

## HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2016

### **PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE: INLET REGULATING STRUCTURES ON MARGARET DOWLING CREEK AND ECKERTS CREEK**

**Mr PEDERICK ( Hammond ) ( 11:27 ):** I want to make a brief contribution to the 538th report of the Public Works Committee regulating structures on Margaret Dowling Creek and Eckerts Creek. These structures will certainly be of benefit in the management of systems and environmental management right throughout the Murray, but as the member for Chaffey has indicated, we need to manage all of that water wisely because there is only so much of it. It has only been a few years since the millennium drought broke in September 2010 and it was a great feeling to see that muddy Darling water flowing into the river, because that was the first lot of water that relieved the situation for the River Murray in my electorate, when the water level had dropped by approximately two metres.

Certainly, with all these structures in mind and any water planning, we need to make sure that we make absolute use of the water, whether it is for critical needs, human needs, whether it is for the environment or indeed whether it is for food production, which is also vital. Considering the perilous state of mining at the moment in this state—and I am sure it will come back—we are so much more reliant on agriculture, as we have been since the settlement of this state.

There were a couple of things that the member for Chaffey related to, and certainly I am one who is very keen on an interconnector between Lake Albert and the Coorong. There needs to be a full environmental impact statement completed so that we can see whether there is any negative impact on the Coorong if some sort of connector is put in place.

I personally think that the figure quoted of around \$20 million would be a much better amount of money to be spent on the actual structure. There is a bit of debate about how the structure should be made, whether it is a channel so you can promote tourism as well (which is a good idea) or a pipeline affair that can be regulated—but a channel could be regulated as well with a lock arrangement. It is the idea of the minister in the other place, minister Hunter and his department, that they can freshen up Lake Albert with an unregulated flow of water.

Now, I cannot remember when the last decent slug of unregulated water came down the river but things are dry. There have been some rains over January and certainly early this month in sections of the basin, but one thing I will certainly never forget from the millennium drought was how long it took to wet up the catchment before water of any amount flowed into the system. It took gigalitres and gigalitres of water right across the basin just to get it damp again so that we would have that run-off into the system.

The thought that, because Lake Albert is a terminal lake, you can bring hundreds of gigalitres of water at a time and do some flushing through the Narrung Narrows, I think, is completely flawed. It is completely flawed on a number of levels because it uses far too much water. And even though we have the

department and the minister saying, 'Oh, that will be unregulated water', it is also not a good look in the overall management of water for the whole basin because at the moment we see producers and users right along the system giving up water with buybacks and other measures so that we can get the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in place.

It is a good thing that that is happening but it is affecting right across; and, whether it is right or wrong, certainly the perception of having to use hundreds of gigalitres of water to flush out Lake Albert is not a good one and certainly not a good one for our state because we need to look upstream and work with all of our upstream neighbours, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, and getting the right result for the whole river system.

Certainly I would endorse the comments of the member for Chaffey in looking at a decent regulator system for the connector for Lake Albert through to the Coorong, but also we need to be looking forward. I know there has been some preliminary work done on how the barrages are managed, and that work should be accelerated, I believe, because we need to have fully automated Torrumbarry-style weir gates down there that could be operated, perhaps, by a mobile phone from anywhere in the world if need be instead of what is there at the moment which is a stop-log process and which would have to either be pulled out or put back in.

As we saw during the millennium drought, those stop logs were leaking and there were many methods, such as poly pipe and plugs, used to try to plug the gates because when they were built they did not think that they had that much pressure from the ocean side trying to get into the fresh side of the system, and there was a lot of salt water that leaked in.

We need to have a far better system to preserve the finite fresh water that we do have and to make sure that we have a fresh system. Overall I endorse any of these works so long as they manage water in the appropriate manner because everyone in the system is deserving of getting a fair go—so long as the water, when it is used and what can be reused many times coming down the system, can be used in a wise manner so that everyone gets their fair kick. The environment needs a kick and the critical human need is absolutely vital but also we never can forget our agricultural production.