

**House of Assembly
28 October 2009**

**NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE
MURRAY-DARLING BASIN**

Mr RAU (Enfield) (11:17): I move:

That the 35th report of the committee, entitled Water Resource Management in the Murray-Darling Basin, Volume 2, 'The Two Rivers...', be noted.

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:28): I, too, rise to make a contribution on the report entitled, Water Resource Management in the Murray-Darling Basin, Volume 2: The Two Rivers.

Mr Venning: Pretty name!

Mr PEDERICK: They come up with some very good names in the Natural Resources Committee. I just want to go over the committee's findings. The committee's finding No. 1 is that buying Cubbie Station would be of little if any practical benefit to South Australia; and finding No. 2 is:

Our best hopes for water security lie in the Murray system. Over-emphasis on the Darling system, especially the Upper Darling, as a solution for our water troubles is to raise false hopes.

I acknowledge the chair of the committee, the member for Enfield, for his work with local members. I think the committee got on very well in all electorates in South Australia associated with the river, certainly with the member for Finniss. I know that when I worked with the member for Enfield on working out where people should go on a bus trip around the Lower Lakes, we had very open discussion about what we should do.

However, I disagree to a major extent with the committee's findings. Yes, buying Cubbie Station on its own is not a silver bullet and yes, the Darling River on its own is not a silver bullet. However, in the overall management of the Murray-Darling Basin we must remember that there are two parts: there is the Murray and there is the Darling. At the moment (and I have said it in this place many times) we do only manage the Murray. Yes, the Darling side is a lot more variable: it is about 700 per cent variability compared to 250 per cent variability for the southern Murray system.

The problem is that the southern Murray system has been in drought for years. The mouth of the Murray closed over in 1981 and, essentially, the southern system has been in drought since at least 2002. That is a long time for a sustained drought. As a farmer, I know we will come out of this and have inflows, and we will come back.

The \$10 billion plan that John Howard instigated (before it was diluted by the present Rudd government) would have been a major step forward. The proposal to take all the power away from the states and give it to the federal government would have been a great step forward. That plan has been diluted and we are taking microscopic steps moving forward. There has been buy-back where, essentially, a lot of low security water is bought. That does not exist at the moment—or minute parts do—but there will be some of that available in the future when we get flows.

We need the Eastern States to put up their infrastructure projects so that we can get open channels into pipes. I have mentioned in this place before that I, along with the member for MacKillop, the federal member for Barker and our candidate for Chaffey (Tim Whetstone) visited New South Wales where the Murray and the Murrumbidgee originate in the Snowy Mountains. It was a very enlightening tour.

In one of the irrigation districts it was indicated, 'If we go into pipes we'll have to pay for pumping.' Hang on—bad luck! South Australia has bitten the bullet over the past 15 years or longer, put the pipes in and paid to manage its system. It is all in pipes with barely a channel to be seen in South Australia. However, there are thousands of kilometres of channels in New South Wales and Victoria. For example, in one area, to deliver three gigalitres of stock and domestic water you have to send seven gigalitres. That is a 130 per cent loss: you have to send seven gigalitres to get three gigalitres of useable water.

We really need to get infrastructure upgrades into the system and rolled out. However, the irrigation communities are not in a rush, so the federal government needs to get people to take action. I agree with the member for Enfield that the federal government should take the stick approach. In fact, it should go further: it should step in and use emergency legislation to take over the system and get on with the job. We will work with that because the states have been bluing over water since the late 1880s, when irrigation started to have a major effect on flows down the river, and that is why the locks and the barrages went in. In 1885 New South Wales and Victoria decided, 'We'll just split the water between us and South Australia can go he.' That is exactly what happened.

I will go back to talking about the benefits (or disbenefits, depending on how you look at it) of buying a place like Cubbie Station. It is interesting to note in media reports this week that it could not get enough money from international bidders on the open market to cover its \$320 million debt to the National Australia Bank. We have heard at various times about how communities will disappear up there because it is obviously not sustainable for cotton to be grown there. Cubbie is not the only place up there. When I was there on a business trip last year there were at least 22 properties. I flew over properties where there were hectares of water. Most were growing wheat, trying to crop their way out of a debt situation. Meanwhile, people in this state relying on the Murray have lost their irrigation areas.

Recently, the New South Wales and federal governments got together and said, 'Well, perhaps we can ferry environmental water down south.' That is a step in the right direction, but to see it happen will be another thing. That is the only way that buying a place like Cubbie (and others) will benefit South Australia. Yes, it would raise pump take-off heights at Bourke and lower down and people will access that water. It would have to be ferried down but it would have to be part of a process of regulating the whole basin.

As far as losses go, if we had to get our critical human needs water for South Australia out of the southern basin alone—and all of it, 100 per cent of it, the 201 giganlitres—we would get only 11.5 per cent of the water delivered to us by the time we take into account transmission losses and that sort of thing. We do have losses in the southern basin. I acknowledge that taking action in the Darling will not be the total silver bullet but it will be a major part of the process. If we do not manage the basin as one (instead of managing it as we are doing, with two components), we will not get there.

It comes back to the irrigators in this state and the strife they are in. They are on only a 34 per cent allocation of so-called high security water, yet in the east there are some on 97 per cent on the Murray and 95 per cent high security water on the Murrumbidgee. Essentially, in trading water, all the cheques come out of South Australia. If people believe it is too hard to grow a crop in New South Wales they just take the money and get on with life.

There was talk in the report about the proposed Wellington weir. It is interesting to note the member for Enfield's comment about a government not letting people run out of water. Hang on: when the Premier announced the Wellington weir in November 2006 there was nothing about making sure that people below Wellington did not suffer from lack of a water supply. It has only been in the past two or three weeks that people at Point Sturt and Hindmarsh Island have been told that pipelines will be built. For three years these people have been waiting to see if they will have potable water. There has to be more equitable access to water.

I note that Kerry Muller, a scientist from around Strathalbyn, has talked about the reverse head if the weir was put in of up to 400 ml. To get water through the barrages you need at least plus 0.3 AHD and probably more likely plus 0.5 of a metre. So, it is a bit of a fallacy to think that you would protect Adelaide's water with a weir if you have dirty water blowing in over the back.

In regard to the government taking up action on the river in this state, I note the reluctance of ministers Weatherill and Garrett and Premier Rann to go down and meet with the public. Minister Weatherill had his own little trip down there, minister Garrett flew down without telling anyone, and Mike Rann will not go anywhere near the place because it is bad news. We need to stand up for our communities, and I have seen the problems elsewhere, but we need to fix the basin as a whole.

Motion Carried.