

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 08TH JUNE 2016

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: LEVY PROPOSALS 2016-17

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:46): I rise to speak on the 109th to 115th reports of the Natural Resources Committee relating to various natural resources management levy proposals and plans for 2016-17. I will be echoing comments from my colleagues on the side of the house that this is an outrageous fee rise. I note my interest in natural resources, as I did when I presented to the committee. My wife is an environmental scientist and she helped set up integrated natural resources management maybe over a decade ago now, so I have a little bit of inside knowledge of what happens and I am still fed some information from some good people.

Natural resources management is vital to our productive state, but the frustration continually vented to me is that it appears that about 80 per cent of the levy money is spent on office work, reviewing plans which, subject to the act, are required to be reviewed on a three-yearly or a five-yearly basis. Volumes and volumes of work are being done every year right across the state by people just reviewing plans. It frustrates the practical people, the practical producers of our state who just want to do things on the ground and get them happening.

Interestingly, some feedback via a question I was asked during my presentation to the committee was that I did not support any of the work. No, that is not right. I do support the on-ground projects, but the issue for me is that it is almost like going to a crop trial site. Every time you go to one, there are always the same farmers and they are good operators—don't get me wrong.

They are the same operators whose good work you go and visit whether it is on the River Murray swamps, a dryland area or at Lake Albert. It is always the same people, so no-one can tell me that it involves thousands of properties in that manner across the region. In fact, I am going to see one on Friday morning in Murray Bridge. I think what cuts to the bone for people is the fact that, as is stated in the report:

Additionally...DEWNR intended to begin full cost recovery for corporate services (\$21,699 per FTE) from all regions commencing in 2016-17.

So not only are people paying this levy, their emergency services levy, they are straight-out funding the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources. This is where it really sticks in the craw of the electors of this state: instead of these departments being funded, as they have been from general revenue in the past, now there is this so-called cost recovery that will again just beat up the good constituents of the regions and throughout the urban areas and take this funding from them.

In regard to the Murray-Darling Basin area, the 2015-16 budget was \$2,253,752 rising to \$5,827,400 in 2018-19, and in division 2 the water levy goes from \$7,079,782 to \$8,050,792. We are seeing these gross rises right across the board that impact on the producers of our state who contribute around \$20 billion a year to this state, especially in the light of the downturn in mining and manufacturing.

There has been some discussion about the attitude of councils to collecting the levy. I would like to note a motion that was put forward by the Mid Murray Council to the Murraylands and Riverland Local Government Association. It reads as follows:

That the Murraylands and Riverland Local Government Association:

(1) Note the significant cost increase proposed in the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin NRM draft Business Plan 2016/17-2018/19 in the amount of levy raised through the NRM levy (land levy proposed to be increased by 136% from \$28.00 to \$66.00 and water levy by 10.5% from \$5.70 to \$6.30 per megalitre).

(2) Considers that such a significant increase in the NRM levy may have a detrimental effect on the payment of council rates and council operations.

(3) Request that the South Australian Regional Organisation of Councils (SAROC) consider the removal of the requirement by the state government for the collection of the local government Natural Resources Management Levy due to the reasons outlined.

It is sad to think that it has reached this level because I have had constituents ring me to say, 'Well, we're just not going to pay it. We're just not going to pay it.' I said, 'That's up to you; that's your call.' However, what is going to happen is that councils will have to pick up the slack because they will get the direct bill from the government.

While I am talking about natural resources management, something I presented in my submission was the effect of both corellas and the New Zealand fur seals in my area. Corellas are having a devastating effect on communities around the state, yet there is only one council, the Coorong council, that has put in a proper relocation program that permanently relocates some of these corellas so that they never offend again. It is the only way to manage these birds, yet NRM flatly refuses to be involved. You would have thought that this was something that natural resources management should be involved in.

However, there is also the seal issue. I note a letter from Julie Jones, the daughter of the great Henry Jones who stood alongside so many environment ministers and environment shadows over his life, especially the last decade of his life, in fighting for the River Murray—a true champion. After a visit by the federal Minister for the Environment, Mr Greg Hunt, only the other day, Julie wrote a letter, and I quote from it:

Dear Minister Hunt,

Thank you for visiting Clayton Bay today and for listening to the concerns of our community. I reiterate what I said at the meeting through print as you requested.

Re: Destruction caused by the New Zealand Fur Seal & introduction of the herpes strain cyprinid herpesvirus - 3 for carp.

PLEASE LISTEN!

We are distraught watching our fishing business and industry suffering as it has at the hands of the destructive New Zealand fur seals. And in total disbelief that despite the constant and desperate cries for help (through the right channels) we are not getting the right intervention from Government to rectify the problem.

As listed below...all trials have failed.

My name is Julie Jones and my son, Justin Phillips, is a Fisher in the Lower Lakes, mostly South of Lake Alexandrina. My sister is also a fisher, after taking over my father's (Henry Jones) fishing licence 2 & a half years ago. Prior to being employed by my sister, Justin fished with Henry since he left school (10 years ago) . Our family has held fishing licences in this region for over 50 years.

At this time, my son is NOT working due to the horrific daily impact the NZ fur seals are having on the fishery. We are very concerned about the exhausted physical and mental health of the fishers in our Southern Fishermen's Association. There are fishers in our Association on suicide watch.

We see seals every fishing day. We see the destruction they wreak daily. The seals bite the pelicans' neck and feet and leave them to suffer. We are not seeing other species of birds that we used to see (i.e. the musk duck). New nets have enormous irreparable holes in them, the fish in the nets are NOT saleable as they are bitten in half. Our income has been highly affected making it impossible to meet the cost of licence fees, let alone daily living expenses. This, of course, also has a rippling social impact on businesses in our communities.

We have been asked for photos of the destruction, damage statistics, stock numbers, etc., and all of this has been collated and sent. We continue to send accurate information and statistics as requested.

This fishery is generally concerned not only our own livelihoods... but for the Ecosystem that we fought so hard to resurrect in our fight for water post the recent destructive drought.

They go through the list of points that were made at the meeting about the destruction of alternative fishing styles. Fyke nets and crackers were no good. Eighty metres of fencing around the barrages was no good. Seal counts have indicated that seals have certainly increased after they went out to breed in December to January.

My call is that, instead of the government taking all this money from our community without giving too much back, this is the time they should be standing up for our communities, whether it be on issues like land and water management, corellas, or some sort of decent management on seals, which are destroying our native environment and our fishers' livelihoods.