

House of Assembly

10 September 2009

Grievance Debate: MURRAY RIVER

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:39): I rise today to talk about the lack of action by the state government with respect to the River Murray and the delivery or non-delivery of water to communities. This government seems to wish to go out there and divide communities, whether it be in the placing of bunds in the river at Lake Bonney in the Riverland or at Narrung, where Lake Albert is now cut off from the main lakes and river system, or at Goolwa and Clayton, where a bund has gone in. Bunds are also going in on Currency Creek and the Finnis River. This is the government's attitude to this state's once mighty river. It is throttling it to death, and it has created much angst in communities up and down the river.

It is concerning that we have seen the loss of irrigation areas. We have seen the loss of irrigation around Meningie and the Narrung Peninsula. We are seeing the loss of irrigation on the reclaimed swamp area where \$22 million of government money was spent, let alone the many hundreds of thousands that was invested by farmers in rehabilitating that country. The government finally came in kicking and screaming last water year, after we had lobbied for months on this side of the house for critical water allocation, and supported permanent plantings, and it is just a pity that other people on so-called high security water in this state could not access that water.

We now see this year a less worthwhile approach where a grant system has been introduced because the government bowed to pressure from the Eastern States that said, 'If you purchase water for your irrigators we will cut you off from transmission flow.' This is another reason there should be full national control over the River Murray. This is what happens with interstate intervention. Yes, we have had water forwarded to us, but we have to pay it back. It is a great shame to see what is going on up and down the river.

Point Sturt and Hindmarsh Island have had a huge issue in securing potable water supplies. It was indicated to me that any savings that showed up in the Murray Futures plan for pipelines in the Lower Lakes would go to these communities. However, it has taken two years and great work by Michael Doecke (a local resident) and others (Mike South included), to finally get a reasonable outcome. You just have to wonder why a government would let these two communities suffer when \$14.5 million of savings were identified back at budget time (and I explored this during estimates) and these two pipelines would only cost \$7.3 million.

Community members received communication from the minister that indicated that they would have to pay \$100,000 per connection, so it was a great relief, after much lobbying from politicians in here (including myself and the member for Mayo, Jamie Briggs, at a federal level) to get fairness for this community. It is great to see that, if we get federal sign-off, they will be able to connect for around \$3,117 per connection. I commend the community for its lobbying.

It is sad to see, as with the Murray Futures program, the lack of federal money spent on programs to assist communities in this state. Where is the money that is supposed to be put into riverine recovery and projects to take irrigators' pumps off back waters and get them into the main stream? I believe not a dollar has entered that program.

We saw people protesting at Swan Reach the other day—300 people from right up through the river system, from the Lower Lakes and the Mid Murray to the Riverland and the Mildura-Sunraysia area. There are people just starting to learn that this cancer of inattention to the River Murray is going right through the system. Yet, we still see inattention by the government.

Minister Weatherill (the minister for the environment) made two commitments to go down to Milang and Clayton to meet with the community. One of those commitments was to the primary school at Milang—a great little school. There was no show. The Premier was invited to go down to Nalpa Station on the western side of the proposed weir site, and they even tried to entice him with a barbecue. Again, no show. Then we had a rumour Peter Garrett came down to the area unannounced.

Time expired.