



Speech by

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WATER AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (9.21 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Water and Another Act Amendment Bill. I do so as a former shadow minister for water, a portfolio that I held for a short time during the course of the last parliament. The explanatory notes accompanying the bill state that it amends the Water Act 2000 to modify the composition of the Queensland Water Commission. In reality, the bill abandons the failed Queensland Water Commission, which was established by the state government to absorb the criticism it faced about its dismal track record in respect of planning for the future water needs of South-East Queensland and building infrastructure accordingly.

The explanatory notes accompanying the bill would have us believe that the bill has been introduced as part of the state Labor government's implementation of its response to the recent Weller report on statutory boards, committees and authorities. Once again, the reality is that, while the winding up of the Water Commission is consistent with the wider reform of statutory bodies proposed by the recent Weller report, the recommendation to effectively axe the Queensland Water Commission could not come at a more convenient time for the state Labor government.

The explanatory notes accompanying the bill state that the so-called structural changes to the Queensland Water Commission are consistent with the reform program being implemented by the Bligh government to reduce bureaucracy and improve efficiency. I certainly hope that this will be the case because the establishment of the Queensland Water Commission was extremely successful at increasing bureaucracy and reducing efficiency.

The commission was established by the government under the Water Act in June 2006 as a statutory body responsible for water supplies in South-East Queensland, although there was provision for the commission to assume responsibility for water in other regions. They were responsibilities that were previously held by the responsible department. It perplexes me that the explanatory notes state that the functions carried out by the commission remain critical for ensuring the continued implementation of regional water supply security in South-East Queensland.

The state government obviously does not think that is right because it is moving tonight to emasculate the Queensland Water Commission, reducing the commissioners to one and moving the functions into the responsible department. The minister has also flagged an amendment to the bill that will allow the minister to direct the commissioner in certain circumstances. This is confirmation that the Queensland Water Commission is being effectively euthanased by this bill. It is a final recognition that the commission was a very expensive political experiment, undertaken by former Premier Beattie, whose government at the time was under enormous pressure to do something—anything—about the water crisis that South-East Queensland was facing at the time, which has failed miserably.

Certainly, the average use of water in South-East Queensland per person has been significantly reduced following expensive education campaigns and the imposition of extensive water restrictions on local communities. Undoubtedly, the behaviour of South-East Queenslanders in respect of the use of water has changed and it appears those behavioural changes will be enduring. I acknowledge the efforts of South-East Queenslanders, but it is a ridiculous proposition that the formation of the Queensland Water

Commission was the silver bullet that was able to marshal the people to comply with the new water restrictions.

State government departments undertake public education programs all the time. Indeed, this state Labor government spends an inordinate amount of public money undertaking a seemingly endless series of public education campaigns to promote its latest initiatives. There is absolutely no reason the department of natural resources and water, as it was then, could not have undertaken the public education programs and implemented the development of the infrastructure that it determined was required to address the water crisis.

At this point I turn to the infrastructure that was built over the last few years by the state Labor government—the desalination plant at Tugun, the western corridor recycled water pipeline and the plant at Bundamba and the obscene amount of money that has already been spent on the Traveston Crossing Dam project, and the list goes on and on. This infrastructure and the massive bills that the state Labor government now has stand as monuments to the worst examples of the excesses and irresponsible management of the government of Queensland under the Labor Party.

The LNP prior to the election announced that it would scrap the Water Commission and make the responsible minister once again responsible for water in terms of the infrastructure required by the community. There is nothing unusual about that scenario. For many years the minister acted on the professional and independent advice of public servants in the department. The state Labor government flick-passing those responsibilities to the Queensland Water Commission a few years ago was either a terrible vote of no confidence in the capacity of those officers in the department or a cynical political exercise to take the pressure off the then Beattie government that had failed to plan for the future. The return of responsibility to the department for these matters by the provisions in this bill proves that the latter is the case rather than the former. The state government should be embarrassed about that.

As a North Queenslander, it may not be immediately clear why this debate is relevant to my region and my electorate. Generally speaking, we have plenty of water and we realise how lucky we are. The speaking list tonight is dominated, understandably, by South-East Queenslanders, but the taxpayers in my electorate and in other regions of Queensland outside South-East Queensland will have to pay the higher taxes to help meet the costs of this disgraceful failure in the delivery of an essential service—the delivery of water—by the state Labor government. And I speak tonight for them. Our water supply in North Queensland may not have been subject to the gross mismanagement of the state Labor government, but it has its hands in our pockets to pay the bill.

My constituents and other people in North Queensland are concerned about the massive debt being racked up by the government and they ask me where the money is going. The blowout of the annual budget of the Queensland Water Commission to \$27 million is a good clue.