

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 16TH NOVEMBER 2016

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: ANNUAL REPORT JULY 2015- JUNE 2016

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:37): I rise to speak to the 118th report of the Natural Resources Committee, entitled Annual Report July 2015-June 2016. Generally, I think the Natural Resources Committee is one of the best committees in this place. I have never officially been on the committee, but I have always been welcomed along on trips. I salute the Presiding Member, the member for Ashford. It is a good, welcoming committee for other members to make their points and to be part of fact-finding visits.

One of the visits outlined in this annual report is the Pinery fire visit. The Pinery fire was an absolute act of devastation. It is pleasing to see that, bar hail damage and frost, things have improved markedly in the last cropping season for those people. We went to Pinery and viewed the damage, especially on some of the sandy ground towards Mallala, where some of the guys on the heavier ground were cultivating strips to try to stop the drift, and we really could not do anything but watch it blow, and it was devastating.

It reminded me of the bad old days in the Mallee where there is an old saying, 'No blow, no grow'. They would work the ground about a dozen times or more and tractors and sets of harrows were enveloped in dust, and it was not a good look and it is not a good look. We have had vicious winds and bad dust storms this season, but they are nothing compared with what we used to have in the old days, especially in the early growing stages of a crop, when the whole sky was blocked out. However, farming practices now are far better, not just for the farmers but for the environment and everyone concerned.

I presented to the committee on natural resources management (NRM) levies. Regarding natural resources management, my wife is an environmental scientist and, although she does not work in that field anymore, she did help set up the NRM, especially in the Murray-Darling area. She can speak for herself, but I know that she is frustrated with where things have gone.

I am frustrated with where things have gone in relation to natural resources management, as is the community, especially in relation to DEWNR making it a subsidiary—and not even a subsidiary. It has become a part of DEWNR (Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources) so, essentially, any independence we thought might have been there has long gone. They are under the command and control of the minister down, and I certainly noticed that with the issue of the New Zealand fur seals, apart from other matters.

People are frustrated, and I think the frustration is mainly with the legislation around what has to happen under the act in relation to the renewal of reports. I believe—and I have seen it from the inside and I still hear about it—that there is far too much time spent renewing three yearly or five-yearly reports, and once that is done you do the next lot.

There are some great individual projects that get done on ground, I must say, but they are few and far between, and not enough money is reaching on ground. Far too much goes into the bureaucracy that just cuts down trees to print books, which I find offensive, and we are not getting the weed management and we are not getting the pest management that we used to have. Things definitely need to change.

The populace have switched off out there, especially in the farming areas. They do their own thing, and I have mentioned in this place before the matter of corella management.

I know it is not an issue for the natural resources management board: it is a council issue. Then it becomes an issue of, 'Will council do it?' And then the police get involved because not all councils are as courageous as the Coorong council, which has a very good relocation policy around corellas, and some of them get relocated to a better place.

Ms Sanderson interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, some go to a worse place: corella hell. If you are proactive and do things under the right guidelines, you can get some decent management. There has recently been some media around Mannum and what they are going to do about their corella issue. They have a hot-rod show there, and people are now refusing to bring their cars along because of the damage inflicted by the birds.

There has been damage throughout Murray Bridge, especially in the Riverglades area, and the Alexandrina Council area—whether it's through Strathalbyn, Langhorne Creek, heading down towards Goolwa—and people need to work with the authorities. It disappoints me that the NRM does not want anything to do with it. It is a sensitive issue. I know the police in Murray Bridge certainly do not want a relocation program like the Coorong council has implemented, but there has to be a way to protect not just people's homes, livelihood and belongings but also the environment where the trees just get butchered.

In relation to what was put to the NRM Board, especially in the Murray-Darling Basin section, there was a proposed 10 per cent increase in the water levy, the division 2 levy, which went through, and a 150 per cent increase in the land levy, the division 1 levy, which went through. This is some of the angst that comes back to us as members of parliament as these levies are put onto local government, on their rates bills, and then local government cop the flak as well and come to us complaining about this impost that they have to deal with.

One that is a real angst is the base levy of \$200, as a water levy. From what I have been told, this has been a 1,000 per cent increase on some people's base fee. I have had one very small cricket club write to me, and I have contacted the minister to see if we can get some relief. This is just the kind of bill where you might be only running one team, you might have a dozen or 15 players and a few supporters, and that is it. So, that small cricket club gets belted with this increase, and it has a huge impact, especially on people trying to access their regional sport. This is happening right across the state. It does not matter how big or small the sporting club is, but it obviously impacts the ones that have a smaller population using their facilities.

These imposts have been put in right across the state. One of the things that is most galling is that it is blatantly paying for DEWNR staff wages; something like 22 per cent of DEWNR wages come out of the levy instead of coming out of general revenue. That is totally wrong, in my opinion, and we see it in a whole range of fields now. Whether it is management fees around DPTI (Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure), or whether it is in the agriculture department managing concessional loans, millions are taken out just in bureaucracy, and we see it again here with these things that, in my mind, should be funded out of general revenue so that more money can hit the ground.

I note the report. I note that there are many inquiries that the Natural Resources Committee has undertaken. I believe we are not far off an outcome in regard to the fracking inquiry in the South-East. I acknowledge the committee receiving, on my request, a submission by Skype from Jeff Heller, who heads up a group of over 100 farmers in New York state who were very keen to access fracking in their country but who were denied because of a ban. I note that they have a different royalty system over there and that they are totally reliant on groundwater. I acknowledge and thank the

committee for hearing his evidence. I think the use of technology for all committees is an excellent way to get information from right across the world. I endorse the report.

Motion carried.