




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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WATER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (3.46 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Water Legislation Amendment Bill. I will start by saying that I have developed a mistrust of the government on anything to do with natural resources. It starts innocently enough with everyone trying to conserve water and measure it, but then in the next few years we will have to defend a new pricing regime in a water catchment area. That has been my experience in this place. You can cut and paste the issue but it happens time and time again, so my level of distrust runs very high for the sorts of changes that are proposed. They seem pretty innocent up-front and everyone seems to agree, but it gets masked and cloaked as, 'Let's just do this properly and have scrutiny,' as we have been doing with a number of issues right now.

In relation to the Flinders River in particular, I flew over the Flinders during the 2019 floods. At about 5,000 feet in a small single-engine aircraft for about 30 kilometres each way you could just see pure water. I had never seen anything like it in my life. I did that for about an hour and a half and then I went and checked the Excel spreadsheet for the average annual flows for the last 30 or 40 years. I must say that after discussions with certain local governments and departmental people there was a considerable amount of doubt about the records that are held. There are difficulties and challenges in tracking that water. Then down the track you are told, 'We're using average annual flows as the basis for allocations for irrigation because we're doing this measuring and it's all been done in this respect.' Again the level of distrust in the integrity of some of that data is questionable, so when we are talking about overland flows—which I have moved on to now—I have a high level of distrust.

I will share an anecdote I heard recently. Ashley Gallagher, whose family has been in Normanton for generations, had the water department come and talk to him and the council. They mentioned a figure in relation to the flow they would have down the Flinders River in one year—the same river—which he immediately questioned. He went home and checked the records on the station they have been maintaining for some 70 years or more. He said that based on what he saw go over the weir—it is quite easy to estimate the volume once you go over the weir in Normanton—that number you gave us for the flow is just so inaccurate. The guy from the water department was caught red-handed with highly inaccurate figures and he responded, 'Well, that was what the modelling told us.' When we are measuring stream flows, you can forgive me for thinking that in five or 10 years we will be told, 'This is what the modelling tells us. You're going to have to cut back here. We're measuring you now and you're going to have to cut back.' None of this seems to end up with more water going to anyone or there being any benefit to downstream users. It always ends up with, 'We're going to scrutinise this and watch it a bit closer.'

I will add my distrust with how the utilities are operating on top of that. They are no longer concentrating on enabling farming or agricultural use of the water. They are more focused on profit motivations that are built into the policy via the charter of operations they are given by the government of the day. It provides these perverse outcomes on the other end as well, like Lake Julius in my patch where Sunwater are greedily holding on to all of this water. That dam was built and half paid for by the

mines to enable more mining development in the region, and it is literally now constraining mining by means of its operation. When you are saying, 'We've got to meter more things and we've got to do more overland flow,' I am sorry but I do not buy it. I do not trust the way governments have been doing this for years. I am very wary of this sort of legislation. Where I come from, more scrutiny from the government is usually not a good thing.