

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 04TH APRIL 2012

MURRAY-DARLING BASIN

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (17:08): I, too, rise to talk about the Murray-Darling Basin plan and what could be the outcome for South Australia. There is one thing we need to worry about, and it is not just numbers; it is salinity levels. At the moment, salinity in Lake Albert averages 4,800 EC, which is far too high to use for stock and domestic, and far too high to use for irrigation systems, and these systems have been out of place in some cases for six years—unusable. These people have been forced to cart water in and, then, yes, through commonwealth and some state money, but mainly commonwealth funding, some emergency pipelines were put in. Now with the extreme SA Water price rises, it is becoming unviable for people to water their stock or grow their crops, and people are now seeking to put extended pipelines through to Lake Alexandrina.

We on this side of the house certainly know how important the River Murray is to the state because pretty well all of us connect to it in some way. My properties connect to it with a just-in-time pipeline from Tailem Bend—the Keith pipeline. But we saw how committed the government was not during the process when the Murray-Darling Basin Authority requested staff to get on board to prosecute this state's case. What was the answer from here? 'No, we're not going to send anyone. We don't think it's that important that we need to send anyone to prosecute the case.'

It was the same effect when water was being negotiated under former premier Mike Rann and the former member for Chaffey: they could not negotiate enough water just to keep the Lower Lakes through. There was a time when I was almost begging former minister Karlene Maywald because we needed 30 gigalitres for Lake Albert—30 gigalitres.

Members interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, I know it was low; I know water was low, but during this time there were people on high-security water allocations getting 95 per cent of the water out of the Murrumbidgee, so there would have been water available. Victoria and New South Wales just laugh at us and at the ineptitude of this government in securing water flows for the state. We have seen the flawed effect of the proposed Wellington weir that was going to cost hundreds of millions of dollars. From memory, I think there was a forecast of about \$125 million, but then it just would have gone on and on and on.

The only thing that would have saved the Wellington weir if it had been built and needed topping up every year—and it could have sunk about a metre a year—was the fact that there is plenty of limestone around; that is the only thing that would have saved it if they were going to build it, but what a flawed concept. What a flawed concept—that a government could have thought of just cutting off a huge community south of Wellington.

Mr Venning: How much did they spend?

Mr PEDERICK: Well, they spent about \$14 million on the access roads, and they are roads to nowhere.

Mrs Redmond interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: That's right—the roads to nowhere. Obviously, there were some heavy negotiations with the Withers and MacFarlane families on what they needed to accept to get those deals through and get those roads in place. Thankfully, someone saw sense and suddenly realised that the Wellington weir was not a viable alternative.

I had a meeting with former minister Maywald because salinity was getting so bad that they were concerned about the Taillem Bend offtake, and in front of a representative from SA Water I asked the minister, 'So, what's this going to cost?' They said, 'Early costings are about \$75 million,' and then they asked me, 'What do we do with the salt?' and I replied, 'Well, you're going to have to work that out.'

I now refer to the bunds that were put up over time down through the Lower Murray and Lakes, the first of which was the Narrung bund at the Narrows that went in between Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert; 20 per cent of that bund is still in the water. It is silted up, it is disgusting—it is absolutely disgusting. To my knowledge, all these bunds were put in with the money to pull them out given to the South Australian government. But they haven't used that money to pull these bunds out.

Mr Williams: But they've used it for something else.

Mr PEDERICK: They have used it for something else—paying public servants or whatever. They have just put it into general revenue to eat up cash that was given to them by the federal government and the MDBA. Part of the reason that Lake Albert and the region have almost become a wasteland is that no-one on the other side cares—no-one on Labor's side cares. That bund should have come out.

We have the same issue with the bund at Clayton. The Clayton bund removal is like the ad, 'The beer when you're not having a beer.' This is the bund when you are not having a bund. Yes, the majority of the bund has come out, but there is all the wash

and silt at Clayton that is still in there and causing grief to the community; it can be removed.

Then we have Currency Creek. Currency Creek is the sleeper; this is the bund that is underwater, so nothing is seen, it is hiding and we do not have to worry about it—and that is how the government looks at it. We hear all this clap-trap, as we did when we asked for the pumps to be lowered for Adelaide and were told that it could not be done—well, hang on, have you heard of engineers? It can be done.

There are at least two companies, such as Dynamic Dredging at Mannum and Frank Henderson, and there are probably more (but I will get into trouble if I name too many companies because I may miss someone out), that can mount a long-arm excavator on a big barge out of Mannum. They can go down and dig out all this underwater soil and silt. It can be done: it is just about commitment to the job.

In fact, I have dealt with and I have sent the inquiry through to Andy Dennard at minister Caica's office about a government bund at Jervois where the contractor got the approval from the government to fix up an issue and suddenly someone looked at the costing and within three-quarters of an hour, the approval was pulled.

Mrs Redmond: Spend the money on something else.

Mr PEDERICK: Yes—spend the money on something else, and this is how this government operates. Some of us, like myself, took the time to travel up through the northern basin to see how it operates. I flew up over Cubbie Station and there are about 22 other big properties up there that, at that time several years ago, harvested a lot of water. I talked to graziers on the flood plain who only got about 20 per cent of the water that they used to get because of the harvesting up in the north.

Then we went through the southern basin. I remember an interesting trip with the members for MacKillop and Chaffey, just to see how things operate. It was a very good trip, just to get a good idea of how things work. We saw the Snowy River scheme. I do not think the environmentalists would let us build a scheme like that in this day and age.

Mrs Redmond interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Absolutely. It just gives you an overview of what has happened with the overallocation of the river and the pillaging that has caused the problems in the southern system. We have had communities absolutely slaughtered, whether you are in the tourism sector especially below Lock 1 or whether you are trying to get water on the River Murray swamps where \$30 million has been invested and we are going to have to spend at least that and maybe double that to get them back into a real, productive capacity.

We have had massive chunks of river slumping happen. We have had complete pump stations fall into the river. We have had people—as the member for Finniss rightly said—absolutely dismayed at what was happening down at Goolwa, and there are many competing interests. Obviously, some people wanted bunds; some people wanted to float boats. They would have floated them on raspberry cordial, but we on this side said, 'No, we have to move on. We have to have a freshwater recovery for the river.'

I mentioned briefly before the inequity in allocations. We were on 18 per cent allocation here one year and yet on the Murrumbidgee—95 per cent, no worries. How does that help and how does that work out? One thing I do want to extend on is the constraints, and Tony Burke actually summed it up pretty well yesterday. Federal water minister, Tony Burke—

Mrs Redmond interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, the Labor federal minister—he said that you exponentially lose positive outcomes above 2,000 gigalitres of environmental water returned to the river because of the constraints. What happens is you get overbank flooding and losses. You get losses that do not get the environmental outcomes where you want them.

What I say is that we need to make a start. We need to make a start for all the communities along the river, all the communities that derive water from the river, because I know, from someone who lives in the area and relies on a just-in-time pump, that things need to happen. A High Court challenge will kill this deal because we have a Premier and a government who do not understand that calling for 4,000 gigalitres is just what the Eastern States want, because they just want a trigger to kill the deal and that is exactly what will happen.

We on this side do want the best outcome from the river but sometimes you have to get going while you have the opportunity. If you kill the opportunity and then you do not have any outcome, that is the worst outcome that we in this state could have, because the Eastern States will do anything to switch us off.