



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILLS

**Water Amendment (Long-term
Average Sustainable Diversion
Limit Adjustment) Bill 2012**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Tuesday, 30 October 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Katter, Bob, MP

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Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (19:43): I rise to speak on the Water Amendment (Long-Term Average Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment) Bill 2012. Once again, I find myself in a minority of one in this place. As the writer of a history book—we have sold 16,500 copies at \$35; available at all good newsagencies—I can speak with some degree of pride about my country. Amongst its many great achievements I think the Snow Mountains Scheme was probably our greatest achievement. People with vision and determination—people like Minister Lemmon and Ben Chifley and the Liberal David Fairbairn—were very much a part of driving this idea. They could think big; they could see big.

Let us have a look at what this achieved. Half or maybe as much as 60 per cent of Australia's agricultural production comes from the Murray-Darling. The vast bulk of that comes from irrigation. Eight million mega litres are taken out of the 22 mega litres and used for irrigation purposes.

The people that ask for more water down the river are the greenies and people that want to go back to nature who do not believe we need any food. I, at one big debate, said there are 2,000 million people going to bed hungry of a night and there are going to be a hell of a lot more going to bed hungry of a night if we close down the Murray-Darling. They said we have got too many people. I said that is an interesting way of fixing it up; we starve them to death to get rid of that excess number of people. I had not thought of that idea before. But these people were not people with a sense of humour and none of them laughed. Ian Causley—one of the finest members of parliament I have served with in this place and a very successful minister for water, lands and agriculture in the New South Wales government—said 'when it rains the river runs and when it doesn't it doesn't'. Really, for those of us that live on these rivers, we know that is profoundly true. You can build all that dams and do everything you like and take backward somersaults at yourself but when it rains it runs and when it does not it does not.

For those people that want to say this is a problem, all right you address the problem by looking at—and I pay tribute to Pat Byrnes at the National Civic Council—the idea of environmental dams. If you want to get back to nature then you return the Menindee Lakes and the Lake Alexandrina to their natural state, which is no water in them. That saves nearly a million mega litres of evaporation a year from the Menindee Lakes—artificial lakes created by and for what purposes we are not entirely sure—and Lake Alexandrina, which seems to me to be entirely stupid since Lake Alexandrina is only a stone's throw from the sea. If you want to see a huge body of water, head 20 or 30 kilometres south and you can see the ocean; that will make you happy. But do not take a million mega litres out of the Murray-Darling.

The Clarence River diversion put up by Mr Coffey and his firm, Coffey and Partners, is a magnificent scheme. It is one of those ideas whose time should have come. To protect the waters and people that live in the Clarence River basin from the huge flooding that occurs in that river and to capture a little bit of the flood water and send it back through the range, take a little bit of water from the Clarence but put a huge amount of water into the Murray-Darling.

The recycling of water is a very simple thing. Simply taking the water from your washing and putting it into your septic or sewerage water is a very simple thing to do yet it halves—arguably more than halves—the consumption of water in the ordinary household. In Brisbane the stupid Labor government or the stupid Liberal government—I cannot remember which—banned the use of water tanks and then made them compulsory 10 years later. So there are a dozen ways in which you can approach this problem if in fact there is a problem. I need a lot more convincing. I remain the only member of parliament that has gone to all of the seminars on the Murray-Darling Basin in this place. I like to think that as a patriotic Australian and a thinking Australian I should have a good handle on it.

Please God, in my lifetime may some government in this place might be enlightened enough to do something about the waters of northern Australia. The northern third of Australia has three quarters of the nation's water. And none of that is being used except a couple of tiny little dams. Virtually not a single drop of it is being used.

I take great pleasure in advising the House that my political party, as small as it is, is diametrically opposed to any further cutbacks in the Murray-Darling and wants a restoration.

I will be doing a tour through the back of New South Wales very shortly and I will be telling the people in each town that you are going to be a ghost town because half of your entire income is going to vanish. The stupid people in the white house in Canberra have taken away three million mega litres of your eight million mega litres. They have taken it away and you will not get it back unless you start thinking about voting for a party that believes that we should be bigger nation than we are, that we should have a bigger economy and that we should have the great vision of our forefathers that drought proofed one tenth of the this nation with that magnificent scheme.

When Strzelecki discovered Mount Kosciuszko, he said he would name it after Kosciuszko because Kosciuszko was a man whose life was devoted to freedom and this is a freedom-loving country. He went on to say that the waters of the Snowy Mountains can change Australia and are one of the few undeveloped water resources left in the world that can achieve great things for a nation. I wish Strzelecki, the great Australian that he was, had come to North Queensland. We would have changed his attitude a bit on that one. This mighty scheme took was what was effectively a dustbowl of the lower Murray and the upper Darling and the Murrumbidgee and turned that dustbowl into a productive resource that feeds arguably 40 million people, most certainly over 20 million people. They turned it into a magnificent scheme that provides even today a 10th of our peak load power. Once again, the disgraceful people in this place tried to sell the greatest asset owned by the Australian people. They voted to sell it.

So we will do everything within our power, the little party that we are, to try and stop any further cutbacks and to return that water. And if there is a problem out there, then there are a dozen ways of solving it. We will get off our backsides and solve those problems, and put more water down, if you want more water down—not a great problem; not a great problem at all.

Once again, I finally return to the greatest builder in Australian history by a long way, Dr John Crew Bradfield, who built the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Story Bridge, the University of Queensland, and the Sydney underground railway system, for which he got the international award for engineering for that year and should have got it, quite frankly, for that decade. Today we still use the underground railway system in Sydney; it is a strategic part of our traffic flows in Sydney, as is that bridge. What great foresight! What great vision!

This man said, 'If you fill up Lake Eyre you will have a hell of a lot of evaporation,' and I will be very technical: you will get over 30 million megalitres of evaporation a year. Remember that the Murray-Darling only has 22 million megalitres; you would get 30 million megalitres of evaporation, and it would be blown over the top of the Murray-Darling Basin.

The inquiry at the time, back in the thirties, said it would not work. It was a three-man committee, but the only one who knew what he was talking about was the meteorologist and he said that it would work. He was the only person on that committee who was technically qualified.

If you say, 'It won't work and it's not going to cause rain over the Murray-Darling,' then where is the 30 million megalitres going to go? Is it going to jump over the Great Dividing Range and set off into the Pacific Ocean? Is it going to go backwards? Is it going to go up into the atmosphere and cause carbon dioxide problems? No. I simply think that, like all water that goes into the atmosphere, it will precipitate when it runs up against a mountain range; that mountain range is the Great Dividing Range, and it would be blown up against that.

I must also say that the scheme of that great man, Bradfield, centred upon two possibilities, One, which of course we would do today, is simply to dig a canal up from Spencer Gulf and fill Lake Eyre with water, which is well below sea level. Alternatively, you could take a little tiny proportion of the massive floodwaters of North Queensland—but I do not think we would send that all the way down to Lake Eyre; I think we would use that on the black soil plains of Queensland. I think that is a much better idea than to fill Lake Eyre.

People say these ideas are ridiculous. Well, during the Great Depression in the United States they built the Tennessee Valley Authority which then produced more electricity than we produce in the whole of Australia put together—free, forever. They built a huge water highway, a channel through the Mississippi River; it went up 1,000 kilometres. It was navigable by quite big boats, actually. And of course they flood-proofed a lot of America as well. They also created the great agricultural juggernaut of the world, the United States' agricultural

production. They did all of those wonderful things. Well, our forebears did too. But in this place today we are closing down what our forebears did. The pygmies are at it again! And on that note, I conclude.