

MURRAY RIVER WATER SUPPLY Nov 15, 2006

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond): Yesterday the Premier described depending on the River Murray for South Australia's fresh water supplies as untenable. He talked about Waterproofing Adelaide, a 20-year plan to reduce our dependence on the Murray. Let me give members some history on this. It has been known for a very long time that depending on the Murray was dangerous. The quantity, quality, survival of the river and preservation of the entire river system has been on the agenda for nearly 130 years and it impacts on much more than just the state's drinking water. Let us also end the mistaken belief that the Lower Murray and lakes were originally salt water. Indigenous people had occupied the area for centuries in semi-permanent settlements because of the availability of fresh water. In the 1820s, white sealers regarded the lake as a great source of fresh water.

The natural flow of the river was more than enough to hold back the incoming tide. The river began to slow once development and irrigation began. In the early 1900s, people who paid a premium price for land adjoining these waterways began to fight for their rights as the reducing flow allowed the sea to affect the lower reaches of the Murray and land values began to tumble. In 1912, farmers complained that a slimy green scum was poisoning their stock. I acknowledge the drastic situation that we now find ourselves in and I know there is no silver bullet solution, but current-day landowners and other business people in the area are entitled to ask: why now? The problem has existed since the 1880s, longer than records have been kept.

There seems to be a prevailing attitude that, if we are short of water, we take it out of the country. Let us take it from the people who use it to support themselves and their families and grow the produce the rest of the state and country depend on. Let us give it to others to put in their Scotch glasses and pour on their lawns. We hear a lot about bipartisan support, as if the opposition is standing in the way of finding solutions. Given the location of our electorates, nothing could be further from the truth. Bipartisan support means that we are all in it together, seeking solutions to common problems. If we are all in it together, what about getting the urban population and other industry to share the load?

The government talked yesterday about fast-tracking certain plans, but the Premier could not tell us which ones. I have attended two meetings this week, one at Langhorne Creek on Monday and another in Murray Bridge yesterday. Great care was taken to explain the gravity of the situation before Minister Maywald spoke. Incidentally, it was curious to note that the STAR Force was in attendance at these two meetings, but we did not even need the local copper at a forum with 200 people the week before. Country people came to all these meetings looking for answers and water, not arguments and blood. If there was one strong feeling outside the obvious concerns, it was that their perception is that country people are carrying the load again while city people tip water on their lawns.

While farmers and other primary producers tighten their belts and struggle to keep producing food etc. for them, all they worry about is which day to water their lawn and how long to leave a tap running. If we are in a one in 1 000 year drought, why are urban people not on level 4 or 5 restrictions? Does it take a one in 10 000-year drought to get to level 5? Perhaps asking the urban population to go without would cost too many votes.

Premier Rann said in this house yesterday, 'We don't want to build a weir, but we have to act in the interests of South Australians.' Many of my constituents downstream of Wellington would be grossly offended to discover that as of yesterday they are no longer South Australians. As for consultation, consider this: the Premier's big announcement two weeks ago about the proposed Wellington weir caused immense concern and near panic among the population of the Lower Murray and lakes. Now we are told it may not be feasible anyway. Yet when we ask the government questions about other options, we are told they are looking at a whole series of them. The Deputy Premier said yesterday, 'We are not going to put them in the public domain at this stage because some may be discarded.'

What was different about the weir? The difference was that the Premier saw an opportunity to impress the so far unaffected voters in metro electorates by showing how he was going to save them all from doom and destruction at the expense of their fellow Australians in the country. We have also not heard from the local Ngarrindjeri people whose burial grounds will be affected, and we have not heard from the yuppies at Hindmarsh Island, which will turn into Hindmarsh Hill, especially if they open the gates.

Time expired.