestic purposes.

In relation to overland flow, I can advise there are no costs for taking overland flow for stock and domestic purposes as measurement requirements do not apply to take that is not licensed. The acting director-general wrote to the member about this. Not only that, every water plan that regulates overland flow take includes an exemption for stock and domestic purposes. I say to the member for Nanango that it is in section 37 of the Condamine and Balonne water plan. It is in every water plan that regulates overland flow.

I want to talk about certified meter installers. It is certified meter installers who revalidate and certify meters. The certified meter installers are certified by peak body Irrigation Australia. Instead of holding photo-ops and grandstanding, those opposite should be encouraging their growers to get appointments booked in with their meter installers. They should also be encouraging water users to talk to the department if they have questions on this. We cannot forget that the department used to own and maintain these meters in Queensland, but the LNP cut these arrangements and sacked staff. So it is pretty galling that the member for Nanango and the member for Burnett pretend this is something that is new. The member for Bancroft said it best in his contribution when he said, 'You cannot manage what you cannot measure.' This bill is about water management to better measure the water that we are using in Queensland.

I do not have enough time to fact check everything that he said, but I do want to respond to the member for Burleigh's more outlandish claims in this House. This is not a revenue-raising measure. Let me make that clear. This is about better water management in Queensland, to help us meet our Murray-Darling Basin commitments and to strengthen how our water is managed.

I say to the LNP that they cannot talk about water costs. When they were in government bulk water prices in South-East Queensland increased an average of 12 per cent a year. How much more expensive would urban water prices or irrigation water prices be if they sold off parts of Sunwater like they wanted to when they were previously in government? How much more expensive would water be if the LNP had kept their word when they said that any future water infrastructure must only be built by the private sector?

We are delivering improvements to water management through this bill, but we are also delivering irrigation price discounts for our growers. We saw an additional \$22.6 million in irrigation price discounts announced by the Palaszczuk government in the recent budget. That is money in irrigators' and farmers' pockets. Unlike those opposite, we have worked with the federal government to secure funding from them to assist with the rollout of this policy in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin. We will continue to listen to the experts when it comes to water management in Queensland. We are a government that plans and we deliver.

Some members of the LNP raised the issue of local content. On this side of the House we support local content, and these strengthened requirements will provide more opportunities for local water product suppliers and contractors. I will talk about the annual reporting shortly, but in the contributions of those opposite I was reminded that none of them seem to have read the government response to the committee's report. If they had, they would know that the department has already committed to providing draft regulations for stakeholder feedback through the Water Engagement Forum. The department has also committed to reviewing the new arrangements.

I say to those opposite that they owe it to their communities to read in full the committee reports, the submissions and all of the documents on this legislation. Comments from the LNP that there is insufficient information about how stakeholder views were considered are just not true. My department has been consulting with stakeholders throughout the development of this policy. They published a consultation report, implementation plan and the policy in October 2022. The consultation report details key issues raised and how my department considered these issues in finalising this report.

While implementing the strengthened measurement requirements, we have listened to the views of water users and industry every step of the way. We are using a risk-based approach to implementation as well. This means strengthened measurement will be rolled out in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin first where pressure on water resources is at its highest and access to accurate, timely information about water use is most critical. Implementing the strengthened non-urban water measurement policy will take a phased risk-based approach. The initial focus will be on the

Murray-Darling Basin through to 2025. The rest of the state, prioritised based on risk and water plan commitments, is expected to be completed by 2030. This is a sensible and consultative approach to implementation over a long period.

We are supporting water users with existing meters through grandfathering arrangements. This will allow a significant number of existing meters to remain in service. Where telemetry is required in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin, the Palaszczuk Labor government and the Albanese Labor government have come to the party with funding and in-kind help to subsidise telemetry for water users. My department will continue to monitor implementation and costs in its annual reporting. This will include seeking feedback from the Water Engagement Forum to ensure we get the right balance between improved measurement and minimising costs for water users. As part of this annual reporting, I want to make sure industries' ability to meet increased demand for measurement devices and validation services is monitored in Queensland. I also want to make sure as many Queensland businesses as possible have a chance to play their part in this process.

Privacy and data security affects all of us, no matter who we are and how we interact with government. I want to acknowledge the feedback about privacy and data security as part of this bill. I can understand why water users want assurances that the information they provide will be securely stored and used only for its intended purpose. I want to assure water users that the collection, use and storage of water users' data and information by my department will meet the requirements of the Information Privacy Act in Queensland.

As part of my department's Rural Water Futures program, we are also building appropriate systems and security for the data we will be collecting. The bill improves the current water measurement framework, expanding its scope so that measurement devices such as telemetry and a broader range of measurement approaches such as measurement plans can be used to improve how water take is measured and reported across Queensland. Implementing strengthened water management will give the government better information about water use and availability. Having accurate information about how much water is taken from our river catchments and aquifers is crucial to support sustainable water management here in Queensland.

That information means better decisions about water allocation and planning. Water users, and the community, want their water resources managed effectively. They expect the government to have systems and processes in place to ensure that all water users can access their fair share and that penalties are in place and enforced for people who are doing the wrong thing. Getting better water information in means getting better water information out. This will help water users, industry and businesses to access the information they need to make informed decisions about the best use of this precious resource in Queensland. This will put Queensland in the best position to stimulate regional development. Access to water is the lifeblood of regional communities. It drives economic growth, creates good jobs and supports thriving regional Queensland lifestyles.

The bill proposes amendments to Queensland urban water management legislation that will give greater clarity, accountability and transparency in the way Queensland urban water resources, assets and service delivery responsibilities are managed in Queensland. The changes proposed in the bill will improve the way Queensland's groundwater resources are managed, brought forward on behalf of the Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The amendments help us to protect groundwater and reduce the administrative burden of managing our groundwater resources. This bill is a clear demonstration that the Palaszczuk Labor government is delivering on its commitments to strengthen water management in Queensland and is meeting its national commitments to the Murray-Darling Basin.

As I highlighted in my second reading speech, I will be moving an amendment in consideration in detail to clarify the process for deciding an application for a water licence dealing. The proposed amendment in the bill provides that the chief executive is not required to publish a public notice about an application to add, remove or change a condition of a water licence if satisfied that granting the application will not have an impact on other interests or water needs. The amendments in the bill will also ensure this can apply to an application to renew or reinstate an expired water licence. This is an acknowledgement that public views on these applications have already been sought and considered as part of the original application. Importantly, the amendments in the bill clarify that a public notice must be published if granting the application would or could result in additional take or impact. This will reinforce protections proposed by the bill for other interests and for those third parties.

I commend the work undertaken by the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water—in particular, the water measurement and the policy and legislation teams within the Water Act Initiatives branch—to bring this bill before the House. I thank Leanne and her team for the policy

and consultation they have done to get us to this point. It is my expectation that the department will continue to listen to the views of industry as part of its annual reporting on the implementation of this policy. I would like to thank all of the stakeholders that have provided feedback to this bill process. I particularly thank the Queensland Farmers' Federation and AgForce for their input as part of this process. The extensive consultation and feedback started with early policy development through to, and including, the review of the bill by the State Development and Regional Industries Committee. I take this opportunity, while I am on my feet, to acknowledge the work that was done by that committee and the work that it has done to get this bill to us here today. I also acknowledge the member for Lockyer and note the sad passing of his father recently. In conclusion, I commend the bill to the House.