



Speech by  
**GLEN ELMES**

**MEMBER FOR NOOSA**

Hansard, 13 November, 2007

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### South East Queensland Water (Restructuring) Bill

**Mr ELMES (Noosa--Lib) (7.42 pm):** I rise to add to the debate on the South East Queensland Water (Restructuring) Bill 2007. I would like to preface my remarks by noting from the outset that this is not a water shortage that we had to have. This water shortage is one of the legacies left over from Kevin Rudd in his old position as Chief of Staff to Wayne Goss and their other good buddy Wayne Swan when they refused to build the Wolffdene Dam.

**Mr Lawlor** interjected.

**Mr ELMES:** Is that the Muppet theme I can hear in the background? This was the dynamic trio that ran this state during the seven years of the Goss government. I have spoken with many people across south-east Queensland and they, like I, remember the legacy of Rudd, Goss and Swan and the art form that they developed which said plenty and delivered only failure and disappointment to those who relied upon them. I would like to say to the people of Queensland that they should look very carefully at Kevin Rudd in the last two weeks of this election campaign--and not just for his taste in ear wax. The people of Queensland should consider Kevin Rudd's track record. Kevin Rudd and his mates caused the water shortage by scrapping the Wolffdene Dam. Kevin Rudd and the Goss government as well as Anna Bligh and the current Labor government are directly responsible for every person in Brisbane--

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan):** Order! I remind the speaker that we are talking about restructuring, not the Wolffdene Dam. Bring your argument back to the legislation.

**Mr ELMES:** They are directly responsible for every person in Brisbane getting only a four-minute shower each day. The reason is simple. It is a complete lack of adequate planning for essential infrastructure. To me the most hypocritical part of the Kevin Rudd story is that most of his agenda on national reform looks to fix mistakes made by him and his Labor mates at a state level caused by failing to act on water security. Kevin Rudd should be indicted for his performance in the state of Queensland but instead he now wants to have a go at the whole of Australia.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Would the speaker please bring his remarks back to the bill.

**Mr ELMES:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Labor suggests that the best way to fix the infrastructure mess is to go about a massive and expensive shift in the bureaucratic machinery of Queensland. We saw how well that worked with the Shared Service Initiative and how it cost the government \$190 million to save \$70 million. The truth is that this bill is not about delivering even one drop of water more to the people of south-east Queensland. It is a sad day when the Premier and Treasurer have not set out to help the people of Queensland in the fight against water shortage. They have set out to attack local governments yet again and stake their claim to the assets of local government councils.

Why is Labor out there attacking local governments again so soon after they are still reeling from the Treasurer's amalgamation barrage? The truth is money. Every member of this House knows--and I suspect that most Australians know--that Labor cannot manage money. Labor needs more assets to mortgage to prop up its failing regime here in Queensland. It is seeking out the assets of local government because those assets, currently in the hands of local government, are not in danger of bankruptcy despite what the Treasurer would like us to believe.

The fact is that the water assets of south-east Queensland are ripe for picking by Labor with the Bligh government using a sleight of hand con job to get its greedy paws on assets paid for by the ratepayers of south-east Queensland. This is a swindle. It is the great water asset swindle. Labor has

demonstrated that it is completely unable to run Queensland without mortgaging every asset that is not nailed down and nothing will get in its way to squeeze every cent out of the Queensland Treasury Corporation's borrowing capacity. The first big loser out of this bill will be local councils. There can be no doubt about that. Since the first barrage of amalgamations this is the equivalent of the Premier and the storm trooper Treasurer coming in to bayonet the survivors.

Let me explain why this is such a solid blow to local councils. I am advised that water and sewerage charges and levies represent up to 30 per cent of the revenue of local councils in my electorate. That 30 per cent represents more than just cost recovery from the perspective of local councils. It represents a major carrying area for council overheads and general expenses. So to simply deprive the councils of this major area of revenue generation would represent a serious blow to the ongoing sustainability of councils whether they are amalgamated or otherwise.

I put it to the Treasurer, through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that this is just a second wave of attack against local government in Queensland so that it can commit the broadscale theft of assets to hide this government's complete failure to plan for the drought and, second, to have its way with the assets of local councils so that it can pawn them for cash and continue its arrogant and dangerous addiction to debt.

Last week on Madonna King's 612 ABC program Anna Bligh was asked three times to give a commitment that local councils would not be financially worse off. The Premier ducked and weaved and tried to avoid having to give such a commitment. But finally the Premier--and only due to the fact that she does not possess her predecessor's ability to duck and weave so well--was forced to give an absolute commitment that local councils would not be worse off through this process.

Let me, for the purposes of the Hansard record, remark that the Premier has so far managed to avoid being caught giving such commitments but in this instance she has given her word. Therefore, on the basis that the Premier has clearly promised and given an absolute commitment to the people of south-east Queensland, I ask: what will be the amount of compensation paid to local councils for their water assets that will be plundered should this bill become law?

The most repugnant part of this bill--the most flagrantly disgusting assumption that underlines this bill--is that it assumes that every local council in south-east Queensland has shared this Labor government's wretched failure to plan for the future. This bill assumes that every mayor and every local councillor in south-east Queensland is guilty of failing to plan for water use requirements for the future. Unlike Kevin Rudd, local mayors and local councillors are not in the business of simply saying 'me, too' to every action of their colleagues here in the Queensland parliament. Where Labor has failed to plan, the local councillors of the Noosa Council did plan 15 years ago. The word 'sustainable' was used in Noosa before it was fashionable.

My community, during the time of the Playford council, decided to look at where Noosa was headed and planned for the future. Water was one of a range of issues looked at, and investments were made to secure both the infrastructure needed and the water supply to sustain the community when its population cap was reached. If only Labor had said 'me, too' back then! By introducing this bill, the Treasurer is sending a message to south-east Queenslanders that they have no choice but to accept responsibility for Labor's failure to plan for water security. But the sting is that those same people--the ratepayers of south-east Queensland--who have already paid for the infrastructure once will now, as taxpayers, pay for it again. Here in Queensland ratepayers are looking at an additional \$250 in rates payments. On the Gold Coast Labor's failure will see a \$350 increase in rates.

In the Noosa shire it is estimated that rates will rise by 15 per cent. But worst of all, in the Maroochy shire ratepayers are looking down the barrel of a 21 per cent increase in rates to pay for Labor's failure to plan. But of course by March of next year, if Labor has its way, there will be no Noosa shire and there will be no Maroochy shire. In fact, there will be far fewer councils to oppose any move made by this government. The trick, though, is that one of the first decisions made by these so-called regional councils will be to increase the rates and of course cop the blame. But do not forget that, for all of this, the people of Queensland will not get one extra drop of water.

My message to the ratepayers of south-east Queensland is very clear: this is the result of a lack of imagination, a lack of vision, a lack of planning and certainly a lack of determination by Labor. By contrast, I can recall that during the lead-up to the last election campaign the Queensland coalition had a fantastic policy on water. We certainly were talking about four dams in south-east Queensland, not two. We certainly were not talking about the Traveston Crossing Dam. We certainly were not talking about depriving 900 families of their farms and their houses. We talked about the proper way to go so far as infrastructure was concerned. We talked about regional pipelines. We talked about rainwater

tanks. We talked about a whole range of things including recycled water schemes, groundwater, business water efficiency, and the list goes on and on and on. I now turn to the legislative form of this bill and question why we need such a draconian bill in the first place with autocratic measures that specifically restrict and remove oversight and appeal. Why does the Treasurer feel that he needs the powers in this bill to achieve his stated aims? What is he covering up? I am concerned that this government has put itself in a position above review and above appeal and, with a flick of the legislative pen, has given itself extraordinary powers to deal with the assets and the money of other entities with the ultimate result that, after spending however many billions of dollars of taxpayers' money, there is no extra water.

So I oppose this bill and the assumption that underlines this bill and I reject out of hand that the taxpayers of Noosa, Maroochy and the other local authorities across south-east Queensland should have to pay for Labor's failure to plan. The councils of south-east Queensland and the report by PricewaterhouseCoopers have said that the water assets are worth \$6 billion, yet the state government is offering only \$2 billion or one-third of what they are worth.

Again, how is it possible that this Labor government can get the figures so wrong, unless of course it is intentional? This is the result of a lack of planning, a lack of infrastructure and rising debt levels. In fact, Queensland will have \$52 billion worth of debt and from the forward estimates today for Labor states across the country we are looking at \$147 billion worth of debt. I am totally opposed to this bill and I hope that even some members on the other side will see the merit of the argument.

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