

Murray Darling Basin (Amending Agreement) Amendment Bill **July 24, 2007-07-25**

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond): In regard to the bill, I would like to make a few comments on river health and some of the programs that have been completed or are nearing completion at the moment.

As our lead speaker the Shadow Minister for Water (the member for MacKillop) indicated, we are all aware of the ravages of drought and the need for this river system to be very well managed. Although the government and the opposition in South Australia may have slightly different views on how they want to get there, I know that the sooner we have national control of the Murray-Darling Basin and the whole system the better off everyone will be.

The barrages are still leaking (quite heavily at times) near Hindmarsh Island. This has caused a lot of angst, with salt entering the system and flowing right round to Point Sturt, and a huge flush-out of water will be needed to tidy up the Lower Lakes.

Another issue in my electorate of Hammond is the Lower Murray Rehabilitation Scheme, which certainly has brought quite large water savings—more than many people anticipated—to the land that has been rehabilitated. I believe that there will be long-term issues with the tracts of rehabilitated land and the land that has not been rehabilitated, and this will need to be addressed by government in some way, shape or form in the future. I believe that about only half of the \$22 million committed to this program has been spent. I think that part of the future management of the river will be to tidy up leaks in the cracking walls of the levee banks on the edge of the river.

I have already mentioned the Commonwealth takeover; I do not think that this can happen soon enough. I am sure that the minister is talking to Victoria all the time, trying to get it to come on side. It would be interesting if the federal government did come on board and decide to spend \$10 billion in three states and not four. It might be something for Victoria to chew on—when it sees its neighbours across the river having money spent on infrastructure and its not taking a share of the pie. Perhaps it needs to think about what is going on.

One part of the Commonwealth takeover will be the water that is returned to the system, that is, 50 per cent to the environment and 50 per cent to irrigators. I think that this year has certainly proved that the river is overallocated. Irrigators have told me that they had the warning in 2002, that we did not take enough notice and that we had the belting this year. Certainly, better management of the system is to be commended.

As to the Wimmera system in Victoria, the piping of water will achieve the same result of water delivered, with 3 gigalitres of water delivered through the system and 30 gigalitres currently. It is a huge saving, and it can be done.

I cannot speak about the river today without making reference to the proposed Wellington weir. I note that some members are surprised and shocked that I bring up this subject. However, I would like this proposal not to be just talked about as though it will never happen: I would like to see it officially go off the agenda.

The Hon. K.A. Maywald interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: I am from the Uniting Church, Minister. I am not a regular goer, as I am too busy at the moment. My father was a lay preacher but, as a farmer in my past life before coming here, I have at times prayed for rain and I have been praying now, because we do need rain and it is good to see. I had a

report from the member for MacKillop that there were some adequate snow falls in the Victorian snowfields—probably better than adequate.

The Hon. R.B. Such: Is he taking credit?

Mr PEDERICK: Be that as it may, he may have brought it with him. Seriously, the weir has caused a lot of mental health problems below Wellington and we need to get other methods of water use up. I know that the government is looking at desalination. We brought forward a policy in January on desalination, and I know it is not the silver bullet but it will be part of the process to alleviate the pressure on the Murray.

Moving forward, we need to look at a several-pronged approach to relieve the pressure on the river. I know for a fact that irrigators in Victoria are on zero allocation and our irrigators are on 4 per cent. Irrigators need to have a long, hard look and think: we do not want to be in this situation again; we want adequate use of water but we do not to see major plantations going in when everyone else cannot get water at the moment.