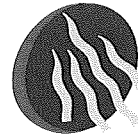




Hon Stephen Robertson MP
Member for Stretton



**Queensland
Government**

Ref CTS 09002/10
ME/10/0315

09 JUN 2010

**Minister for Natural Resources,
Mines and Energy and
Minister for Trade**

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to your letter of 21 May 2010 enclosing a copy of Petition No. 1450-10 lodged in the Queensland Legislative Assembly.

The Petition requests that the House take action to ensure that Bribie Island is removed permanently from the list of potential desalination plant sites in Queensland.

Petition Numbers 1375-10, 1383-10 and 1405-10 requested the same action regarding the removal of Bribie Island as a potential desalination plant site. I responded to these petitions on 9 March 2010 and 22 April 2010.

In November 2009, the Queensland Water Commission (Commission) released the revised draft South East Queensland Water Strategy (Strategy) for consultation. The Strategy is an adaptive plan to meet south east Queensland's (SEQ) water supply requirements to 2050 and beyond.

Planning for new infrastructure has been based on an assumption that structural, operational and behavioural water efficiency measures introduced during the Millennium Drought will continue. These efficiency measures will reduce per capita water consumption by 24% compared to pre-drought trends of over 300 litres per person per day.

It is assumed that average residential consumption will not exceed 230 litres per person per day across SEQ. However, the Strategy challenges the community to save even more. By maintaining average residential consumption at or below 200 litres per person per day across SEQ, residents could defer the need for additional supplies by five years, from 2017 to around 2022, and the amount of water that is treated and distributed through the SEQ Water Grid can be reduced – saving money and reducing the region's carbon footprint.

These savings include the benefit of a regulatory requirement for all new houses and most commercial and industrial buildings to achieve water saving targets. Building codes introduced in 2008 require every new house in SEQ to save 70 000 litres per annum of water from the SEQ Water Grid, by using alternative sources for toilet flushing, washing machines and outdoor watering. This requirement can be achieved through rainwater tanks, local recycled water schemes or stormwater harvesting.

Using less will defer, but not avoid, the need for additional bulk water supplies.

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Desalination facilities will underpin SEQ's future water security. Based on existing technology, desalination is the only practical solution to fill the supply gap which is not climate dependent. While it is prudent for the Strategy to identify and investigate alternative supply options, these options cannot be relied upon. New and upgraded dams and weirs must address similar issues to those raised in the assessment of Traveston Crossing Dam. Remaining purified recycled water schemes are relatively small and require an increase in community confidence. As a result, these options will only reduce the amount of desalination capacity that is required.

As a result of preliminary investigations, Lytton and Marcoola have been identified as priority desalination sites. The Commission will now undertake detailed planning for these sites to ensure that additional supplies can be delivered efficiently and when required. Planning studies for desalination facilities will include flora and fauna studies, marine ecology studies, pipeline corridor identification, and preservation and master planning for the sites and surrounding areas. The further planning investigations will inform a final decision regarding the preferred location, capacity and timing of the desalination facilities.

The desalination preliminary investigations also identified reserve sites at Bribie Island and a duplication of the existing SEQ (Gold Coast) Desalination Facility at Tugun. While it is prudent to preserve the sites at Bribie and Tugun now, these sites will only be required to meet the demands of a growing population. A desalination plant at Bribie Island and duplication of the Tugun facility are not likely to be needed before 2030, if at all. No further investigations will be undertaken on these sites until a need for these projects is defined.

The Marcoola, Lytton, Bribie Island and Tugun sites were selected following an extensive review of engineering, social and environmental considerations, as well as consultation with government, community and industry. All sites are publicly owned. The Bribie Island site was selected based on:

- the land being a pine plantation owned by the State;
- proximity and ease of connection to the SEQ water grid;
- access to high quality sea water; and
- the receiving waters having good plume dispersion qualities and the shortest flushing time of all coastal bay areas.

In the revised Strategy, the Commission outlined its commitment to open, accountable and inclusive community consultation as well as providing stakeholders and interest groups with opportunities to influence water planning and management. The next phase of the desalination investigations will involve comprehensive community liaison for the priority sites and proactive communication with the public regarding the reserve sites.

Should you have any further enquiries, please do not hesitate to contact Ms Karen Waldman, Executive Director of the Commission on telephone 3227 8203.

Yours sincerely



STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP