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## HANSARD

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### **NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: UPPER SOUTH EAST DRYLAND SALINITY AND FLOOD MANAGEMENT**

**Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:14):** I rise to speak to the Upper South East Dryland Salinity and Flood Management Act 2002 Report, July 2012-June 2013. As has been put by members, there has been a long history of drains in the South-East, and there are conflicting points of view on how well they have operated and, especially in latter years, on how well they have been managed. Most of that has been in regard to some of the newer drains that have been either proposed or put in and the way that the funds to manage the construction and maintenance of those drains are levied against landholders.

The history of drains in the South-East has certainly opened up thousands of hectares of land to agricultural production, but, as I said, there are some different points of view on whether some specific drains should have been where they were. In an historical context, I want to speak about Murray McCourt and what he did near Robe with the Woakwine Cutting. Some of the history of the Woakwine Cutting that opened up a lot of the McCourt country down there involved the South Eastern Water Conservation Drainage Board, which drew up plans for the proposed channel, but they were never adopted. I note that Mr McCourt decided to take a calculated risk to build an almost perpendicular cutting—and it is quite a cutting to see if you are ever in that region.

Prior to this, a drainage channel of this depth had never been attempted in Australia, so there could have been a lot of problems in the construction. Murray and a workman did this job 24 hours a day. They used a new, at the time, Caterpillar D7 crawler tractor, complete with a double drum winch and a bulldozer blade; a second-hand seven-tonne Le Tourneau carryall scraper of 11-yard heat capacity, which was cable operated; and a second-hand Le Tourneau drawn ripper, which was cable operated and weighed about 10 tonnes.

The work started way back in May 1957, and the material was carried from the cutting by the tractor-drawn carryall scraper. They disposed of the soil in a deep gully not far from the cutting, and then some of the soil was dumped along the total length of the drain on the southern side. Some small charges of gelignite were used to build some of this. The completion of the cutting—this mammoth operation—was not completed until May 1960, which was two weeks under the target of three years, so it was very visionary for this farmer and his staff to take this on. At this time, there was a considerable build-up of water in a swamp and it was decided to remove the bar that was keeping it out and let it flow through to the lake.

It was quite a massive construction, and here are some vital statistics in regard to the Woakwine Cutting: it is one kilometre long; it is only three metres wide at the bottom; at the top, it is 36.57 metres wide; and, at the deepest point, it is 28.34 metres. The D7 did 5,000 hours in completing this task and removed over 361,000 cubic yards of material. The total length of the channel was approximately eight kilometres. That was just one channel that was dug to drain the South-East. It is noted that around Salt Creek Tom Brinkworth did some work not that many years ago with some big scrapers opening up channels there.

A lot of the drains go back many decades in the South-East. Certainly, you note that in the dry times there is not much water at all in them, but I think they have assisted with the growth of the South-East as a productive area and certainly with the financial viability of making things work because it can get quite a bit wetter than where I am at Coomandook in the mid to lower South-East. In regards to the recommendations, I note that the lead recommendation is:

The Natural Resources Committee recommends that the Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation write to the Federal Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment requesting that the Productivity Commission undertake an inquiry into the South East Drainage and Upper South East Dryland Salinity and Flood Management schemes.

The inquiry should work on issues surrounding an environmental impact statement for each scheme to see how they were constructed and to see what impacts these schemes had, both positive and negative, and it should also include 'a benefit/cost analysis of the schemes taking into consideration total expenditure and total estimated benefits'. I have also just recently mentioned in my contribution about the benefits for agricultural production.

There are issues around maintenance of the scheme, and also issues to deal with in regard to a compensation program with the schemes, and assessment of whether the environmental program has been successful in offsetting the loss of some of the original wetland ecosystems that was caused by the implementation on the scheme. I note what the member for Mount Gambier said about the water from the Lower South-East that may be channelled through to the Coorong, and I note that recommendation 6 is:

An assessment of whether the estimated additional volume of water proposed for the Coorong through the diversion of water from the Lower South East warrants the completion of the South East Flows Restoration Project, currently on hold due to lack of support for enabling legislation in the South Australian Parliament for which 50% funding had been promised by the Commonwealth contingent on matching funding by the State Government;

I think that is something that certainly needs to be investigated. The health of the Coorong—and this reflects back on the River Murray—is uppermost in my mind. I do note the comments by the member for Mount Gambier, who is obviously concerned about the Lower South-East, that their groundwater does not suffer as a result and that his area, and that of the member for MacKillop, does not suffer as a result if this scheme to transfer these waters into the Coorong goes ahead.

Certainly, as the member in this house who represents the lower reaches of the River Murray, I would certainly want a full investigation into what could be the benefits of this water reaching the Coorong. We only have to witness what happened in the recent drought on how much salinity was not only in the River Murray and the lakes (Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert, which is still suffering from high salinity loads), but also the high saline content of the southern and northern lagoons in the Coorong. I also note the last recommendation is that the state government take further action:

...including possible funding mechanisms for maintenance and further infrastructure, new legislation and governance arrangements for ongoing management, maintenance, new works and compensation to landholders.

I think that will be one of the bigger things for parliament to work through. As I said earlier in my contribution, there are mixed feelings about some of these drains, especially about some of the newer ones and who will pay for the scheme. I know that there were land access issues with getting on to people's property and that kind of thing, and whether people thought that some of these newer drains were going to be a benefit. So, I think there has to be a lot of work and a lot of full consultation with whoever is in power in this place to make sure that we get the right outcome as far as the Upper South-East drainage scheme is concerned.

Motion carried.

- Ends -