




Speech By
Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (5.07 pm): I rise to support the Water Legislation Amendment Bill. I was quite surprised, Mr Deputy Speaker, that in your contribution we heard so little about Emu dam. I was very excited—

Honourable members: Emu Swamp!

Mr HEALY: Emu Swamp, sorry. It could be a dam if you spoke a bit more about it, but anyway that was just a passing observation. Secondly and most importantly, member for Buderim, that was a great contribution. Like yourself, I would be absolutely nowhere without my staff, so I appreciate the member for Buderim making those comments. I think it is vitally important.

Water—this is pretty important. The simple thing is that generally these bills are somewhat minor, technical and operational in nature, but fundamentally there are some very important parts of this legislation, and it needs to be important.

Mrs Frecklington: Tell us!

Mr HEALY: If you use your body in proportion—two ears, one mouth—you will learn. The bill also includes amendments to the water supply act 2008 and the distribution and retail restructuring act—you walked into that one—2009. We know how important water security is. We are the second-driest continent on the planet. Does anybody know who is dryer than us?

Mr Mickelberg: Antarctica.

Mr HEALY: Well done. Member for Buderim, you get new staff. It is Antarctica. While I recognise these amendments are generally minor, technical or operational in nature, they do clarify existing provisions and requirements and improve the operational efficiency of these acts. Fundamentally, this is the commitment we made to the people of Queensland. It is about making those improvements, and I want to touch on some of them.

The bill includes an amendment to ensure emergency action plans for Queensland's 114 referable dams are reviewed and approved well ahead of the start of each wet season. We know that is a vital thing that needs to be done to ensure security. The amendment defines the required date a review must be completed by and expands this to allow for a date to be prescribed by the regulator via a notice. That is important. This increased flexibility will support the preparedness ahead of the wet season and allow for a rapid response to unforeseen circumstances by dam owners and operators and also by government agencies which are charged with that responsibility.

The bill also includes an amendment to confirm service provider registration details annually. Maintaining these on a regular basis has been recognised as being important. The wording in the current provision required a review only by a service provider if there had been a change in their registration details. I want to say that again. The wording in the current provision required a review only by a service provider if there had been a change in their registration details. That was the only thing that motivated that change. That amendment ensures the water supply regulator has up-to-date

information, which is vitally important. The water supply regulator has fielded many inquiries relating to the engagement of an independent auditor to conduct an audit on a water service provider's drinking water quality management plan. We only have to look at certain parts, particularly in my part of the world, and the consumption and the quality of water and ensure that those organisations and institutions are in the appropriate place and have all the protocols in place to ensure the best outcomes.

The amendments clarify that existing offences related to the audit of drinking water quality management plans apply to the water service provider and not to the auditor. That is important. Amendments are also made to clarify requirements for auditing particular performance reports, amending the definition of who is an auditor and how performance reports are assessed when audited. These amendments also clarify that a service provider must amend their customer service standard six months after completion of a review. This is ensuring that the appropriate data is in place, and that is fundamental to ensure we get the best outcomes for the community. This will improve public transparency and increase water service provider accountability with minimal administrative burden.

The committee did a fantastic job. There were a lot of people involved and it was quite extensive. A lot of this material has come around as a result of extensive and thorough consultation with the users. I would like to report on the commitment this government has made to water security to Far North Queensland. There have been numerous funding initiatives to councils for vital infrastructure, particularly in recent times. Most notably, there was a \$107 million contribution for the Draper Road water project south of Cairns to futureproof drinking water for Cairns into the medium term. This project is fully funded with equal support from the Albanese federal government. I understand that in 2016 or 2017 the Cairns Regional Council became aware that there was a significant need. The ask has only come recently. To date, there has been \$214 million raised. We recognise the importance of water and we are making that contribution. This project has been fully funded by both the state and the federal government.

I want to commend our community for their water-saving initiatives, and other speakers have mentioned the initiatives in their own communities. These water-saving initiatives have been developed and initiated by not just our primary schools but also a large number of community groups. Whilst we might receive a significant amount of rain during a short period over the wet season, our challenge lies in our capacity for retention. People think we get so much rain and we should be able to hold onto it, but, once again, it comes down to the capacity to be able to hold onto it. We enjoy the wet season but our challenge is that we need to make sure we have a good understanding of how we use the water.

This project is also a timely reminder for local government to remember their responsibilities in terms of water management. With some councils raking in many millions every year from water revenue, we should expect that a good portion of these profits will go back into new water infrastructure and maintenance while also overseeing demand management programs. At the end of the day, this is the legal responsibility of a lot of those local governments. Putting their hand out all the time does not necessarily reflect good management or confidence.

I want to mention the drinking water reports. The water supply regulator has fielded many inquiries relating to the engagement of an independent auditor to conduct an audit on the water service providers, which I touched on earlier. The bill also includes an amendment to confirm service provider registration details, as I have touched on. Amendments are also made to clarify requirements from the auditing side of things, which has proven to be absolutely vital.

The bill makes publishing requirements more contemporary across water legislation, including the SEQ water act, the Water Act and the water supply act. These reforms are in line with requirements introduced under the Financial Accountability Act 2009 to prioritise publishing online. The bill includes improvements for the management of underground water, which is part of the environment and science portfolio, at the request of the Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The amendments provide greater clarity about the requirements for protecting groundwater and reduce the unnecessary administrative burden, which I think we all acknowledge is pretty important.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the work of the committee. I also want to acknowledge those who have contributed. I understand it has been extensive. I commend the bill to the House.