

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
THURSDAY 15TH OCTOBER 2015
NATIONAL WATER WEEK

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (12:12): I rise to support the motion by the member for Chaffey:

That this house—

(a) recognises National Water Week 2015; and

(b) acknowledges the importance of conserving and maintaining fresh water for drinking, irrigation and industrial purposes.

It is interesting to hear everyone's view on history, and I note the amendments that have been pursued by the government in relation to its actions in regard to the health and wellbeing of the River Murray. When you have lived through it—as I did, as a member and a shadow minister on the end of the river—you can see the reality of what happens, or happened.

It was only when there was a meeting with John Howard on Melbourne Cup Day 2006, that people became really alarmed. I became alarmed a lot earlier in 2006 that we were heading into a very, very dry time for not just our dryland farmers but also our irrigated farmers. It was out of that time that exceptional circumstances funding was granted for the very first time in Australia for irrigated properties, and it was a great thing to support people who were in dire straits.

The real issue came when it was perceived that Adelaide was under threat. The river level was dropping and it got to a level of two metres below where it usually sits at 0.75 AHD (Australian Height Datum). Three-quarters of a metre above sea level is where it is kept; where the barrage is normally. That is the aim: to keep it at that level for access, whether it is industrial, irrigation or for critical human needs.

As I have indicated in this house many times around the discussion about the Wellington weir, that was a proposal that was put in place with no environmental outcomes. The only good that would have come out of that weir is it would have cleaned up a heap of limestone—many hundreds and thousands of tonnes—off paddocks in the region. That would have been the only good that came out of it and that stone would have been sent to sink in the riverbed for many metres, probably up to 50 or 100. But, no, the government pursued that plan to put that weir in, which would have totally destroyed the environmental outcomes and the outcomes of industry, agriculture and the needs of people in the lower end of my electorate, which has around \$500 million of agricultural production. I lay that on the record as a matter of history.

I also want to commend a reporter who took note early in the piece. It is very hard sometimes with a regional news story to get excitement until you have something that affects the populace of the city. It was Emily Rice, who was working for Ten at the time; she now works in Melbourne. I upset the leader at

the time, Iain Evans, because Emily Rice said, 'I want to come down and do a story,' she brought the helicopter down and did a story, and I think I knocked off what was supposed to be our lead story of the day. I got a message from someone about that, but that was alright. I thought it was quite good that a reporter actually realised when there was a story unfolding and got on board, came down and saw what was going on.

It has always intrigued me when, near the end of the drought in 2010 and certainly in the years since, the government has made out that it has done so much work in securing up to 3,200 gigalitres of water when it took so long to get any recognition on a state and national basis of what the drought was doing to the River Murray, not just in my electorate but also in the member for Chaffey's electorate where, at one stage, irrigators were restricted to 18 per cent of their water use. It was a real tragedy, and it was not just irrigators.

It was things like the leisure industry with houseboats, who were having to build new mooring facilities and keep building them down and down. Certainly there was interest from some of houseboat people who spoke to me about putting in a lock 0 to restore their water level. I said, 'We can't go down that path, because we will destroy the very being of the river.' If you cut off a life source like that where it meets the sea, no good will come of that at all.

We fought through for a freshwater outcome, and there were tough times. There were some tough discussions, I must say. I am big enough to hold my own, but I had more than one finger poked at me—poked into me actually—saying, 'What are you doing?' But that was fine. It caused a lot of discussion amongst my colleagues and we all had different needs. The boaties at Goolwa were quite happy to float on raspberry cordial if they could have got it in there, because they were suffering hugely at that end of the electorate, which I picked up in 2010 from the member for Finnis.

A lot has been done, but I think the majority of what has happened, especially with the health of the River Murray, is a result of a greater being than anyone in this place when the water reflowed in 2010. That murky Darling water that so often has said about it, 'There's not much of it, it's not very relevant,' was the first water that came down with the floods that came down through Queensland and New South Wales. As I said in this place only two days ago, that was a magnificent sight as the river reclaimed its place when so many people, including many so-called experts, who really are not river experts—they have degrees in other things—said that it would never happen again. I note that some of those people still have their jobs. There is a saying, and it is a bit of a joke, but it always does rain after a dry spell, and it did. A lot of us thought it may never, but it certainly did.

In regard to other issues regarding water use, I am assuming the member for MacKillop will talk about his stormwater capture and re-use policy from several years ago, with 400 gigalitres of water that could have been captured and re-used for the city, which was a fantastic policy and would have alleviated a lot of the draw on the River Murray. I certainly note that we have to manage groundwater and our surface water, but I really do get distressed when I see what the natural resources management boards do in regard to this and the levies that are being imposed. Now, the levies are being imposed to just raise

extra money for government coffers, because I am sure they have had a direct line from the Treasurer to say, 'We need to raise these funds to boost the Treasury coffers because we are in such a bad state in this state.' It is just terrible, when you think about it.

I know there is a vast amount of people who work in these NRM offices. I know, in Murray Bridge, there are some good people there, but there are so many people that you wonder what the outcomes are of all the work that gets done and all the re-doing of reports every four or five years because it is part of the legislation. The legislation needs a major rework so that people out in the community can see real work being done on the ground instead of this bureaucracy that just buries natural resource management.

It makes people out in the field very angry and, certainly, with the rising fees in the Eastern and Western Mount Lofty Ranges. This is an area where a lot of these places are not under threat. From what I understand, there is probably about one place in the whole area that needs a little bit of management, but there is plenty of water flowing through the rest of it. People out there will just ring me and say, 'Adrian, I am not going to pay the levy.' I say, 'Well, that's your choice. The gaols are full. You can do what you like.' That is the thing they are dealing with.

The government talks about its water management. Through NRM, they were going to introduce these low-flow bypasses. They have certainly caused a lot of angst but, at the end of the day, they would have been no-flow bypasses with the original design because they would have been blocked up with leaves. There has been a competition run recently to devise a similar system. All this carrying on and to and fro just frustrates people. Why do we not come out with some real outcomes and really work with the locals?

I note that the contribution from the member for Flinders talked about the issue of rainwater at schools. I know there is at least one school in my electorate where there is a tap in the staffroom with a sign that says, 'Don't drink rainwater.' That is where they fill the kettle for the coffee because they know it is rainwater and that is where they get their nice drinking water. It is just mad policy set up by bureaucrats who are so frightened of some sort of kickback if there may be a bug in the water—it is unbelievable.

I would just like to end my contribution by saying what a white elephant the desalination plant has become. I note that the government only came on board well after Iain Evans' policy in 2007 of having a 50-gigalitre desal plant, and it is a tragedy that I have to stop.