




Speech By
Jim McDonald

MEMBER FOR LOCKYER

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STATE DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr McDONALD** (Lockyer—LNP) (3.01 pm): It is a privilege for me to rise to speak on the committee's report *Examination of Auditor-General Report 9: 2021-22—Regulating dam safety*. Here we are in October 2023. It is disappointing that it is quite a long time since that report was tabled. I note that the committee's recommendations are being implemented. From the outset, one of the things we need to keep in mind is that it is all well and good to address dam safety issues. We do not want anybody in our community to be unsafe when it comes to dam safety. Talking to many of the local governments across Queensland, one of the difficulties I see is the impost this will bring to bear on local governments. It is one thing to have engineering standards, but I was concerned when I was told there was only going to be compliance in this regard out to 2035. I now understand that was all around inspection regimes and making sure that properly qualified engineers were doing these inspections. That is okay, but in some cases we are seeing dam walls strengthened and widened. I would say that the holding capacity of those dams is being improved quite significantly, but there is no increase in the volume of water that is being allowed to be held and captured by those dams.

In our world, of course, water is a precious commodity. It is going to become even more and more precious. Whilst our focus on dam safety is fine, let us work together with local governments. Some local governments are required to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on improving dam safety when the dam contains no additional water. If engineers focused on a holistic approach, I would argue there is probably a very small or moderate amount of cost involved in upgrading the holding capacity of those dams while ensuring dam safety.

I also recognise that the committee made a recommendation that we see independent audit and risk committees established with different local governments to look at these areas. I know that when I was in local government the independent risk and audit committee we had in Lockyer was a very good committee. You learn a lot from the processes that you go through. As we said in the report, I recognise there are many smaller local governments across the state that may need to come together and maybe use one of their regional organisations of council to have an independent audit risk committee overview that so there is only a small cost to them, because they will learn a lot from it.

One of the concerns the committee also had, and we talked to the department about it, was improvements in cybersecurity and cyber safety. I know that my colleague Michael Hart, the member for Burleigh, was on this committee back in 2012 and there were the same issues back then. We are encouraging all of the providers of dams, whether that be Sunwater, Seqwater or other councils across the state, to make sure they are staying up to date and learning some of the best practice cybersecurity improvements out there. Some of those things can be achieved with very moderate cost—without having to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to upgrade those systems.

The point of this report was the Auditor-General's audit of dam safety. They did say they were quite pleased with a number of areas, but they also want to make sure that a few finer areas were addressed. I think it can be improved somewhat. If we took a holistic approach to dam safety we could get a balance and see an increase in the holding capacity of dams as well as being able to see communities kept safe downstream. That is something that we certainly want to see happen, but it should not be an impost on local government. I would strongly argue it is cost shifting from state government to local government, because many of these dams were built with state and federal money and they should get some assistance to see them delivered.