

Grievance - RIVER MURRAY – February 4, 2009

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:44): I rise today to comment on the River Murray and the ongoing issues right up and down the river in South Australia. I recently attended a meeting at Berri where irrigators were tearing out their hair looking for solutions, wondering why they were on 18 per cent when interstate the allocations are up to 95 per cent of high security water. Granted, the ones with permanent plantings have access to critical water allocations, and I note that the government has set aside 64 gigalitres for that, but they are hurting. Their communities are hurting, and they are going backwards fast.

As you come down through the Riverland and the Mid Murray region there are tourism industries, houseboat industries, people wanting access to skiing, and boat launching areas that are going out of action as river levels drop because, I believe, not enough water is coming down the stream. For a long period of time in this country we have seen the effects of over-allocation and, on top of that, we are seeing the effects of a long-standing drought. Yet still things go on.

We have seen ferries out of service and, after some fairly heavy lobbying, the government has taken some action to reinvigorate some of the ferries. I applaud some of the actions taken—for example, putting on super flaps so that ferries can carry heavier loads, or even the reinstatement of the second ferry at Mannum which I believe had to be driven down there with two outboard motors. However, I believe that second ferry at Mannum is only carrying two or three cars and, if the ferry at Tailem Bend has not been upgraded yet with super flaps, I believe it will be soon.

We also note that 47 gigalitres of water have been set aside for next year and purchased by the government for critical human needs. Yes, we definitely need water up-front for critical human needs. I note that in the past few years, \$22 million has been invested by this government and spent on the Lower Murray Rehabilitation Scheme. I just hope it has another \$22 million because it will be needed; after all, the land is cracked and basically has fallen apart to the extent that you can lose cattle and motorbikes through the cracks.

We have noticed the devastation of irrigation industry on the Narrung Peninsula. We have noticed industry and irrigators around Langhorne Creek and Currency Creek that have not had access to quality irrigation water for many months now. But I acknowledge the work that the community has done with the government on arranging to get irrigation water down there late this year in September at a local cost of \$12.5 million.

Right up and down the river so much is going wrong. When you get down to the bottom, to the Goolwa channel where the real devastation stands out, essentially it is just the river stream going through the town, and more lake bed is exposed. But in some of these areas where the lake bed has been exposed for a significant amount of time over the past two seasons, it is amazing to see the results of the bioremediation, where plant life has come up and covers a lot of these areas. I believe that this could be a saving grace for these lake beds instead of going down the disastrous path of using seawater to remediate acid sulphate soils. In fact, the plant growth has been so good that they have had to mow some of it.

However, in completing this speech, I put out my call to the government: it needs to get serious. If it cannot do it, it needs to lobby the federal government and lease in some water to get us through the critical stages. It is not thousands of gigalitres, and I believe that New South Wales and Victoria are both carrying over into the next season 200 gigalitres each at least of irrigation water. Some of that water could be leased in to save our iconic Lower Lakes, and I think the government really needs to pay attention to the environment. I know that permanent plantings have had a grab and critical human needs certainly have their priority, but the environment needs its day in the sun.