

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**TUESDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2012**

**MURRAY-DARLING BASIN**

Adjourned debate on motion of Hon. J.W. Weatherill:

That this house—

(a) acknowledges the commonwealth government commitment to return 3,200 gigalitres of water to the Murray-Darling Basin;

(b) welcomes the commonwealth government's decision to invest \$265 million in water recovery and industry regeneration projects in South Australian river communities to ensure our irrigators do not bear the burden of adjustment in returning the Murray to health;

(c) notes that with 3,200 gigalitres returned to the Murray-Darling Basin, the following outcomes can be achieved—

i. an average of two million tonnes of salt exported through the Murray Mouth each year;

ii. salinity kept below dangerous thresholds for the survival of native plants and animals in the Lower Lakes and Coorong;

iii. a reduced risk of the Murray Mouth needing to be dredged to remain open;

iv. water levels in the Lower Lakes kept at a level to avoid acidification and riverbank collapse below Lock 1;

v. an improved ability for flood plains to support healthy red gum forests, waterbird and fish breeding and greater areas of habitat for native plants and animals;

(d) calls on all South Australian federal members of parliament to support a Murray-Darling Basin plan that—

i. returns 3,200 billion litres to the Murray-Darling Basin;

ii. provides for the healthy river outcomes set out above;

iii. ensures that the burden of adjustment does not fall upon our irrigators.

(e) that the time for the debate be limited to 20 minutes each for the mover and the Leader of the Opposition or one more member deputed by her and 10 minutes for any other member and the mover in reply.

(Continued from 13 November 2012.)

**Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (12:04):** I rise today to make a contribution in regard to the debate on the Murray-Darling Basin. I want to go through the dot points in regard to this motion one by one. When the Premier moved this motion, he noted in (a) that this house acknowledges the commonwealth government commitment to return 3,200 gigalitres of water to the Murray-Darling Basin.

While returning 3,200 gigalitres to the basin may sound like a noble ideal, you have to wonder where that number came from in the first instance, especially when we had Premier Jay Weatherill come into this house saying that he was going to fight for 4,000 gigalitres and nothing less. That was the number that was proposed by the Premier to bring the river system back to health, with great chest-beating and excitement and carry on about high court challenges. Now we see the Premier quite happy to say that 3,200 gigalitres will be fine, if we can get to that.

The issue is that the 3,200 gigalitres, if it can be achieved, would not be achieved until 2024. I have lived not far from the river all my life, within 40 kilometres of the river, and I have had a lot to do with the river. As a member of parliament, I have the electorate at the bottom of the River Murray, and I have certainly seen a lot of the problems over the years. As the member for Hammond and shadow for the River Murray for several years during the drought period, I know that at my end of the river we are right at the pointy end of the argument.

The issue with the 3,200 gigalitres is about whether you can deliver that water, whether you can deliver it sustainably and whether or not you kill communities along the way. That is something we have to realise in this state: there can be vast improvements made in the northern waters above our state to get water back into the Murray. I know full well that we need more water at the bottom end of the river to improve our environmental outcome, but we also need to have social outcomes and we also need to have economic outcomes.

I have toured the northern and southern basins. I have been up there with the members for Chaffey and MacKillop; we have had some interesting trips. I learned a lot of interesting things. We have had a good look. I have also been up there on my own. I have been in Bourke and I managed to find someone to fly me over Cubbie Station to St George in a Cessna and bring me back. It was a very interesting flight back then. They were growing wheat on Cubbie, trying to make some money. The

issue we have here with getting 3,200 gigalitres into the system is that, first, it is not going to happen for a long time—12 years, in fact.

**Mr Whetstone:** It's not in the plan either. The 2,750 is not in the plan.

**Mr PEDERICK:** Yes, for 12 years—and I note that the member for Chaffey reminds me that it is not actually in the plan. It is the 2,750 gigalitres. The simple fact is that there will be constraints to get that water down through the system. There will be bridges that have to be upgraded, there will have to be work on the banks of the river in places, there will have to be flood mitigation—a whole range of works to be able to deliver that amount of water.

What we have said—and I think we have been very realistic on this side of the house—is that the 2,750 gigalitres is a very good starting point for revival of the river. As I said, we fully understand that on this side of the house and those of us who live in this state and people like me with the seat on the bottom end of the river know darn well we need to get recovery. However, the problem we have is that the federal body, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, has been taking the easy way out in getting water savings back into the basin. They have been doing water buybacks which are not that strategic, and I know that they are part of the scheme, but they are quick and dirty. They are the quick and dirty way to get water back into the system, and there is so much work that could be done with infrastructure upgrades.

South Australia has done excellent work over the last 40 years regarding its pressure-pipe irrigation system; it is the leader in technology managing water in the river. However, what we are seeing in the other states are communities looking like they could be decimated by this plan because, as I said, some ways of getting water back have not been too strategic. There has just been a scattergun approach. I think there are much better ways of getting some of this water back into the river system. I note that paragraph (b) of the motion moved by the Premier states:

(b) welcomes the commonwealth government's decision to invest \$265 million in water recovery and industry regeneration projects in South Australian river communities to ensure our irrigators do not bear the burden of adjustment in returning the Murray to health;

I think that is another noble ideal, but why could South Australia not have some of these commonwealth funds that were announced by John Howard's team back in January 2007 to get the river back to health: \$5.8 billion of infrastructure money as part of the \$10 billion plan to restore health to the Murray? A lot of this money could have been allocated to South Australian irrigators, but the issue was, and still is, that we were too efficient. The authority could not work out how to make those funds applicable to South Australia.

I have had tours throughout the basin and I have seen the Eastern States. They look at an upgrade of the irrigation system as putting in electronically controlled gates on the channels. That is all fantastic, but we need to do a lot better. I note the works that have been done in the Victorian Wimmera, great works, where they have piped the hundreds of kilometres of water that was in small channels going around the landscape, making massive water savings. In touring some of these places in the basin, I noted that, to deliver three gigalitres to the end of the line, to the station owners who just basically need trough water for stock, you had to send seven gigalitres down these channels because of evaporation and losses. There are a lot of ways, especially with pipe infrastructure, to put water back into the system for our benefit.

I have mentioned several times in this chamber the story about the Rorato family up near Deniliquin. Glen Rorato and his family own 240 hectares—or 600 acres in the old language—of broadacre tomatoes. It is a huge operation; I have never seen anything like it. Previously, it was all irrigated with flood irrigation in small channels between the rows and, during the drought, the Roratos saw that they had zero allocation of low security water. They spent something like \$700,000 to put in drip line on their 240 hectares. It was a massive expense for these private operators to make their farm more efficient; however, the beauty of what they did—and it was visionary work—is that it doubled the efficiency for the next season, when they got 9 per cent low security water to their property. They said that it actually doubled what they could do in their production. It made 9 per cent equivalent to 18 per cent.

So those infrastructure upgrades show what can be done to prevent communities being decimated, and that is what has to happen. The money has been there, and now we see money going in on-farm. I know that a lot of this is going to have to be spent in the Eastern States, and there is a lot of debate about that, but we need to make these water savings. We need to do it properly and we need to get all the communities on line.

I have spoken to interstate ministers and previously when they were shadow ministers about what they thought of this plan, because every MP along the river, no matter what colour, has to defend their patch for their constituency. I know that Victoria has argued that we need only 2,100 gigalitres, and New South Wales is not too happy about the legislation that has just been introduced into the federal parliament either, but we have to have an outcome, and we have to have an outcome for the sake of the whole basin, not just our end of the river.

I for one know full well the full effects of what happened in the last drought, when we saw massive problems right along the river. We saw issues with low allocation affecting our irrigators, when, during one season, our irrigators on high-security water were allowed only 18 per cent, yet we could look upstream and the Murrumbidgee irrigators were on 95 per cent irrigation. Where is the equity in that?

If it is high-security water, I believe, right across the basin, there should be an equivalent allocation. I acknowledge low-security water is another story, but supposedly we are all high-security water down this end of the basin.

With respect to irrigators, we had a problem below Lock 1 with just access to water. I have seen pump sheds that fell into the river at Mypolonga. I have seen great holes in the bank; in fact, I was taking some photos one day by the bank at Murray Bridge and as Trevor, my assistant at the time, took the photo, he caught a piece of the bank slipping in the background behind me. We lost three cars into the river, and I think there are still two in the river there at Murray Bridge that probably will never be recovered, even though they searched for them.

So, there have been massive effects from this low water level. We have seen Lake Alexandrina, which is still essentially out of commission as a water source, go out of commission because of the low water levels. We have seen the bunds go in because the government could not negotiate enough emergency water just to cover the base of Lake Albert and Lake Alexandrina. We have seen the debate about the Wellington weir, which I have always opposed; I do not believe that it is any solution to the problems right throughout the basin. Why should the people below Wellington have to give up their part of the river?

When the water level was getting low—and that was part of the debate about the Wellington weir proposal—there was debate about the main access pumps for water, especially for Adelaide. The minister at the time, minister Maywald, said, 'Well, they can't be lowered.' I thought, 'Engineering will fix that; just lower the pumps.' Funnily enough, the pumps were lowered and access was made.

In fact, it got that bad along the system—and I lived with a just-in-time supply at Coomandook from the Keith pipeline and the Keith pipeline off-take—that there was talk of a desalination plant at Tailem Bend, which would have cost at least, from memory, \$75 million, but they did not know where the salt was going to go. They looked at me one day in a meeting and said, 'What are we going to do with the salt?' and I said, 'It's your problem.' There have been some massive issues right throughout.

I want to note some of the ideals contained in the motion, and this goes to part (c) of the motion by the Premier. It states:

(c) notes that with 3,200 gigalitres returned to the Murray-Darling Basin, the following outcomes can be achieved—

i. an average of two million tonnes of salt exported through the Murray Mouth each year;

- ii. salinity kept below dangerous thresholds for the survival of native plants and animals in the Lower Lakes and Coorong;
- iii. a reduced risk of the Murray Mouth needing to be dredged to remain open;
- iv. water levels in the Lower Lakes kept at a level to avoid acidification and river bank collapse below Lock 1;
- v. an improved ability for flood plains to support healthy red gum forests, water bird and fish breeding and greater areas of habitat for native plants and animals;

I agree that all of these outcomes need to be achieved, but I think that we can achieve most of this with 2,750 gigalitres, because that is what can be delivered. We still have to get all of the states to agree to get these efficiencies into the system. Yes, I agree that there is an average of two million tonnes of salt, so we do need to have a flow to get that out throughout the Murray Mouth and out down to the lakes. The salinity does have to be kept below dangerous thresholds, not just for the survival of native plants and animals but also for all of our primary producers in the area who have been struggling for years now, since 2006, in regard to access to potable water to keep their businesses alive, whether they are a lucerne-growing business, a dairy, or they are running some other irrigation in horticulture, orange orchards or wine grapes. We need to keep the salinity down for that to work successfully.

We need to have less dredging down the bottom, but we need to make things work. I talked about the bunds that went in, for many millions of dollars. We were told that the money was there to take them out but, when it came to take them out, the money was not there. So, where did the money go? We were going to have 4,000 gigalitres to save the river but now 3,200 gigalitres is fine. It is a bit all over the shop. We have had the Narrung bund—

Mr Whetstone interjecting:

**Mr PEDERICK:** Well, that's what the Premier is indicating. The issue is about these bunds that went in. We see most of the Clayton bund has come out but there is still residue there. The Narrung bund has come out and over the years, since that has been in and now it has come out, there has been silt build-up. I know they had a dredge there the other day essentially to do, in the life of the river, five minutes' work in smoothing out some of the residue. They should have stayed there and done a lot more work to get it right.

Some work needs to be done at the Narrung intersection, I will call it, between the lakes (the Narrung Narrows) to make sure we get a flow into Lake Albert and back

out to Lake Alexandrina so we can make Lake Albert useable for our irrigators and farmers in that region. It may need—and I think it does need—the causeway pulled out and the length of the ferry extended and all the silt that is there scooped out in the meantime. Certainly, Currency Creek I do not think has been pulled out yet—that is under water. What is out of sight is out of mind. I know initial work has been done in looking at how to pull that bund out but it needs to be got on with.

I look at the next dot point, dot point 4, which states, 'water levels in the Lower Lakes kept at a level to avoid acidification and riverbank collapse below Lock 1'. That is fine, but we need the river bank to be at 0.5. I note there is not a height level in the plan for that. We cannot go below 0.5 because, since the barrages have been in, the river is kept at an average of 0.7 positive AHD (Australian Height Datum), and that is how people have set up their infrastructure for flood plain irrigation, especially in the Lower Murray.

We have seen the demise of the Lower Murray swamps where we have seen flawed rehabilitation plans and the opportunity was not there to fix the whole swamp area. Some people took exit and it left another chequerboard approach. Thirty million dollars was spent there of federal, state and farmers' money. I note there is some excellent work going on with the CSIRO and others on what to do into the future, but there have to be some big decisions made to get that right in the swamps. I note the last dot point about 'improved ability for flood plains to support healthy red gum forests, waterbird and fish breeding, and greater areas of habitat for native plants and animals'.

That is a great ideal as well, but we also must remember that we have to get this right. We must support everything. It is not just the environment: it is the social and economic needs of our communities right throughout the basin. The Premier put out this call that it is 3,200 gicalitres or nothing, when it used to be 4,000 gicalitres or nothing or a High Court challenge, but he needs to get real and note the constraints that are in place and the realities of communities right up and down the basin so that we do get an outcome. I also note the Greens are talking about blocking this federally, and they need to get a life and get into the system because, if they knock this out, we will not have a plan.

Time expired.