

MURRAY-DARLING BASIN – 23 July, 2008

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (16:10): I rise today to talk about the terrible situation in the Lower Murray and the Lower Lakes. We have a government that has been prepared to let people hang out to dry for 20 months, since the announcement of the proposed weir in November 2006. Recently, the federal government has come partially to the rescue of the state Labor government by putting up some money to assist in paying for some pipelines. The problem we already have is that the dairy industry at Narrung has gone. The government has been quite happy to write off that industry, quite happy to forgo the income, and quite happy to forgo that area as a dairy region.

Until the federal government said that, yes, it would pipe water to Langhorne Creek and Currency Creek, the government had also let go the Langhorne Creek region. Those proposals have been met with cautious optimism. The problem is that, because this state government has not done anything to provide the infrastructure and has done absolutely nothing to get one extra drop of water from across the border, Langhorne Creek will miss a vintage this summer.

Only because of the diligence of private people who realised they needed water and went ahead on their own and without government assistance, as I speak a 15 inch (or 375 millimetre) pipe is going in from Wellington to Langhorne Creek, and I salute those visionary performers from the wine industry. They will give some access to other people, but the pipeline will pump only about 4½ gegalitres of water. I guess this will be the only private line that goes in, with other proposals in the future. However, the problem is that we do not know whether these pipelines will materialise. The question is: if the private sector can do it, why can't the government do it?

Recently, I made a trip up along the River Murray and up to the Darling. We keep hearing excuses about why we cannot take water out of Lake Victoria, not that far north of Renmark. That lake has 300 gegalitres. That water could be taken out and substituted by water from Menindee Lakes. There is about 530 gegalitres in Menindee Lakes, and surely some of that could be accessed to back up what is taken out of Lake Victoria. But, no, we keep being told that there are constitutional problems and that we have to wait until they get to 640 gegalitres capacity before we can use that water. Well, the way they are using the lakes at the moment, that is never going to happen because the two lakes that are operating have a maximum surcharge capacity of 615 gegalitres.

I travelled further up the river system to Bourke and to Toorale Station, where they basically capture water from the Warrego. Once Toorale Station harvests all the water it wants from the Warrego River, it goes through an 18 inch pipe under a culvert, and that is the end of the Warrego. How bad is that? We then headed up further to St George, where there is at least 1,500 gegalitres of private storage between northern New South Wales and southern Queensland that could be compulsorily acquired and properly compensated for. Some of these irrigation properties are on the market as we speak. Toorale Station (91,000 hectares) could be bought out of the system, and it could provide water not just for South Australia but it could be managed to back up water taken out of the Menindee Lakes system and also for Lake Victoria.

The problem is that this government has trivialised the whole debate about water. It was mentioned to me only the other day that a remark was overhead at an interstate football match. The Victorian Premier allegedly made the comment that, if Mike Rann's team won, he would let South Australia have some more water. That is the whole attitude of these Labor premiers and the Labor Prime Minister. When they come down to visit the Lower Lakes it is under a shroud of secrecy so that they do not have to meet the people. However, we find out when they are coming, and we alert the people.

I also want to quote from a couple of people who have written to the Adelaidenow website and the questions they have asked. Leslie of Marion writes:

Why are we not being smarter with the water that goes down the Sturt Creek and the Torrens? This water could have been recycled for watering parklands or even market gardens or for domestic use.

Arnis Luks of Adelaide writes:

Is it possible for Lake Argyle overflow to be pumped to the head of the Darling to flush the entire MDBasin using Coal Seam Methane as the energy source for the pumps?

Jase of Adelaide also wrote in. These people at least have some imagination, which is something the government does not have.

Time expired.