

GRIEVANCE DEBATE RIVER MURRAY, LOWER LAKES - 2 June 2009

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:26): I rise again today to talk about the plight of the Lower Lakes and the lack of action by both the state and federal governments in regard to keeping this environmental icon alive and well. I note that only in the last week a grand announcement was made by the banks of the Murrumbidgee. The so-called South Australian Senator, Senator Wong, with her Eastern States/Queensland leader, Prime Minister Rudd, by her side announced a grand plan whereby they allegedly purchased 240 gigalitres of water for the Murray-Darling Basin. The sad thing is that none of this alleged water will ever reach the Lower Lakes. In fact, if that water they purchased does become available it will deliver only 107 gigalitres to the Macquarie Marshes in New South Wales—a very long way from the damage that is occurring in the Lower Lakes as we speak.

In regard to the Lower Lakes and the options being taken by the government, we are getting very mixed messages from the government. Six or seven weeks ago government bureaucrats went around talking to community groups about how issues would be managed in regard to the Wellington weir and the issue of sea water ingress into the lakes. A slide was put up at those meetings stating: 'The Wellington weir does not equal sea water.' It is interesting to note that when asked on Radio 891 last week whether sea water would follow the weir as night follows day, Premier Rann answered, 'It would have to.'

Well, hang on, who is doing what? The community is told one thing. I believe they are being bluffed into thinking that, 'Oh, yes, we'll just have the weir; that doesn't mean sea water.' I firmly believe that it does and the Premier has said so. In fact, it is interesting to note that, on the weekend, Allan Holmes, the head of the Department for Environment and Heritage, said that sea water may not be the best response for acidification in the Lower Lakes and indicated that bioremediation is the preferred option. If the government had talked to community leaders and members around the lakes a lot more in the last 18 months it would have realised that bioremediation was a real option. Belatedly, it has taken up that option.

The engineering of the Wellington weir seems to have progressed somewhat. It has been known that the weir will sink by one metre perhaps every 12 or 18 months, but at a meeting the other night Ross Carter from SA Water indicated that the weir would only sink half a metre in three years. It is a three year temporary time frame. I do not know whether the silt has got harder or the rocks have got lighter.

It was also acknowledged at that meeting that 220 gigalitres would get the lakes through another winter, away from triggers of too high salinity and the acidity level in the lakes, and that includes the 50 gigalitres that Peter Garrett wanted as the trade-off for the Goolwa-Clayton bund, which will only be delivered in January, which I found very interesting. There were also issues related to the lakes. I went down to the roadworks side the other day, the causeway out to Pomanda Island. A calf, which had fallen down a two foot wide, one metre deep crack and could not get out, was dead, and they are trying to build a road over this. There are major engineering problems just getting to the weir site.

Another question that I wonder will be answered, when the minister always says that there is no water to bring down for the lakes, is will there be water available behind the weir? That includes the 70 gigalitres for the weir pool from Pomanda Island to Blanchetown, plus the 350 gigalitres that will be needed annually for dilution flows.

It is also sad to see the plight of stock and domestic supply, which is non-existent for many people, on Point Sturt and Hindmarsh Island, and the government just fobs these people off. It is outrageous.

Time expired.