

Address in reply to Lieut Governor

May 2, 2007

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond): I thank the Lieutenant-Governor for his opening speech at the celebration of the 150th Parliament of South Australia. I also thank him for his service, and the Governor, Marjorie Jackson-Nelson, for her service to this state. I believe they will make a valuable ongoing contribution to this state in retirement.

The Governor's speech highlights the city-centric policies of this government and the lack of planning and investment in rural and regional South Australia. Let us start with water and the drought that no-one could have predicted. It is remarkable how the graphs have a consistent pattern that foretold a drought. Yes, it was a bigger drought than expected, but it is not as if experts have not been warning us for years, partly because the real underlying problem that has made this drought so severe was the overallocation of water from the River Murray, and that has been occurring for decades.

What is our government doing about it? Apart from threatening one of the country's greatest natural assets with destruction, its best response is to copy Liberal policy and start looking at desalination. BHP's proposed plant near Port Augusta is valuable, but only as part of a whole state desalination program. It will have its limitations in capacity and brine disposal options. Another purpose-built plant is needed to serve Adelaide directly, and keeping the thinking and planning open will stimulate public involvement and contribution. Such open communication would minimise later controversy that often occurs when sudden announcements leave people confused and threatened by something they do not understand and have not been kept informed about.

To emphasise this point, I quote from a recent report commissioned by the government entitled the Lower Murray Drought Impact Study of February 2007. The author, Dr Jonathan Sobels, refers to the lack of early, open and complete consultation with an anxious community threatened by the prospect of a man-made drought in the form of a weir. Dr Sobels said:

The gulf of uncertainty is a prime motivation affecting behavioural responses to the drought. Of great interest to me was the extent to which the announcement of the weir caused such universal fear and uncertainty in all the Lower Lakes communities that it galvanised a large community reaction well beyond anything that would have happened with just the drought.

Dr Sobels continued:

The government got into this furore because it had made an announcement that affected people's livelihoods without first talking with them. Considerations of local knowledge and perceptions were apparently ignored. There were no effective channels of communication opened with the communities by government, and no information was made available to assuage their uncertainty.

All this time the government was conducting a series of public meetings around the region. The problem was it still was not consulting with the public. People attending these meetings often commented afterwards that they felt like they were talked at, not consulted. There was no exchange of ideas, just statements of facts as speakers saw them, which left people feeling their opinions were heard but not listened to. The same protest arises regularly when contentious issues are raised, and, as long as this government is calling the shots, I believe it always will. It is the way that bully boys do business.

The desalination plant on Kangaroo Island has proven to be very effective, but what about looking at more around the state, including Yorke Peninsula, southern and western Eyre Peninsula, the South-East, etc. These may present ways of insulating the state from its eternal dependence on the Murray and ease the temptation to over use the aquifers that take so long to recharge. Other water sources and conservation measures need full and ongoing investigation, regardless of whether the drought breaks or not. Over-allocation remains the real villain of the situation and no amount of rain will fix that. Stormwater capture, grey water reuse and sewerage mining are not new ideas. Other cities around the world have utilised these resources for many years, yet we are so far behind that we are still at the stage of trying to gently convince the public that these alternatives are acceptable. Dying of thirst has a way of adjusting people's mindsets, but it will be a mark of our failure and immaturity as a 21st century community if it comes to that.

The river has changed a lot since white settlement and many of those changes are irreversible. One of the answers to water worries may lie beneath the surface of the river. The river bed is heavily silted up, since the river's flow has been slowed. Up to 10 metres of silt chokes the river bed, inhibiting the natural ecosystem and reducing the river's holding capacity. Dredging this will dramatically increase its holding capacity, with cool, deep water, have almost no impact on the riverine environment and potentially provide a resource in the dredged material.

Providing real incentives for people to catch and conserve rainwater through an effective rainwater tank scheme would undoubtedly be the simplest and most cost efficient part of an overall plan to fix the state's water problems and remove our cap in hand dependence on other states. The river is a living, breathing river, the main artery of our country and, like blood, it must circulate to keep the country alive. It is hard to believe that things could get so desperate, that the river's existence is under such threat, and there are some who advocate blocking it off permanently.

Let us have look at the sequence of events over the past six months. Late in 2006 there is a series of drought meetings around rural areas as the drought worsens. On 7 November Premier Rann announces the South Australian government's intention to commence planning for a **weir at Wellington**, with an approximate cost of \$20 million.

The Hon. K.A. Maywald interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: I remind members opposite that they can all have a go in this debate in due course. In November, the Liberal Party presented three water saving bills in the upper house, to do with grey water reuse, sewerage mining and rainwater management, and the government rejected them all. In November, community groups, at least four of them, began to form to pursue detail and demand alternatives. These are not made up of rampant greenies but ordinary people whose knowledge and experience of the river and dependence on it ensure them to be alarmed by the government's apparent preparedness to write them off, offering only vague promises to consider assistance. During November and December rural drought meetings take on new urgency as river communities demand clarification of weir plans. By December community meetings are drawing hundreds of people as the community searches for information, reassurances and answers.

Early in 2007 there is much speculation and confusion about where a weir might be built. The subject angers Lower Murray locals who know well from previous studies and constructions that there is almost no firm bottom to the river below Murray Bridge. On 25 January the Prime Minister announced his \$10 billion national water plan to fix the river problems, and I think this is our get out of gaol card so long as Victoria comes on board.

On 29 January, the Liberal Party proposed a desalination plant for South Australia as part of its water policy. On 18 February, on the morning of a protest rally against the weir, Rann declared that the chances of a weir being built had been reduced. The media reported that there was a major protest rally through the streets of Adelaide, attended by around 600 people on a 40° day, with many country people unable to get to the city. On 27 February, an impact study into the effects of drought and low flows on Lower Murray and lakes region was released through minister McEwen instead of minister Maywald. A consultant pointed out the government's poor communication and consultation as major reasons for unrest and panic.

On 1 March, minister Maywald named the location of the weir, Pomanda Island, downstream from Wellington at a cost of \$110 million. We were led to believe at that point that the government was aware on 4 December the cost would be at least \$90 million. The government promised to remove the weir after the need had passed, but no time lines were put in place. The cost was estimated at \$10 million to \$25 million, and it was declared that there was a reduced chance that the weir would be required and the decision was deferred. Negotiations with landowners continued unresolved as the decision to proceed was further delayed. On 20 March, minister Maywald was presented with 24 questions about the weir and related matters at a Murray-Darling Association meeting at Murray Bridge.

Many scientific experts have expressed doubts about or their opposition to the weir proposal, confirming the community's widely held general opinion that a weir would cost too much in the longer term. Opponents included Dr Mike Young, Dr Mike Geddes, Peter Cullen, Dr Peter Schwerdtfeger, Professor Keith Walker, Dr Kerri Miller, Dr Tim Flannery and many other academics specialising in the river and lakes environment and water management.

Is it a coincidence that the last piece of water infrastructure built in South Australia was in 1979, the same year Dartmouth Dam was built? Did that make us all over confident? Country communities continue to cry out for suburbia and metropolitan industry to carry their share of the load on water restrictions. The government's habit of pre-announcing water restrictions has the effect of increasing water consumption, reducing the urgency and leaving most of the state's population underestimating the gravity of the water crisis. Metropolitan residents remain blissfully unaware of what is to be sacrificed. Most are yet to realise that the death of the Lower Murray, lakes and Coorong, let alone the whole river system, will eventually impact on them directly. When they wake up, the decision makers behind this environmental vandalism had better hide. 'Why didn't you tell us all the facts?', they will say.

Dr Peter Schwerdtfeger has repeatedly criticised the calibre and ability of the government's departmental advisers, and some of these advisers (I will not name them today) are hell bent on building this weir. I do not know why, because we are already getting a monument out the front of this place which will be the one legacy Rann will leave this state. Early statements about what

can and cannot be done are later contradicted. For example, first the foot pumps cannot be lowered, and then they can; in January, a weir was inevitable, now it is unlikely; in a February 'frequently asked questions' from the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation, there was acknowledgment that a weir would cause rapid and serious deterioration in water quality above the weir, but there were no plans to assist direct water users.

The confusion in South Australia is compounded by newspaper reports from across the border describing South Australians as selfish and stupid for not building a weir. Many reports both interstate and in South Australia suggest the lakes were originally salt water. The indigenous communities around the river and lakes deplore the government ignoring them completely. They more than anyone understand that the river is a living, breathing creation and not merely a convenient source of and storage for water. The government keeps claiming that it could not have anticipated such a severe drought, yet records and history show serious droughts are part of the system—and that was before the widely recognised overallocation. Why else would the government arrange a study on drought and low flows in the Lower Murray and lakes, a study in which community participants were asked not to talk about a weir?

For years, there have been plenty of warnings from all sorts of water and climate experts about the looming crisis. Is this the drought we had to have for the government to wake up? This has happened on the watch of a government that so-called waterproofed Adelaide three years ago, yet it has done almost nothing to wean the city off a water source it knew was overstressed. While asking for more water from upstream to improve the river's health, the government did little to take the load off at this end. We have been caught unprepared, without the will or the weapons to fight the most devastating enemy—not drought, but mismanagement and inactivity, which are two things we could have controlled.

Let's lead a concerted effort to change the mindset of all Australians that the river is simply a resource to be used to its maximum. There are those upstream who say that any water flowing past their door is water wasted, yet the more you let them have the more they waste. We have to lead the way, with our decades of experience, to correct the inefficiencies of irrigation back up the river—inefficiencies brought about by interference in the natural flow of the river which contribute to 1 800 gigalitres of evaporation which occurs before the river's water even gets to the South Australian border. Do those upstream who point the finger at us realise that fact, and whose job is it to give them the facts? We must work to make the survival of the whole Murray-Darling system a national priority. We can then work to return the once mighty Murray-Darling to its former glory and pride of place as one of the world's most important river systems, with its majestic miles and its unique and world-renowned estuary, the Lower Lakes and Coorong.

I will now move onto our search for **alternative energy sources**. We need to redouble our efforts and commitment to research into other potential sources, that is, wind, solar, wave action, as well as nuclear, geothermal, geosequestration, etc. We should rule nothing out. Thorough investigation and research might prove useful later as technology advances might turn old ideas that were discarded as unworkable or unacceptable into future solutions. The

same is true for water sourcing. Australian scientists have proven to be among the world's most innovative and creative, making many surprising and valuable discoveries. More investment into clean coal technology might advance its success and give us the best of both worlds. Once these discoveries are made, we must back them into production so as not to lose our best ideas and best people to more adventurous investors from overseas.

I now want to address a few local issues. We have already heard today from the member for Schubert about the **branched broomrape eradication program**. It has had \$3¼ million cut out of its program over four years, and just recently growers under the grant funding scheme who need to receive over \$5 000 have to sign an extensive contract. This has not been before the ministerial advisory committee or the community consultation group, mainly because the ministerial advisory committee has not met under minister Gago, to my knowledge.

We have had **exceptional circumstances**; it has been an exceptionally dry year. I commend PIRSA for all the work it has done in helping areas throughout South Australia. I believe 11 areas now have full exceptional circumstances listing. However, we need more rural counsellors out there. Kay Matthias from Rural Financial Counselling said that we certainly do need support. We do not want to see again what happened in Murray Bridge and the lower swamps in relation to rehabilitation and people leaving farming because they did not have the mental health backup. One man from Murray Bridge went missing for a week and, thankfully, we found him.

Another big issue in the area is the **Mallee Wells** and Peake area groundwater supplies. These supplies are a great resource for stock and domestic use, as well as irrigation, in the seat of Hammond. I have in my possession a letter from the environment minister in another place (Legislative Council), written to stakeholders in irrigation. It states:

As you are no doubt aware, the current drought is significantly impacting on South Australia's water supplies. Consequently, users of mains water (supplied by SA Water) and River Murray water users are currently subject to water restrictions to preserve our water supply.

Obviously, measures such as this can place additional pressure on our other water resources. As the Minister for Environment and Conservation, I have responsibility for ensuring that all water resources are managed sustainably. Therefore, I am writing to you as part of a consultation process about placing either permanent water conservation measures or water restrictions on non-mains water supplies, such as ground water extracted from bores.

I quote part of an answer from a stakeholder in the irrigation industry as follows:

We believe that each water system must be regulated according to its own set of criteria. This is precisely why water allocation plans exist in all of the main irrigating areas. The sustainability criteria for each irrigation area are carefully considered in each plan. Trying to bring in one rule . . . all will not fit and will only cause further hardships in horticultural industries. The proposal is not practical.

To restrict irrigation from the Murray River because one of the aquifers in the South-East, for instance, is under stress would be nonsensical and vice [sic] versa, to restrict irrigation in the South- East because the river is low is equally floored [sic]. . . Some of our growers irrigating in areas that rely on river water are doing it tough at

the moment with current water restrictions in place. Denying other growers in areas that irrigate from underground aquifers would then see the other portion of our state's growers doing it tough as well with absolutely no benefit to those, already struggling, who rely on the river system and production losses through the state.

Whilst the . . . industry is concerned with the current water situation in this state, we do not support your current proposal as there has been no evidence presented of how reducing already regulated underground water users will in any way assist those growers who rely on SA Water or River Murray water to alleviate the current water crisis.

I believe that, if such a restriction was brought in, it would decimate the already stressed horticultural industry in this state, which is essentially relying on the great bulk of its horticulture produce to come out of the Mallee Wells area at the moment.

I mentioned **mining at Mindarie and Strathalbyn**, both in my electorate. Both Terramin and Strathalbyn have opened their new lead, silver and zinc mine. Operation of the Australian zircon mine at Mindarie commenced the other day. They have two D11R bulldozers costing \$2.7 million each, so they have made a great investment. As long as we get the right outcomes for everyone, including rehabilitation, it will bring great employment to both areas.

The **Police Prosecution Unit** has been relocated to Mount Barker but, after a bit of action by myself and others, that will be brought back to Murray Bridge. In the context of new goals coming to the area in coming years, I could not get my head around that matter.

Mr PEDERICK: The **new prisons** at Mobilong will bring thousands of jobs into the community, with plenty of construction and plenty of growth in an already booming Murray Bridge. However, we have to manage any negatives that may arise. The Murray Bridge **railway precinct** is a valuable project that I have negotiated with the minister, Patrick Conlon, and the Murray Bridge council. That project is going ahead and involves a five-star development overlooking the river, with a convention centre and a hotel facility.

From modest beginnings, the **Murray Mallee Strategic Task Force** came to be a pace-setter in local rural assistance, pioneering some valuable and widely applicable programs. Most of its work was done by local volunteers who gave their time and expertise to help their neighbours and others. However, the funding carpet was pulled from under their feet, resulting in a miserable amount of money by state budget standards covering only office and administration costs. Suddenly, in the middle of a drought crisis, with a difficult future and new challenges ahead, the wizards in this government have pulled the mat on them, and this worthwhile and inexpensive service looks doomed for the want of a few shekels.

This seems to be typical of this government's approach to country South Australia: centralising health services, facilities, equipment, administration and governance, taking funding away from small schools (which often form the backbone of small country communities), trimming emergency services to the barest minimum and shifting the load onto volunteers, and allowing important arterial roads to deteriorate. The list goes on.

A case in point is the deplorable state of major roads around the Pinnaroo, Lameroo and Loxton regions. These roads are vital transport routes for rural commerce and for cross-border trade. The condition of the region's roads has been the subject of much previous discussion and concern. Complaints from local transport operators, bus drivers and residents are supported by concerns expressed by local councils. Perhaps the most concerning cries come from ambulance personnel, local volunteers who provide the critical link between wider communities and the increasingly distant health facilities. Road conditions are so bad that the ambulance is forced to travel slowly over much of the road between Pinnaroo and Loxton in order not to magnify the patient's discomfort as the vehicle bumps and jolts over the poor surface.

Previous requests for attention have drawn the response that the government has other road maintenance priorities and that the Mallee will have to wait. How long? What does it take to get some priority for the roads in the region? How much do they expect the community to contribute through its volunteers and their employers because of unnecessarily wasted time? How much extra expense is borne by the taxpayer as emergency vehicle maintenance costs are unnecessarily increased?

The fabric of Australian life is stretched thinnest across the country, the very feature of Australia that makes us unique and gives us the charm and character we are known for around the world—ask any traveller. They visit the 'must sees'—the Sydney Harbor Bridge and the Gold Coast—but what they really come for, and return to, is the bush—the Outback, the Rock, the wide open spaces and the endless blue skies. What travellers remember most about their Australian trip is the special people they meet in the country, the tough but friendly people who run the services and give the country its character. Yet this government seems hell-bent on breaking down these communities that make Australia what it is. Look at this government's short and questionable record of achievements: it is all about the city and the coastal fringe. The heart of Australians is in the heart of Australia, where Labor fears to tread.

This season has highlighted the lack of attention to and investment in the state's infrastructure. The number of broken pipes, the awful stories of delay in repairs and the frequent indifference of staff underline how low the priority of maintaining infrastructure has become. True vision and forward planning rarely seem to make it past the Premier's announcements, which are always carefully managed events with all the bells and whistles and with maximum media coverage. However, when the fireworks stop and the coloured streamers cease to flutter, everyone goes home to watch the evening news, and that is the last of it—unless you are into Great Tram Trips of the World. The people of the River Murray face a huge threat from the trials of this current drought. The Premier appears at a local school to give an award; that is all—nothing else and no promise of assistance or support.

When the locals responded in great numbers to my invitation to attend a rural business forum to consider how we might deal with the drought, Mike Rann dismissed it as a publicity stunt. That meeting, which no government representative attended, spawned a successful application for exceptional circumstances assistance, which is a real and positive step to supporting rural

communities. Two months later, in January, a huge storm hit the north of the state, and record rains caused widespread damage to farms, fences and stock. Within 24 hours, guess whose face popped up on TV and in the press, grinning at the cameras and promising government support to repair fences and roads? `Count on me boys. I'm your mate! What a difference! These were both natural disasters, one offering a spectacular front-page story and the other underlining the government's inaction and immobility on an event that was looming and inevitable—the drought. As it happens, the promise of support to the people of the north was shallow, with many complaining months later that promises were still unfulfilled. Their new best friend, Mike Rann, is nowhere to be seen.

I am privileged to have the opportunity to play a significant part in the vital areas of the River Murray, Sustainability and Climate Change. All these matters are bound to have a governing influence on future policies for almost everything we do, and none more so than resolving the longstanding problem of the control and governance of the Murray-Darling Basin. They are also vital to the plans of the future growth of South Australia's population and economy. In the immediate future, I will make it my mission to pursue this government on feasible and acceptable alternatives to the state's water needs and to remove once and for all the need for weir No. 3 501 in the Murray-Darling Basin.