

RIVER MURRAY campaign – 25 September 2008

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (16:29): I rise today to make a few comments about the river, and I acknowledge the campaign by the local paper in Murray Bridge, *The Murray Valley Standard*, in looking for ambassadors for the river, and its initiative to get people to pay \$2 for blue ribbons (one of which I am wearing and which members on this side have been wearing this week) to put money into the Waterfind Environment Fund, which was an initiative of the former Howard federal government in 2004. It is an easy way to help Australia's greatest river system.

I commend the local paper for showing the initiative that other people in the area have had to find to survive in these tough times. The environment fund provides a not-for-profit service to direct water and financial donations to projects that are helping to improve the health of Australia's river systems. The organisation directs donations of water and money to accredited environmental watering projects through a web-base system and allows all communities to assist with the management, survival and restoration of Australian river systems. I fully commend that initiative. As I said, it shows some of the things that people are doing to try to do their little bit for the River Murray.

We have seen the low flows over the past couple of years. We have seen the Narrung Peninsula decimated as a dairy industry. That irrigation industry has been written off. People in that area have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on desalinating lake water to keep going or putting pumps kilometres out into Lake Albert to access water. I still take my hat off to the people who, during winter, have paid \$500 per week for water and who, during summer, have paid up to \$3,000 per week to keep their dairy going. We have major issues in the Lower Murray swamps where \$11 million has been invested in rehabilitation, but, by the end of this debacle, they will need to spend that money again because the swamps are cracking up: motor bikes and cows are falling down holes and, if you are not careful, children can fall down cracks in the swamps.

Five companies around Langhorne Creek put together a private pipeline project because they realised that any help for this next vintage was not going to come and they needed to get some action underway. I take my hat off to those companies. They are also helping to supply some stock and domestic water out of that pipe, but it is a little disheartening to note that it sounds as though they are not eligible for any of the commonwealth money that has been put out recently with the \$610 million plan.

I believe that Riverland irrigators have spent at least \$100 million in the last water season to bring in water. It has just about brought the Riverland to its knees. We saw the federal exit package come out on the weekend, a package that will take out perhaps up to 1,000 growers in the Riverland, so long as they meet the criteria. There is also a state survival package because the government came under pressure to keep people in the industry. It has come out that they may have to spend \$67 million. I think the ministers know full well that that full amount of money will probably never have to be spent. I do acknowledge that the help is badly needed in the Riverland, but people are torn between what to do and what not to do because no paperwork is available. The Riverland office is inundated with calls, but no-one knows what is going on because policy is being drawn up on the run.

Another thing which I bring to the attention of the house and which is interesting is that, after almost two years, the Premier has finally acknowledged that the Coorong and Lower Lakes are an important Ramsar site. After almost two years of announcing a potential weir that could destroy communities forever, I think things have changed a lot since events over the past few days and media reports since Saturday. It is nice to see that perhaps the government has recognised that it is a world-listed area, important for migratory birds.