

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 10TH FEBRUARY 2016

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

Adjourned debate on motion of Hon. S.W. Key:

That the 107th report of the committee, entitled Annual Report 2014-15, be noted.

(Continued from 2 December 2015.)

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:49): I rise to make a contribution in regards to the Natural Resources Committee Annual Report 2014-15. For the important sake of disclosure in regards to natural resources management, my wife is an environmental scientist.

The Hon. L.W.K. Bignell: A very good one, too.

Mr PEDERICK: Absolutely; and she helped with the inaugural INRM, well over a decade ago, I think it was—I do not have the exact time lines—in setting that up. She can speak for herself, and she may have a different view of the world now.

Members interjecting:

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr PEDERICK: I must say, natural resources management in this state has changed dramatically in that time. I think the problem we have got at the start is that there is so much bureaucracy involved, and I think a lot of it has got to do with the act from 2004. Certainly, if it was up to me I would have the whole act repealed and redone, because the frustration that I see, and certainly what many members of the public, many landholders and people out there see, is staff rewriting reports every few years, as they have to under the legislation, as they must. It is an absolute frustration to real people on the ground, wondering what the heck natural resource management and all their staffing structures actually do for the management of natural resources in this state. I am only echoing the frustrations of many, many constituents who talk to all of us about their issues with that.

Certainly part of that is in relation to the raising of levies. I know that some of the members have spoken to the committee, and I thank the presiding member, the member for Ashford, being very accommodating for some of us to present to the Natural Resources Committee in regards to levies; but there certainly is a lot of angst about proposals for a significant increase in levies that will have a severe impact on landholders. Essentially, these levies are to plug millions of dollars worth of what the government calls funding gaps in the environment department. This is where it all gets ridiculous.

My initial feeling of natural resources management is that it was supposed to be a step away from government, but now it has been absolutely taken over by

government with all those 300-odd staff involved in natural resources management essentially being made government staffers and part of the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources. I think the whole process, especially with what is happening, has completely lost its way, with the government deciding that it will just use natural resources management as an excuse to fund operations that should be funded out of the budget. There are many distraught levy payers that are not very happy about these proposals into the future, and I can certainly sympathise with them.

What I will say, though, is that I think the Natural Resources Committee of the parliament does great work. I think they do great work, especially under the chairing of the member for Ashford. She is a very approachable person, especially when you want to bring something to the committee or have a discussion on the side about things that could be done or other things related to natural resources management; so I really thank her for the connection that people can have.

We do have to manage our natural resources, but out there in the greater sphere there needs to be a better tool to do it and there needs to be an absolute better way. Obviously, with this annual report of 2014-15, NRM levies are discussed and set, and some of these are well above consumer price index rises, some are around the same and some—not very many—are slightly below CPI increases.

I note the big inquiry into fracking and, as I have said in this place before, I was involved in the oilfield industry over 30 years ago in the Cooper Basin in the shooting of wells before they were fracked—it was part of the fracking process—so I know a little bit about horizontal fracking. I know it is a bit different from the high-volume fracking, which is the coal seam gas variety with directional drilling which is being investigated in the inquiry, along with standard horizontal fracking.

Operations and technology have changed a lot since 1983-84 when I was involved in the industry. One thing I will say is that if people do not want to see the price of gas double in this country they will not want to ban fracking from the whole state because the Cooper Basin has been fracked for many decades—close to 50 years—and some wells have been fracked on multiple occasions.

In regard to other inquiries that the committee has had, regarding aquaculture, I think there is a lot of great work that is being done and has been done in aquaculture. It is a very delicate field; it is a field that some people have delved into, and it is a worse gamble than farming. They have poured hundreds of thousands of dollars in and lost it all, and accrued debt as well and had to walk away. However, I have seen some really successful projects. There was one in the Riverland only a couple of years ago that I visited that looked to be quite a successful project, but it needs real management. You cannot just walk away; you have pumps and water quality control. It can be done but you really need to look after that asset that you have.

As the member for Flinders said, the committee had a trip to Kangaroo Island around aquaculture, and certainly briefings with the committee have involved discussions around fish stocks. There was the Department of State

Development's response to the 91st report of the Natural Resources Committee which involved the Whyalla visit; and there was also a briefing on Christie Creek and the Southern Expressway.

I want to make a couple of brief comments about fish stocks. We have seen the implementation of marine parks in recent times and what troubles me, and the Minister for Agriculture will not agree with me, but I certainly believe the environment department are taking over the management of our fish stocks from Fisheries. The fisheries in South Australia have been extremely well managed for many decades, and I think it is just another level of interference that we do not need in what has happened with the botched marine park process.

What we now see, within a very short amount of time, is that there are going to be new quotas set for recreational fishers. I was involved in this discussion, and I think the Hon. Gail Gago was the minister, about three or four years ago, and I had discussions with Professor Mehdi Doroudi, and he does great work, and we came to some middle ground eventually as to where those numbers would be, and I was pleased to get a win at the time for recreational fishers.

Notwithstanding that, it is like everything, we do need to make sure that everything is sustainable. But if you are going to make sure that things are sustainable in the ocean you have to look at the whole picture. You have to look at the predators and you have to look at the seagrasses—a whole range of issues that need to be taken into account. It was interesting to note that there were not any marine parks off the coast of Adelaide where most of the recreational fishing takes place, so you can take that for what it is.

The one thing I would be really interested to know is what research has been done into the impact of the 100,000 long-nosed or New Zealand fur seals that are present in our South Australian waters that are consuming 400 tonnes of fish a day. That is not a small amount of fish; that is ten B-double loads. So just get that picture in your head. That is a huge impact on our fish stocks, and I believe it is having an impact, and not just other forces at play, whether it is commercial fishing or recreational fishing. It is certainly something that needs a lot more research because otherwise we will see the demise of stocks like whiting and garfish, and it will be just like all the little penguins around our coastline.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr Whetstone.