




Speech By
Jim McDonald

MEMBER FOR LOCKYER

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WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr McDonald** (Lockyer—LNP) (3.31 pm): It is a pleasure to be able to speak on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill. I thank my committee members firstly for the way we approached this bill. I also thank the shadow minister, the member for Nanango, Deb Frecklington, for her contribution and consideration. I pay tribute to my fellow committee members: the members for Bancroft, Bundaberg, Ipswich West and particularly my colleague the member for Burleigh, who joined with me in issuing a statement of reservation. I must also pay tribute to our secretariat and thank them for the consideration in which they have assisted the inquiry.

Every time a bill is passed by this House it changes something and there is a cost. We certainly support the best use of water. In fact, water will be one of our greatest assets in the future. It is so scarce now, but it still does not have the appreciation that it should. It is taken for granted. In rural areas where water is used for agriculture and for producing food for the community it is something that we do appreciate. When this bill was introduced, we gave it a lot of consideration to make sure that we got the balance right.

We have tried to stress the importance of having practical and cost-effective measures to ensure the effective measurement of water. I appreciate that the department did say in answer to one of our questions during the inquiry that they would look at the areas of highest risk first. That means that they will be looking at the larger volume takers—those who use the most water. Fortunately, most of those large volume takers—in fact, I am not aware of one who does not—already have meters because they want to make sure that they are getting the best use of water, both in and out, and minimising evaporation.

Other smaller users have not had to use meters, but they use practical measures. They understand how big the dam is and they know how full it is after they pump overland flow in and capture water as it passes by. They know what their water take is without having to go to the expense of \$20,000 or \$30,000 in some cases for a meter. We certainly appreciate that the department have taken those issues on board. We do not want to see an imposition placed on people across the community. I stressed this to the department: 'Please don't place an imposition on the community in those areas that do not have meters at the present time. Use some practical approaches.' One of the instructions in the committee report is to have a water measurement plan for each farm that uses overland flow. That will be tailored differently to every farm. Again, it comes back to the important measure of cost when it comes to implementing this bill.

I do have a couple of concerns, particularly around the legislative changes or regulation of overland flow and how that could apply across the state without further consultation. Across the state there are properly made water resource plans. We have no problem seeing overland flow measured in those cases because most of the time it has already occurred and there has been consultation in those areas. If this legislation were to allow the government to require overland flow measurements right across the state without due consultation with the rural and farming communities who are affected, that would be very disappointing and would not be met with a great deal of appreciation by those communities.

Regional and farming communities are sceptical about government intervention at the best of times. If the government is going to have proper and meaningful consultation with those farmers, listen to them and put in place practical applications that I have just talked about in terms of practical ways to measure without going to the expense of meters, then we welcome that.

We are also concerned about the imposition of the measurement for stock and domestic take of water. I understand that our shadow minister is considering amendments in the space of both overland flow across the state and stock and domestic water. I welcome her contribution to that.

A couple of things were uncovered in the inquiry in terms of the learnings from both New South Wales and Victoria. We need to make sure that the right people are around the table on those water advisory boards to get the right advice and, again, to get practical applications in place so that this legislation works and is not just a cost imposition on our communities.

I note that generally this legislation puts in place federal requirements for the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. I must say that, if the ocean were on the New South Wales-Queensland border, we would not need this legislation. This is coming from the Murray-Darling catchment, and I think the South Australian and Victorians probably have a better deal than Queensland in this matter because it is considered on a federal basis. I cannot help but feel that in Queensland we are sometimes treated as the poorer cousin in these debates because the people down south think that we are actually taking a vast quantity of water, but that is just not the case. Perception, however, becomes reality and that is why we find ourselves faced with this imposition.

In our farming and rural communities across the state, including my home of Lockyer, farmers are very sensible about the measurement of water. They do not want to waste water at all. The cost of electricity, the cost of power, the cost of moving water—all of those things—are an impost on our farmers already. They do not want to see any water wasted. In fact, a very large percentage of farmers who may not be legislatively required to have meters on their farms actually do have them so that they understand how efficiently they are using water. In fact, through a water resources plan that was done in central Lockyer a few years ago now, some farmers realised that they could grow some crops with just over two megalitres per hectare where they were once applying nearly 10 megalitres per hectare. All farms are different, but I am talking about the same farm.

There is a lot of learning that can occur, and I am sure farmers right across the state are in a similar boat. Some have done it this way and that is the way they are going to continue, whereas there is a very large number of farmers out there who do innovate, who do make sure they get the best use of resources and who do not want to waste a single drop of water. I challenge the department to work with farmers.

I am concerned that the regulations as they stand may allow the capture and measure of overland flow to apply right across the state. That is a concern of mine, and I look forward to the minister providing some certainty that that will not occur unless there is a properly developed water resource plan with the community for that specific area. Once that water resource plan is put in place an allocation is attributed to that farm—for example, if it is four megalitres per hectare and there are 1,000 hectares then 4,000 megalitres of water are available as an entitlement. That is a capital asset of that farm. That is something the farmer can take to the bank and use as a capital asset on the farm in order to see other improvements on the farm. It is something that is tradeable but it is also a very large asset, and I know that in the central Lockyer it is a benefit they have enjoyed.

I would stress again that any measure of overland flow across the state must have a water resource plan so that entitlements are allocated through proper consultation and it is an asset for the farming community. Our good farmers will work with government; they will work with people. That fear of government can be put aside and we can produce a better outcome for all.