

NEWS

Water talks in the pipeline

By **Joanne Fosdike**

POLITICIANS have spent a day at Meningie to hear the concerns of landholders and primary producers over the rising cost of water.

Coorong Mayor Roger Strother said the rising cost of water, which had almost doubled in price over the past four years, was having a grave impact on the visibility of regional agricultural producers.

"Huge hikes in water pricing have reduced the value of farming properties in our region to in excess of \$100 per hectare, which is alarming," he said.

Twenty landholders and primary producers attended the meeting alongside members of the council and Liberal Party members Adrian Pederick and Mitch William to discuss the ongoing ramifications of the 2007-08 drought.

Mayor Strother said he believed the forum had opened the lines of communication and hoped it would generate positive action at a State Government level.

He said the importance of members of parliament collaborating with peak industry bodies while lobbying for fairer water tariffs was highlighted during the meeting and could become a critical issue for the 2014 State election.

Member for Hammond Adrian Pederick said the meeting produced a transparent dialogue about the cost of water, and what alternatives were available to alleviate the costs.

"The rising cost of water is of great concern as it threatens to de-stock South Australia through the monies raised by SA Water to fund the desalination plant debacle," he said.

"Including pipework, the desalination plant is costing South Australia's \$2.2 billion and in return these costs are impacting the current high cost of living and production."

Mr Pederick said primary producers were looking towards investing in private infrastructure to transport water from natural resources such as Lake Albert, however costs were significant and it was a concern whether or not the money could be justified compared with the cost of potable water.

He said if the Liberal Party won the 2014 State election they would be in a position to help irrigators and farmers by implementing third party access - an initiative which was introduced in the Water Industry Act in 2011.

"Third party access allows an organisation to utilise the SA Water pipelines in order to deliver an allocation of water which has been purchased by that organisation as a river water entitlement," he said.

"A delivery fee will be charged to deliver that water through the SA Water system.

"The State Liberal Party has no intention to increase water prices because as highlighted in the 2013-14 Mid-Year Budget Review, SA Water is realising healthy profits."