

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

THURSDAY 30TH JULY 2015

APPROPRIATION BILL 2015

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (12:40): I rise after a blistering performance from the member for Bragg and a less than insightful performance from the member for Kaurana. Be that as it may, I rise to speak in the aftermath of estimates, which is a rather interesting process—and some people think it is an absurd process. Certainly, the member for Kaurana reflected that the opposition do not put up any ways the process can be improved. Well, yes we do and yes we have many years running in respect of some ministers who have the courage to sit up and say, 'Well, give it to me,' like the former member for Port Adelaide, Kevin Foley, which he did regularly. That is the one thing that I will give him credit for. One or two ministers in this place for estimates and in the other place basically did the same thing, but they were very much in the minority.

The sad thing is that we have got ministers who seek the protection from that dinosaur of parliament, Dorothy—Dorothy Dixier, the dinosaur. She raised her ugly head many times during estimates. I think it is, quite frankly, an abuse of process when the government ask questions of themselves that could be asked inside closed doors, inside their own party room. It would certainly give us a lot more opportunity to ask questions on our side, when we do not have department of thousand or more behind us, so that we can get some valuable information for our electorates.

I certainly note that in one of the estimates I was involved in the Minister for Regional Development was constantly shielded with either Dorothy, that ageing dinosaur, or with his staff providing answers. I congratulate the ministers that take it on the chin and say essentially the same as the former member for Port Adelaide, 'Well, give it to me,' but the others, well, I think it leaves a lot to be desired.

The interesting thing in the budget, and what we found during estimates, is that there are fewer jobs this year than were proposed in last year's budget. We have got a jobless rate of 8.2 per cent currently. I note that in a major town in my electorate the jobless rate is currently at 10.6 per cent. We have increased registration costs for our good people throughout the state and we have a rise in the emergency services levy once again, which essentially, for a homeowner with a \$500,000 house, would mean a rise of \$205. This was in regards to the cost of the Sampson Flat bushfire.

Well, I would hate to see, when we have a very busy bushfire season, and maybe five, six or seven, or worse, big events, what is going to happen then. Are we just going to have the emergency services levy jacked right

up every time we have an incident? It is absolutely outrageous to think that the government can throw this land tax on the good people of this state and then expect our 13,000 plus volunteer firefighters and the CFS, of which I am one—and there are many members on the side who are—to go out and fight these fires.

I think there should be better management of what goes on instead of coming up with ideas of reform, as the Minister for Emergency Services did and then had to drop, but not until he lost a very good man, the head of the Metropolitan Fire Service, Grant Lupton. We need far better ideas about how we manage these events instead of just slugging the poor taxpayers of this state.

We also see that it was said in the budget that the Daw Park Repatriation Hospital will close, and I congratulate the veterans and their friends out the front of this place who are into well over 100 days of protest over that closure. I just cannot understand. It just shows that the member for Waite has become one of the comrades. The Daw Park Repatriation Hospital is right in his electorate, just on the edge of his electorate.

Not only has he been a traitor and gone over to the other side from this side of the house, and signed up as a minister with all the perks, the car and the money, but now he has obviously had the secret handshake and said, 'Yes, I will go along with that because I probably won't get elected again anyway.' He is shafting not only the constituents of his electorate but the state of South Australia, and I think it is utterly disgraceful not just for him but for the whole Labor Party.

What will happen with hospitals like Daw Park and the other changes that are happening is that it will mean more travel for regional residents. We are already seeing the impacts of changes in Goolwa, in that end of my electorate, where people cannot be triaged at Goolwa Medical Centre anymore: they have to go to Victor Harbor, which is at least half an hour by road.

There are many elderly citizens in Goolwa and in aged-care facilities and the like, and it is affecting them. I have written to the health minister about several of these people who have had terrible experiences, and he had better come back with a good answer to why the health services in the south have suddenly gone backwards. Also, we see in the budget that there are no new major infrastructure projects to keep this state going and get employment back on track.

What I want to talk about now is the Department of Primary Industries and Regions estimates and a subject I have been campaigning on for quite a while now, that is, the New Zealand/long-nosed fur seals, which is the new name so that people realise that they are actually a native seal. I acknowledge that, but for many years now they have been called the New

Zealand fur seal. I asked the whether the government had instigated a new management plan for the commercial Lakes and Coorong fishery.

I reminded the minister that three years ago I called for a plan to implement an overabundant native species management plan to tackle the New Zealand fur seal problem which, as I stated in the estimates, has now become a crisis. I asked whether the management plan noted in the targets included such management of fur seals, whether the minister had received any advice from the department on what measures would be used to tackle the fur seal problem and whether any assistance was being offered to the Lakes and Coorong fishers.

The minister said that he shared the concerns and noted that, yes, from SARDI research there are about 100,000 and that they are growing at about 5 per cent. The minister noted, 'One thing we have ruled out is a cull,' but he is saying that pretty much every other option is out there. He talked about the acoustic deterrents that are going to be tried and, from my understanding, explosive underwater crackers are also going to be tried. These things should have been tried at least three years ago. This has been an issue that has been in the Coorong and Lower Lakes—Lake Albert and Lake Alexandrina—for at least eight years.

Professor Mehdi Doroudi, who I have a great respect for, helped the minister out with some of the answers on what they are going to do. I will quote this section from Mehdi:

To start with, in collaboration with the environment department we came up with about a \$100,000 cash investment to investigate modified gear and technologies that could address the issue by separating seals from attacking the fish tangled in their mesh nets.

Also, when he was asked about how they are going to assist fishermen (and I am thinking more along the regulatory process and the managing of the licence), he said:

For instance, we have a policy of owner-operator in marine scale fishery where you need to own the licence to be able to operate on the boats.

He also mentioned how they came up with 28 days of relief for boat masters, and also that:

[They] are in discussion with industry to increase that to about three months for the Lakes and Coorong because one of the ways that they can better address their fishing activity is if they could have relief masters and get inspections of their nets quicker than the normal way they do; therefore, they can collect the fish and harvest the fish before they are damaged by seals.

This is a constant conversation. The minister in the other place (Hon. Ian Hunter) keeps saying, 'We are asking the fishers to change their practices.' Well, they have been doing that for years and still getting hit with a huge impact by these New Zealand/long-nosed fur seals. In fact, one fisher, who has a 100-net licence, only strings 12 nets at a time because he cannot get around them quick enough before they are severely damaged.

Professor Mehdi Doroudi also talked about relief of fees, and he did admit that matter is under consideration and that the government are looking into that. He said there is a possibility to work with those with mesh nets, or withdraw the fees to stop them from paying that. He also said:

That is a matter that needs further discussion with the Treasury and we need to look into regulatory aspects to see how we can help them.

During estimates, I also asked about the \$100,000 that was recently announced by the minister in the other place, and the percentage that PIRSA were paying. I also asked:

...when this fishery is decimated, and I believe it will be, because this is just ridiculous how slowly any action needed is taken, will the minister buy out licences and fully compensate fishers .. ?

The minister said that cost of the \$100,000 trial process of acoustic and explosive devices is being shared on a fifty-fifty basis, and, 'in relation to the buyout we are not ruling anything in or out'. I guess that gives some hope to people who are actually considering getting out of the industry. To be truthful, some of these people are right on the edge, and their families are very concerned for their wellbeing.

In another question, I asked about time payment licence relief. I did note, in my question, the huge support for my motion in relation to an overabundant native species management plan, including a sustainable harvest of New Zealand/long-nosed fur seals. In regard to that, I will be tabling a petition later today that has close to 1,600 signatures calling for the same thing.

In light of that, I note that Coorong council has unanimous support for my motion and certainly the Ngarrindjeri (the local Aboriginal tribe), through the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority, have full support for getting rid of this feral pest out of the waters of the Coorong, Lakes Albert and Alexandrina, and the River Murray. In fact, when I talked to one of their representatives earlier this week and asked him about support for my motion, he said, 'We want it eradicated; work that out for yourself.'

I know there is a meeting tomorrow between the Ngarrindjeri and the minister, because the government needs to take on board what they are saying. The Ngarrindjeri are over having their totems, pelicans, native

birds, swans and musk ducks attacked. You only have to go to the 'Save Mr Percival' Facebook page to see the damage that these fur seals are impacting on our environment. I believe they are posing a major threat to our Ramsar status in the Coorong and lakes Albert and Alexandrina.

I note that the minister commented, 'To talk about the cull, we all remember the images out of Canada a few years ago of fur seals.' Never have I said that we should be clubbing fur seals, but the comment I did make during estimates was, 'It did not stop tourists going to Canada, minister.' There is a huge amount of work that needs to be done, and it should have been done long ago. The professor talked about issues of buyback and that sort of thing and it is under consideration, evidently.

One thing that was not brought out in estimates in the answers from the minister was the simple fact that of all the absurd things that have been looked at by this government in the last 12-month period on the seal issue was the fact that there had actually been a conversation between the tourism department and the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources in regard to building a viewing platform at the Goolwa Barrages. What an outrageous proposal, to spend \$112,000 to put up a viewing site so that people could look at the fur seals coming in to attack our native birds, our pelicans and our fish, and just cause havoc. Of all the absurd proposals I have ever heard, for a viewing platform! Some of the email conversation went along like this:

It has been brought to [someone's] attention that the South Australian Tourism Commission (SATC) has several million dollars available to fund projects that promote tourism in SA. They have contacted the DEWNR as they have had trouble spending the money. You mentioned a viewing platform for Long-nosed fur seals—

I assume DEWNR have mentioned that in all their wisdom—

—at our meeting a few weeks ago, but that didn't eventuate due to lack of funding. Wondering if this funding might be an opportunity to get your idea about a viewing platform happening?

The project needs to be matched dollar for dollar and be ready by September, but, as this was an existing idea, plans may already be created.

Yes, there are plans put to work through water-engineering technologies at SA Water for the design, fabrication and installation of an anodised aluminium walkway platform. It specifies that the walkway will have three gates with key-type locks, walkway mesh, 316 stainless steel fasteners insulated from aluminium components, chemical anchors to be used to fasten the walkway to the weir, and the list goes on.

The thing that gets me in all of this carnage that is happening to our environment in my electorate and in adjoining electorates, is the stupidity of the ministers in charge of these departments to let this type of work go on when this should never happen—it should never happen. It never fails to amaze me the fact that, after all the pleading of industry, after all the people in my electorate to get some action, the government makes out it has done a good job to come up with \$100,000 to try out some acoustic devices and some underwater crackers to scare the seals. Yet here we see something that was certainly in discussion in December 2014—over seven months ago now—plans were drawn up by then to put a viewing platform at the Goolwa Barrages. How outrageous!

The next thing we will see is a ridiculous proposal to lay bitumen along Goolwa Beach so that people can watch the New Zealand/long-nosed fur seals invade the Coorong from that angle. I have seen some crazy things in my time, but this one tops the cake; it tops the list. It is just crazy stuff and it shows how out of touch this South Australian government really is. It really needs to stand up and listen to the Ngarrindjeri and have a look at what is going on down there, the carnage that is happening to pelicans especially, the musk ducks and swans. As we approach the native bird and migratory bird breeding season, the government really needs to have a proper look at this and stop coming up with mickey mouse ideas about viewing platforms at the Goolwa Barrages. One local said to me, 'What are they going to do? Put gun rests on there as well?' That is how ridiculous a notion this is.

The people of my community want to see some real action and some real funding. I know it is not Labor electorates but the world will stand up and take notice when our Ramsar listing for the Coorong, Lake Albert and Lake Alexandrina comes under threat, and I believe it will. Perhaps then we might see a minister sit up and take notice. They may not care about the 33 fishing licences that are down there.

Time expired.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr Gardner .

Sitting suspended from 13:00 to 14:00.