



HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 15TH FEBRUARY 2017

PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE: SOUTH EAST FLOWS RESTORATION PROJECT

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:20): I rise to speak to the South-East Flows Restoration Project and concur with the comments made by the member for MacKillop; we do have to get this right. Issues with the Murray-Darling Basin go back for millennia, but they were certainly highlighted with the massive drought we had about 10 years ago that impacted heavily right throughout the basin. It was very stark at the bottom end of the Murray-Darling Basin, where my electorate of Hammond is situated; we could not even get water to cover acid sulphate soils at the bottoms of Lake Albert and Lake Alexandrina. We had a major crisis.

I note that under this project it will take 18 months, weather permitting, to put back an extra approximately 26.5 gegalitres of water annually into the Coorong. I have worked in the South-East for quite a few years as a shearer, and I noticed back in the eighties, especially, that there was a lot more water about, a lot more run-off, and those drains were highly utilised. In my conversations with the member for MacKillop, even with the wet year we have had this year, a lot of the water has drained away through the ground, dissipated and not ended up in the drainage system because of the previous dry years.

If we keep getting wet seasons that will obviously change, but it certainly is weather dependent, and we need to freshen up the Coorong. We need to keep looking at things in a whole-of-basin approach, and in South Australia as well we need to look at ways to make things better right throughout the river and lakes area and the Coorong. We need to have a serious look at the connector from Lake Albert through to the Coorong so that we can get better flows through there to get some better freshwater outcomes.

I also note there has been recent discussion put out a lot in the media by David Paton about a proposal at Parnka Point, which splits the northern and southern ends of the Coorong with a small weir. When people mention weirs to me, and more weirs in the southern end of the river and lakes and Coorong system, the hair starts to stand up on the back of my neck.

We need to be very careful with some of these proposals going forward. My understanding is that that proposal will get due consideration, with a department investigation of about six months into it, but I think that these things, especially the current proposal to put another obstruction in the system, need to be looked at very carefully. The government needs to remember that we are at least 18 months off from whenever this work starts on the South-East Restoration Flows Project to make sure that we get the outcomes we need without putting another obstruction in the system.

I know that fishermen are up in arms about the proposal, as are others who want to see the right environmental outcome. I will be watching where that goes with interest, but we really need to concentrate on the whole Murray-Darling Basin Plan and the outcomes in getting water back into the system that supposedly will benefit everyone, whether you

are an irrigator, whether you want it for the environment or, obviously, what we need for critical human needs.

This has to be managed in an appropriate way so that we do not kill off communities wherever they are in the basin. I have always been a big fan of irrigation. Irrigation that is in place that can have an infrastructure upgrade is a far better way to put water back in the system while still getting irrigated outcomes and food production than simply buying water.

I certainly support this proposal, but let's not start throwing a whole heap of other proposals on top. Let's give this proposal a chance to work and see how much water actually flows. I note the \$60 million cost. It is a significant project, with about 13 kilometres of new drain and 80 kilometres of restored drain work. Let's just hope that in future—though it might not be for at least 12 months—our NRM levies will not just be paying for DEWNR staff to sit in offices when that should be coming out of the general revenue account. But, in saying that, I support the project.