



## **Adrian Pederick MP**

Member for Hammond

### **House of Assembly**

Wednesday, 6 February 2013

#### **NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: ANNUAL REPORT 2011-12**

**Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:44):** I rise to speak to the annual report of July 2011-June 2012, the 74<sup>th</sup> report of the Natural Resources Committee. I would like to congratulate the presiding member, the Hon. Steph Key, the member for Ashford, for the interaction I have had with her and the committee, especially with regard to being involved with the Murray-Darling Basin report. I am very pleased that the committee and the presiding member made sure that all local members were kept on board and kept in the loop. I managed to present evidence at both Goolwa near the Murray Mouth and at Mannum and Murray Bridge during the tour of the Lower Murray swamps, so I certainly thank the member for Ashford for that opportunity. I also thank the members of the committee. I think it is a committee that does great work and it is spread across both government benches, opposition benches and Independents.

There were many reports that the committee worked on this year: Eyre Peninsula water supply, little penguins and the levy report. It was interesting to note that sometimes committees do have teeth and it was good to see that there were some committee concerns about some of the natural resource management levy proposals, which saw a significant reduction with regard to the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges region. Some people think that committees do not have any bite, but it was just good to see that they made a recommendation that the proposed increase of 11.4 per cent was too high and well above CPI and that, as a result of the committee's objections, the minister granted an amended increase of 6 per cent. As I said, that shows how well committees can act.

I want to focus most of my discussion here today on the committee's work and the recommendations involved in the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the basin plan. Going through the recommendations, they include the salinity targets for Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert of less than 1,000 EC units for Lake Alexandrina and 1,500 EC units for Lake Albert for 95 per cent of the time measured as a rolling average over a 10-year period. I think that recommendation has to be applauded because obviously the committee listened to the community—a community that is still suffering with high salinities in the high 3,000s off Lake Albert. Some of those farmers are only just beginning to irrigate their properties again after many years of not even being able to see the water, let alone use it, but they are getting back to use of those River Murray flows that have come back since around September 2010.

I am interested in the water height target for below Lock 1—and I think it is a good target to aim for—with the height of Lake Alexandrina to remain above 0.5 metres Australian Height Datum for 95 per cent of the time measured at a rolling average over a 10-year period. I think the Lower Lakes communities—Lake Alexandrina, Lake Albert, the River Murray swamps communities and anyone below Lock 1 at Blanchetown—realise that there is more likely to be more adaptive management of the river going into the future. It is usually held at 0.75 metres AHD, and certainly when you get below 0.5, it is very hard to operate the levees of the Lower Murray swamps and get that flooding effect which is the most efficient way for those swamps to operate.

In recent years, we have seen a real rationalisation of dairy farmers in that area. There were about 120 dairy farmers and now there are only a few more than 20, I believe, in that same area. What has happened, when we had the program for the rehabilitation of the swamps and about \$30 million of federal money, state money and farmers' own money was spent, is that with the drought and the effects of low flows, sadly most of those properties, if not all, need major work.

I think the second recommendation is very important, because it is a place that produces great feed and is a great dairy producing area. As I have said in this place before—and I note the work that is being done there by other agencies—with the longer term aim, with what can be done into the future with the Lower Murray swamps, as a whole the community and governments must work out whether we bring these swamps back to their former glory or whether we just walk away.

We just cannot keep spending money if we are not going to have those water flows, that is the simple fact. I am not saying we should walk away by any means but, hopefully, as someone who wants to be on the government benches next year, we acknowledge that we have to be realistic with how the budget is spent, and we have to expect the whole community to be realistic as well.

I also note target 4, that will see the Murray Mouth open with river flows for 100 per cent of the time. That is certainly a target well worth having in the recommendations. Recommendation number 5 is for stronger requirements for monitoring and evaluation, because if you do not have that in place how do you know what salinity is there and what water heights are there? I also talked about before—and it is mentioned in recommendation 6—the adaptive management framework that will have to be put in place with the operation of the plan over time.

I note recommendation 7 talks about the preliminary terms for the review in 2015—which is getting ever so much closer as discussion on the River Murray just keeps rolling on—including the social, cultural and economic impacts as well as the benefits that can be had from the plan and its implementation. Certainly, there is the work in regard to recommendation 8, the requirement for additional hydrological modelling prior to the finalisation of the plan, that assesses the impact of removing selected operational constraints combined with water recovery on the ability of basin plan targets to be met.

In addition to some of these proposed changes to the basin plan, the committee recommended that the state Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation lobby the Australian federal government to undertake an independent basin-wide audit of the cost of further water savings from infrastructure investment. This is to help identify the extent to which these savings could make up the gap between the volume of water recovered to date and that still required. I think that is absolutely vital. For too long the authority has targeted the simple system of just buying water out of communities right throughout the basin—whether it be here, through Victoria, New South Wales or Queensland. It is just too much of a cheap and nasty, easy fix.

As I have mentioned in this place before, I have seen upgrades that can be done where people put investment into their own properties and get a 100 per cent improvement in their water use efficiency. That is just by putting in drip lines instead of relying on flood irrigation in areas around Deniliquin. I think too much focus has been put on water buybacks that can carve holes in communities, and that is why we have had so much backlash from the upper basin states.

In closing, I commend the work of the committee right throughout the year. I certainly commend the work of the committee that involved the River Murray, and its report to help guide the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. As a community, especially being on the end of the mighty River Murray, we must do our best to make sure it stays in the place it used to be, in its former glory before the drought. Otherwise the impact on communities—and not just here in South Australia—will be too massive for anyone to bear. It is not just the economic cost; it is the social cost and environmental cost. So I commend the committee for all its work and wish it well in its future endeavours.

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