




Speech By
James Martin

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

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WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MARTIN** (Stretton—ALP) (4.49 pm): I rise to support the Water Legislation Amendment Bill. Water is the most vital resource we have, so it is important that it is well managed. Water preserves our environment, sustains our communities and is a vital input for the farming and mining industries which are the backbone of Queensland's rural economy.

The Palaszczuk government works closely with stakeholders across Queensland including landholders, irrigators, water service providers and First Nations people to ensure the sustainable management of our most vulnerable resource. Water is not just a key driver of economic growth in Queensland. It also provides many job opportunities that support regional and rural communities.

Like many other places around the globe, Queensland experiences changing weather patterns, ranging from severe droughts on one side to violent floods on the other. Good water management in both of these situations is fundamental to ensuring that our water network remains safe and reliable for all Queenslanders, whether they live in the city or in the country. This includes the safety of dam infrastructure, access to clean drinking water, efficient water markets that stimulate economic development, and planning that balances the needs of water users and the environment. This is achieved through high-quality data collection that is importantly visible and transparent.

I would also like to briefly recognise the magnificent work of local schools and kindergartens in the Stretton electorate that are doing their bit to conserve water and use it in a sustainable manner that benefits our environment. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the Stretton Early Years and Kindergarten and their Bush Kindy program which enables youngsters to learn about the experience of our natural environment. The kindy also has a fantastic community garden with a whole variety of fruits and plants that are watered and cared for by kids each day. I would like to give a shout-out to Cameron Turnbull and his team.

There are a number of other programs provided by the Queensland government and its agencies that educate students around our state about the importance of water. The School Water Conservation Program and the Waterwise Schools Program are great examples. I am very proud of the importance that our government has placed on educating young people about our most important resource.

The Water Legislation Amendment Bill delivers a key milestone of the Palaszczuk government's commitment to improving water management and ensuring that regulatory frameworks remain effective. The bill amends the South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring Act) 2009, Water Act 2000 and the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008. The bill also amends the Water Act to make minor operational and technical amendments to the framework for managing underground water.

The primary aim of the bill is to establish a clear and transparent framework for implementing Queensland's strengthened non-urban water measurement policy, which will improve the way water take is measured and reported across our state. Consultation was undertaken with entitlement holders,

industry partners and the wider community for the updated measurement policy. I am pleased to say that the consultation process garnered broad support for better measurement and accountability for water use in Queensland.

One of the keys to sustainable water resource management is having accurate data on how much water is taken from river catchments and aquifers. By having precise information, everyone is able to access their fair share of water. The new framework applies to water users with a volumetric surface water or underground water entitlement. For those who take water directly from a stream, river or aquifer, it will mean having a meter attached to their pump to record how much water is being taken. Provisions for measuring complex water take operations, such as when a water user collects and stores overland flow water on their property, are also part of the new framework.

In 2018, the Palaszczuk government made commitments in response to an Independent Audit of Queensland Non-Urban Water Measurement and Compliance and the Murray-Darling Basin Compliance Compact. Water from the Murray-Darling Basin sustains plants, animals, industries and communities around Australia. It is undoubtedly our most important water source and needs to be well managed.

This bill provides for measurement plans which will be required for overland flow water licences in the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling Basin. These measurement plans will detail how water take is measured on farm and will provide more accurate information about the amount of overland flow, as well as the water taken in the catchments. As a result, the impact on river flows and water availability of other users can be managed more effectively and also better understood. That goes back to having better data.

Consultation with stakeholders and industry bodies was essential to getting the balance right in ensuring that irrigators have measurement systems in place that work for them and properly measure the water take. Irrigators with overland flow water licences in the Murray-Darling were supportive of this new measurement approach because they know how precious water resources are and that, when managed better, both stakeholders and the broader community—every Queensland—benefit from it.

The new regulatory framework will also require more frequent reporting of metered information on water take from water users. In order to facilitate this, entitlement holders in the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling Basin will have telemetry devices installed on their meters. These devices transmit metered data in near real time to monitor water take. They are especially useful for time and event-based situations where water may only be taken when certain water flow conditions occur.

Irrigators will be supported by this technology as it allows them to manage their water resource more effectively with the ability to capture and transmit data more quickly and regularly. The information provided by the devices will make it easier to monitor water take against an entitlement. It supports compliance action as well against anyone taking more than their fair share and makes for easier and more efficient decisions about managing and allocating water. At the end of the day, that means that we are all in a better position to stimulate economic development in regional Queensland.

We already have strong standards for the design, installation and maintenance of water meters, but amendments in this bill will expand these standards and make them even stronger. To ensure that measurement requirements can be applied to both simple and also complex water takes, this bill provides that standards can be made for measurement plans and other measurement devices like telemetry.

It is important that all stakeholders involved have confidence that measuring equipment is operating at an acceptable level of performance throughout its working life—which is what this bill will deliver. It will also help the Rural Water Futures program, which is delivering projects to harness water data and make it readily available online. This program is driving more transparent and sustainable water resource management around Queensland by giving water users better information about their water use, their entitlements and the water that they can buy or sell on the water market. It will help numerous businesses and industry stakeholders to access information that they need to make important decisions about the best use of water to suit their business needs, their farm or their interests in those areas.

The bill will also amend the Water Act to improve and synchronise the administration of the water authority boards. Amendments will ensure that the chief executive can consider and decide water licence applications that may impact other water users, environmental water needs or the public interest. Minor operational amendments that improve underground water management will also be made.

Finally, I would like to commend the hard work of the Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water, as well as the State Development and Regional Industries Committee for their efforts in developing and reviewing this bill. I thank the secretariat, all of the staff and everyone involved. I support the bill and I commend the bill to the House.