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NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: UPPER SOUTH EAST DRYLAND SALINITY AND FLOOD MANAGEMENT ACT REPORT 2011-12

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:07): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I congratulate you on your ascension to the very eminent post of Speaker. In rising to make some comments re the Upper South East Dryland Salinity and Flood Management Act 2002 report, drainage in the South-East is something that has happened over the last century or so and has actually realised many gains for properties, especially with the McCourt property down near Beachport and other properties through the region, around the Lucindale/Callendale region and other areas in the South-East. I note this report is dealing with land from south of Tintinara and Salt Creek.

Drainage management is a complex issue as I am sure the committee found out in their erstwhile endeavours. There are very many debates from differing landholders on the benefits or not of these drains and there are certainly concerns on how some of these especially latter-day drains have been implemented.

The REFLOWS project is a project working on getting more water into the Coorong. Certainly, as a member of the Select Committee on Sustainable Farming we have had some interesting people speak to us for and against this project. There are also concerns in the South-East about people looking for shale gas reserves and the amount of drainage of water that would have to be taken out of the area. Certainly some people in that area have had negative impacts from drains and have had areas flooded because drains have gone in and have made land unusable.

As the member who represents the seat at the mouth of the River Murray, we are always keen to get more water into the river and lakes and certainly to get the Coorong somewhere back to what it used to be before the drought that had such a high impact. The rise in salinity was massive. There certainly needs to be a lot more work done as the REFLOWS project happens. I also note the work that has happened in the past with pastoralists like Tom Brinkworth and his own drainage system that he put in place for his extensive raft of properties.

I note that in the conclusions of the committee there is talk about it being relatively dry. It has been relatively dry in the South-East for many years. All the drainage network that is already in place has not had to be utilised to its full potential and it is still not known whether there will be enough water to get that wetlands back to where they want, the Parrakie wetlands and other wetlands that people want to see restored to their former glory. Part of the conclusions in the report states:

While the program seems to be working well in terms of reducing dryland salinity, for many landholders reducing flooding and returning flows to the Coorong, it remains to be seen whether it will enable the restoration of high-value remnant wetlands.

Some landholder-constructed banks have been removed on the West Avenue watercourse, and these are working in to get more flows through because of the reduced flows that are happening now. As I noted earlier, there is certainly reduced winter rainfall and there are some deep drainage systems nearby.

I note that the committee reserves its judgement on the third REFLOWS drain, the South-East flows restoration program proposed by the department. I also note that the committee mentioned in the conclusions that on the face of it this project seems to be a good idea in that it will further restore

original surface water flows to the Coorong and that it will mostly utilise existing drains. I think so long as existing drains can be used in the main, it will be a very positive matter, but as I indicated earlier in my contribution, drainage works are a very emotive subject when brought up amongst landholders. Some can see the positive benefits, but some can see a negative as well.

As I indicated, some farmers have had negative impacts because there has not been the appropriate consultation and next thing they have had parts of their land flooded out and they have not had the opportunity to use that land for their farming operations as they have in the past. If there can be more investigation done to make the REFLAWS project absolutely work for the area and bring the wetlands and the Coorong back to better health, I applaud that, but we have to take the community with us.

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