

Government's lack of clarity on SA's water shortage June 21st, 2007

Mr WILLIAMS (MacKillop): I move:

That this house expresses its dismay at the lack of clarity and openness from the government with regard to strategies proposed and implemented to manage the state's water shortage.

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond): I refer to the reliance of this state on water from the River Murray and the fact that the government has not moved one step away from the River Murray as its main water source for this state. We do not want to make Adelaide totally reliant on the Murray as its water source, and we need to take the pressure off the Murray and look at other sources. One might ask whether this matter is more a case of considering how much of a cash cow SA Water is for the government. An amount of \$1.61 billion over six years will be sucked out of SA Water (on top of what has been sucked out already) to go into general revenue. I acknowledge that we need money for health, education and so on, but the government is having a boom time with the GST it did not want—\$3.8 billion this year and around \$3.4 billion last year. When I talk about being totally reliant on the River Murray, the proposed Mount Bold enhanced reservoir will only be here in 10 years' time—if it is built at all.

The Hon. R.G. Kerin interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, it is a fantastic idea—I jest! Whenever they want to secure two years' water supply for Adelaide, they will have to have those pumps going flat out. I was advised last night that around 770 gigalitres was released down to the lower reaches last year through to the Coorong. If we had had this dam we would have been able to pump that water into Mount Bold. Pumps can only carry a certain capacity. I do not have the exact figures—

The Hon. R.G. Kerin interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: That is right. You would have to have massive pipeline and pumping expenditure to come anywhere near pumping even a third of that need. It is wrong as an idea that that water could have been pumped into a reservoir if we had it in place. It does not add up and the government has a lot of hurdles to get over, not only with construction but also with environmental issues involved with Mount Bold. We hope that with investigations occurring there will be a lot more clarity than with the Wellington weir issue, which just came out of the blue with a great big announcement—and away we went! We have heard talk of desalination, and I endorse the comments of the member for MacKillop. The government has been dragged kicking and screaming into this matter and has politicised the whole debate on the issue.

The Hon. R.J. McEwen interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: Thank you, minister.

The Hon. R.J. McEwen interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: If the primary industries minister wishes to make a contribution, he can do so after I speak. We looked at the plant in Perth, which with the piping infrastructure was around \$387 million. We acknowledged that was the pricing when they got the plant up and running in November last year. We always acknowledged that it would cost more to do it here, but this state needs to go through the exercise of supplying water not only to Adelaide but also to regional areas, especially Eyre Peninsula. It is madness to keep extending pipelines into the Eyre Peninsula, reliant on the River Murray, when we have irrigators who until a few days ago were under the threat of zero allocation. I hope the minister is getting plenty of phone calls from people in her own electorate, because they are angry and it is pitting South Australian against South Australian. We have people along the upper reaches of the Murray even on our side saying, 'Build the wall; do this; why haven't we got water? Why can't we have water? Build the weir.' I have to remind those people—

The Hon. R.J. McEwen: Do you support the weir?

Mr PEDERICK: No, I don't support the weir and I have never supported it.

The Hon. R.J. McEwen interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: I am telling them that there are other people suffering in the system who are quite happy to survive the effects of drought—

The Hon. R.J. McEwen: You're sitting on the fence.

Mr PEDERICK: No, I am not. But they are not happy to endure the effects of a weir about which even the government has no knowledge because it has not done the environmental impact statements. It has no knowledge—nil, zilch—of the full environmental impacts of what a weir will do

to the lakes and the Coorong. This illustrates the government's regard for the iconic sites of the Lower Lakes—Lake Alexandrina, Lake Albert and the Coorong. It just does not care. You only have to look at the pictures Peter Owens from the Wilderness Society put up at the Property Council the other day from the mid-1990s through to now of the Murray Mouth simply closing up, but no-one seems to take any notice of that at all. It is just outrageous.

The people who live around the lower lakes have all said to me, 'We can handle drought but we cannot handle the uncertainty of the weir.' The total notion of a Flintstones-style escapade of putting 700 000 tonnes of rock into a river is folly and, by the way, we were first told that every piece of rock would be pulled out. Obviously, the minister had some advice and she was told it would be impossible because it would sink through the 100 metres-plus of silt. If you put that amount of rock in there after you have built a causeway over several kilometres, it does not sound too temporary to the people down there.

Let me talk about water reuse, sewerage mining and better use of rainwater. These bills went through the upper house last year but, because the government did not care whether or not we were running out of water, the measures were voted against. It is just outrageous. I refer to the Treasurer's comment in the lock-up regarding water supply, bearing in mind that all he is worried about is Adelaide. Somebody asked, 'What about water security for the state?' He said, 'That is all right. If it gets a bit low, we will drop the weir in at Wellington.' That is scant regard for the 30 000 residents living below the proposed weir site. As for the minister's saying that she did not see it coming, I point out that people have endured six years of drought in the Eastern States, where part of the major catchment is for the Murray-Darling Basin. Apparently, it is all right to go back over 116 years of historical figures and say that we did not see it coming. This government has a so-called State Strategic Plan which says that we will have 2 million people living here by 2050. The problem is that the government has not considered how these people will be told that they will have to import bottled water from somewhere else just to keep themselves alive.

I have already mentioned the effect on communities located below the proposed weir site. Ever since it was announced, there have been plenty of mental health issues. The government only needs to talk to health professionals in the region. There are also social issues; people have to make major decisions in respect of their programs. I know of five dairies that have sold out. People are destocking and drying off stock; in fact, there are people who have just turned their backs on what has been their—and their families'—life for well over 100 years, and it is just a terrible thing to go through. But they are gritty people. They know how to access water. They have gone far below the levels where people said they could access water. I know that one farmer has rolled a pipe one kilometre into the lake to access water. We need to remember that people in this state, including irrigators, have never faced a situation like this, and they have to ask this government what has been going on and why they have fallen asleep at the wheel. It is outrageous. We have a 1 per cent allocation, which is better than zero because plenty of irrigators were giving messages to me that, under zero allocation, they would have still turned on the taps to keep their permanent plantings alive and take the consequences, and those consequences can be large—they can have their water shut down. I commend the motion.