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HANSARD

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NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: ANNUAL REPORT 2012-13

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:46): I rise today to speak to the 88th report of the Natural Resources Committee, being the Annual Report 2012-13. I want to make general comments about some of the inquiries conducted by the committee. I must say that the committee does great work and, as the member for Ashford indicated, it interacts with local members. I have been very pleased with the interaction I have had with the member for Ashford and the committee members over time in my electorate at the lower end of the River Murray.

With regard to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan postscript report, *The Return of the Water*, I want to make some comments about whether the extra water returned to the system should be the 2,750-gigalitre amount or the 3,200-gigalitre amount. For people to get a picture of how much water that is, Sydney Harbour has about 500 gigalitres of water, so it is a lot of water to put back into the system, whichever way you look at it.

The report mentions constraints, and certainly there will be many constraint issues to be dealt with if the 3,200 gigalitres is the amount of water to be used in the future to get down through the River Murray system. I note that there will be some issues around that—there will be some flooding of shacks, and a lot of them will be in my electorate.

It is about how the water is managed. It is always good to have more water coming down through the system, but we need to have a whole-of-system approach. Having been involved with the Murray Darling Association's annual general meeting at Goolwa last week, it was pleasing to see a fair bit of love in the room; it was not total love, but when you are dealing with—

The Hon. R.B. SUCH: Was it free love?

Mr PEDERICK: No, it wasn't free either. However, it was good to see a reasonable amount and, in fact, quite a large amount of consensus amongst people involved with the Murray-Darling Basin, from Queensland right down through New South Wales and Victoria and the lower end. I note in particular that one resolution was put at the meeting about whether there should be more work done on raising the barrages at Goolwa and renewing them to Torrumbarry-style weir gates and automatic opening so that you can operate them with a mobile phone, basically, from anywhere. At the moment, they just use stock logs, which has been a great way to hold the river back, but this is technology developed 80 or 90 years ago, and we noticed during the drought how much they leaked when they were forced to do something they were not designed to do, that is, not having the back pressure of the fresh water coming up against them they were leaking sea water heavily.

There was a lot of consensus at that conference, from people right throughout the river, that those barrages not only need to stay in place but also need to be upgraded and appropriately dealt with. It is a bit of a different response to that of some other spokespeople in the Murray-Darling Basin further north, but there are certainly some issues that need to be addressed with the Murray—there always will be—but I congratulate the committee for its work with regard to the River Murray. Also, I want to

talk about natural resource management levies. These are always a bone of contention in the community, and I note in one of the recommendations:

The Natural Resources Committee recommends that increases in NRM levies above the CPI should be the exception, not the rule. Due to the tendency over the past few years for increases to consistently exceed the CPI (in one case 15 times the CPI)—

and I note that the committee stood against that increase—

the Committee recommends that the Minister for Environment and Conservation direct DENR—

now DEWNR—

to ensure that in future increases remain within the CPI.

I certainly agree with that, and there should be a far more astute way of allocating any increases, because it is tough for all our ratepayers out there. We know that these levy rates go out with the local government notices and people get upset when they see anything that is unreasonable across the board.

Another thing that interests me is the recommendation to amend the NRM Act to require that business plans are reviewed no less than every three years instead of annually, together with a commitment to core funding under the state government NRM fund for the same period. I declare my interest. My wife had a bit to do with integrated natural resource management, which was the precursor to natural resource management as it is today. I have witnessed and seen over the years the number of business plans that have been produced, and I would hate to see how many trees have been cut down to produce these business plans.

It has been ongoing, and it has frustrated the heck out of the community that there is so much work going into all this paper and more planning and more planning, when the community just wants to see the outcome of more work done in the community and near their properties, and that kind of thing. Thankfully, in some of the dialogue I have had with my natural resources management board is the fact that they are suddenly recognising that farmers exist. That is a good thing, and they are realising that there needs to be a better dialogue.

I note there was an issue dealt with in regard to prescribed burns. They have always been a fascinating thing in South Australia. A lot of the time they turn into uncontrolled prescribed burns, and we have seen the Gawler Ranges, Messent park in the South-East, and other areas where these prescribed burns get out of control. I am not saying we should not have them, but we need to have far more control and more appropriate days when these burns take place so that they can be managed a lot better.

In closing, I want to comment on the recommendation about a joint select committee on foxes and the possibility that it could be expanded to include wild dogs. I think this is very apt. I have had conversations with the member for Stuart about wild dog attacks at Waikerie, and there was a rumoured attack at Coonalpyn—I have not verified that—by a wild dog. This is wild dogs that are breeding below the dog fence. It is not as though the dog fence has just collapsed. I think a select committee into the control of foxes and wild dogs would be very apt. I congratulate the committee on its work and commend the annual report.

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