

## HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 04<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2012

### NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: DRAFT MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN

**Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:34):** I, too, rise to support the 64th report of the Natural Resources Committee, entitled Water Resources Management in the Murray-Darling Basin: Volume 3. I would like to acknowledge the Presiding Member (the member for Ashford), Steph Key, and the committee for being very inclusive of local members in the research into this report. It was pleasing that the committee invited local members along. I was glad to be involved in the meetings at Goolwa and the surrounding area and also around Murray Bridge and Mannum. It was very much a tripartisan committee, with Labor, Liberal and Independent members.

Much has been said already in this place, but we certainly need major reform in the River Murray. As the member at the bottom end of the river and as a former River Murray shadow minister, I know only too well of the carnage that was caused by the most recent drought and the over-allocation that was imposed on this state, especially on my electorate of Hammond.

We have many competing interests below Lock 1. We have a tourism industry with houseboats and a farming industry that wants only to draw water. We had water that was below the height of the siphons and we also saw a time where it looked as though Adelaide's water supply was under threat because the government was telling us that it could not lower the pumps, which was an engineering solution that was finally achieved.

We also saw over that time a flawed proposal to build the Wellington weir at Wellington, and this shows just how desperate things got. The government spent something like \$14 million or \$15 million on approach roads to that site. Thankfully, nothing else was spent there. This shows just how desperate the situation became in this state. I still believe that the government at the time did not negotiate enough emergency water to get us through.

The River Murray swamps were rehabilitated several years ago for close on \$30 million, and I have mentioned this in the report. There is a real disaster happening down there now, where we have seen major cracking in these swamps. We have seen stock disappear into cracks in the landscape. It is said that to rehabilitate these swamps again would cost about \$2,000 a hectare, and potentially up to \$50 million.

As I reported to the committee, we must either do this properly or not at all. If we are going to rehabilitate the Lower Murray swamps, we need to get on with it and we

need to do them all, instead of leaving out pockets, which is what happened last time under the Labor government. This was once a bountiful part of the Lower Murray. I remember going past as a child, and later in life, seeing these fantastic green swamps that were providing such great feed for the dairy industry and for this state. This is a major problem.

One of the other issues was riverbank slumping. I have mentioned it in this place before. I was out with some people getting photos of the slumping by a marina at Murray Bridge and, in the background, just as the shot was being taken, a piece of the river fell in. We caught it on film, so to speak. We noticed that, during that period, three cars went into the river, and I think only one came out. So there are still two cars in there. Thankfully no-one was in them at the time. These were desperate times, especially below Lock 1.

We see what happened with Lake Albert. It soon became too saline to use and it recorded EC levels of salinity in the tens of thousands. Still to this day we see salinity averages in Lake Albert of about 4,800 EC. It is just terrible that farmers cannot access that water for irrigation. Some are now putting in a pipeline through to Lake Alexandrina so that they do not have to rely on the emergency water that was piped to them through the SA Water pipeline. That water was badly needed at the time because some dairy farmers were spending up to \$5,000 a week just to cart in water. So there has been a massive cost, a massive loss to the industry, a massive loss to the population in that area, and a massive loss of jobs.

We saw private desalination plants go in around these lakes and now we have an EPA program to impose a tax on these people who spent well over \$200,000. In fact, one property owner spent close to \$1 million all up so that he could make himself self-sufficient through having a desalination plant, yet now we see a group that wants to tax these plants, so essentially the message I am getting is that people will just shut them down and mothball them. This is the reward that people get for looking after themselves.

Some of these plants were installed around Lake Alexandrina; also in Clayton and Goolwa where there is another side of the tourism industry, apart from the fact that the mouth was closed up, thousands of boaties who usually use the waterways around there did not have the water to operate. I must commend the people of Goolwa for hanging in there and still running events like the Wooden Boat Festival when there was very little water in the river channel flowing out to the mouth.

It was a real struggle. Many boats left the area and not all of them have come back by any means, but it is looking good at the minute. We must make sure that we have good water in the area for this part of the river, and it is a very important part. Obviously food production is extremely important, but the needs of boaties for recreation and as somewhere to wind down is also important. So there are many

needs up and down the river, and I note the member for Chaffey's comments. His irrigators and my irrigators were reduced to minimal levels of irrigation and this is where one big deficit in water management is: even though we are supposedly on high security water, we cop the biggest penalty as far as allocations in this state. I want to talk about some of the recommendations coming from the committee:

1. salinity targets for Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert of less than 1 , 000 EC and 1 ,500 E C, respectively , for 95 % of the time measured as a rolling average over a 10 year period ;

I think that sets a very good target instead of having some so-called magical number. These numbers were modelled on different hydrological modelling: the 2,750 gicalitres as outlined in the plan and the 4,000 that the state government seems intent on pursuing. The second recommendation:

2. water height targets for below Lock 1, with the height of Lake Alexandrina to remain above 0.5m AHD for 95% of the time measured as a rolling average over a 10 year period;

That is extremely important for the people on the Lower Murray swamps and others who want to be able to access water through inlets onto their properties, or through their siphons and pumps. The third recommendation:

3. targets that never allow water height downstream of Lock 1 to fall below mean sea level;

That is absolutely essential with regard to the health of the environment and the salinity and acidity issues that we saw during the drought. The fourth recommendation:

4. targets that will see the Murray Mouth open with river flows for 100% of the time;

That is a very important target inasmuch as for a small percentage of that time it may need mechanical dredging. We do need to keep the mouth open to keep the end of the river alive and to keep the Coorong alive. I also note:

5. s stronger requirements for monitoring and evaluation, including in relation to salinity and water height below Lock 1;

There should be more permanent monitors being monitored all the time as far as salinity and height with regard to the river. We need to get on with the job, we need to get on with the plan and we need to make sure that South Australia never again experiences the utter carnage that happened before. It could have been irrigators who had access to water above Lock 1 who had to spend a fortune getting water in,

or people downstream of Lock 1 who could not access water at all, and it sent many people to the wall. Also, the environment suffered, the economy suffered, and everyone in this state suffered. I commend the committee for the work it has done and I hope the government takes notice of this report.