

Rally against the Wellington Weir – February 22, 2007

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond): As many in this house would be well aware, Sunday's rally against the Wellington weir was a great success. Despite the weather forecast and the fact that many of the protest's core supporters live well out of the city, it was pleasing to see over 500 people from all parts of the city and state taking part. The words of the speakers flowed across the state through radio and TV, and the river of yellow flowed from Victoria Square along King William Street and down to the steps of Parliament House.

Many of my Liberal parliamentary colleagues, as well as members of the Democrats and Greens, were there on the day and were pleased to be part of such a well organised group. Even the police were heard to comment that it was a well disciplined rally, underlining the point that these people are not your average serial protesters. They are a clear-thinking, well informed organisation with two very clear objectives: stop the weir, and correct the over-allocation of the Murray-Darling's water.

It was curious to see Premier Rann announce on Monday that the odds of this weir happening are now down to less than 5 per cent. Of course, he is still referring to it being 'completed'. The massive obstruction blocking 80 per cent of the river at that point may well still proceed, with all its permanent consequences.

This is undoubtedly why the Minister for the Environment (a contradiction of expression if ever I have heard one) is making application to the Federal government to bypass the Federal Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, much to the horror of all Australians. This would put Premier Rann, Ministers Maywald and Gago, and the whole of South Australia, dead centre of the international conservation spotlight, distinguishing itself by asking to break its own country's rules to go back on an internationally recognised promise. Will this government then look to circumvent its own laws to relentlessly pursue what it has admitted is not a long-term solution?

I draw the house's attention to the definition of the word 'reservoir', described in the *Macquarie Dictionary* as 'an artificial place where water is collected and stored to supply a community or irrigate land'. If this weir is completed, it would be defined as a reservoir, and many of the everyday activities and industries that make it so valuable would be prohibited under South Australian law.

It is time the state government came to grips with the fact that putting another weir anywhere below Lock 1 is a bad idea. They should listen to the people who know the river and lakes. If what I suspect is true, they should also listen to some of their own advisers, who must be personally horrified by this proposed act of vandalism.

Let us put our time, effort and resources into developing other ideas to get through this drought—ideas that have long-term benefits, not long-term consequences. We should be looking for ways to capture and reuse stormwater now, treating and reusing effluent, encouraging and assisting urban industries to reduce their water needs, investing in pump technology and encouraging installation of rainwater tanks and systems that can contribute water to the system, as is now the case with power.

Instead of wringing the last drop of water (or is it blood, or money?) out of the Murray, we should be pursuing ways to improve its flow and capacity in such a way that it does not impact on the neighbouring environment.

One suggestion on this matter has come from an organisation that collectively has over 2 000 years of knowledge and experience on the Murray. The Murray Skippers' Association advises me that the original river bed is covered with an average of 11

metres of silt and mud, which would usually be moved downstream by normal flows. If this were to be dredged out, it would greatly increase the river's natural holding capacity without affecting anything on land. The extra water stored would be cooler which would further minimise evaporation, and the added bonus is that the by-product (rich alluvial soil gathered by natural flows) is a saleable item. Even the river bed's natural plant life would regenerate, greatly assisting the recovery of indigenous insect, fish and bird species and, therefore, water quality.

This idea from the Murray Skippers' Association has great merit. They are incensed that, despite several offers of advice and assistance to the government on this and other river management suggestions, they have been ignored, like so many others up and down the river.

A weir would greatly increase salinity in the Lower Murray, a fact that the government has conceded in a DWLBC 'Frequently asked questions' document released last Friday. This would impact on tourism in many ways.

One of the obvious ones comes from the same association. The skipper of the *PS Marion* has advised that he is unable to sail the paddle wheeler from Mannum to Goolwa as planned because excessive salinity levels in the lake will cause extensive damage to the ship's boilers.

Mr Pederick's speech time expired. The following text would have been delivered had time allowed.

How will it be when the whole of the river from Blanchetown to Wellington is affected the same way? Forget tourism.

On behalf of all the people of South Australia I urge the government to make a truly tough decision and drop this proposal entirely - now.

Let's be sure the only thing 'dead in the water' is the plan itself.