

STATUTES AMENDMENT (WATER CONSERVATION TARGET AND SUSTAINABLE WATER RESOURCES) BILL – 6 March 2008

(Continued from 14 February 2008. Page 2081.)

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (10:47): I rise today to make some comment on this bill, which was introduced by the member for Mitchell, and note that an almost identical bill was introduced in the other place last year by the Hon. Mark Parnell. I also note that that bill has been pulled in the upper house because the opposition called for a select committee (which has been formed) to look into these matters. Be that as it may, I want to refer to some of the clauses in this bill. I think that the following provision in clause 4 is very apt, especially in relation to people living in the Lower Murray and lakes area:

a requirement for the corporation to perform its commercial and non-commercial operations in a manner that ensures proper consideration is given to—

(a) the need to conserve, and reduce adverse effects on, water resources; and

(b) the need to ensure that development is ecologically sustainable;

Further, clause 5(1) proposes to insert:

(ab) to carry out and facilitate research about conserving or reducing adverse effects on water resources

I believe this is a very timely bill in that respect: having witnessed at first-hand the devastation occurring below Lock 1, I am well aware that the Murray-Darling Basin has been in drought for up to seven years in places. It is having a long and sustained effect on the whole basin, but I am also alarmed that we still have not resolved the matter of over-allocations so that we make sure that everyone is treated equitably in their ability to access fresh water. We have an alarming situation where ferries for transport are dropping out of service, because water has not been managed properly, and people just do not have good water to service their homes. On the Narrung Peninsula they are flushing their toilets with a black ooze; it is water that you can barely shower in.

People are going up to three kilometres out into Lake Albert to access water just to keep their houses going. They have long shut down industries because they realise that that is what they need to do to survive. They are being very resourceful, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars of their own money, but they are also running into problems because the supply is just not there. Even people who have invested upwards of \$200,000 in desalination are finding out that access to that very saline water is getting difficult at this stage. I know that the Raukkan community has had to extend its pipe several hundred metres out into the lake to access water for the Aboriginal community of up to 200 people.

It is a dire situation and, in the State Strategic Plan, the government has a target of reducing Adelaide's water use by 22 per cent, but get this: by 2025. Many people in this place will not even be here then, so it will become

some other politicians' issues. This issue certainly needs to be addressed. I have spoken in this place before about fast-tracking water supplies to the communities of Langhorne Creek, Narrung and those around the Meningie region because they are really suffering.

I want to talk about a letter in today's *Stock Journal* written by Terry Sim, who is very knowledgeable about Lake Alexandrina and its situation, because I believe it is important that everyone gets the right idea about where the Lower Lakes fit in with the whole river supply as far as our fresh water supply—and its conservation—is concerned, not only for Adelaide users but also country users. The letter dated 6 March 2008 entitled 'Fresh v salt: get it right' states:

Sir, the comment by Ken Jury (Stock Journal, February 21) regarding the building of a weir near Wellington and allowing seawater into Lakes Alexandrina and Albert 'to gradually return the region to its original estuarine feature' is ill-informed and wrong. The lakes were originally freshwater lakes. The amount of water flowing down the river and discharging to the sea through the River Murray mouth stopped seawater from entering those lakes. For thousands of years, this was the case.

It was not until Europeans started extracting water from the river and altering the amount of water entering the lakes that seawater began invading. This occurred from the late 1800s. Until then, the lakes were a freshwater paradise fringed with reeds and other vegetation and abounding wildlife. In December, 1837, the party of Cock, Finlayson, Wyatt and Barton walked down the Bremer to Lake Alexandrina and found that 'the lake appears to be of vast extent, the waters being quite fresh and sweet'.

Sturt, in an 1838 report after a visit to the lakes, said: 'During my late visit I never observed the sea running in, but a strong current always setting out of the channel. From what I observed, I am led to think, that the level of the lake is above high water mark.'

The Strathalbyn Southern Argus, in the editorial of August 1875, comments that 'Lake Alexandrina is 12 miles from our town, and is a noble lake of freshwater.'

It is time that the management of the River Murray should be from the mouth upstream and a sufficient allocation of water should be given to the environment. This would return it to a healthy working river—the whole river including Lakes Alexandrina, Albert and the Coorong.

I believe that to be a very accurate description of how the lakes were before extraction began. It was only with extraction that we had saline slugs of water pushing into the Murray, and I will acknowledge that they did push up as far as Mannum, but they were saline slugs that pushed up once we started mining that resource.

With this bill, we have to make sure that we start getting things right, instead of using SA Water as a cash cow, which it has been for the last six years, contributing \$1.6 billion to Treasury coffers. Treasury might have to tighten its belt somewhere else, or else be more prudent in its spending: perhaps we could cut some of the 10,000 unallocated public servants—

10,000 people who were not budgeted for. That would be a good start to get us back on track.

In closing, I think it does deserve very careful management, because we stand to lose our two iconic lakes (Lake Albert and Lake Alexandrina) and the Coorong, and they all make up what I believe is a vital part of the water supply for the whole state, not just this city. We also need to see what a thorough investigation that the select committee into the operations of SA Water and its charter comes up with so that we get a full assessment of what is going on.