

MURRAY-DARLING REFORM AGREEMENT – April 3, 2008

The SPEAKER: I have received the following written notice of a proposed matter of urgency from the Leader of the Opposition pursuant to standing order 52 which I have determined is in order:

That the House of Assembly condemns the Rann Labor government for failing to protect South Australia's interests in negotiating the memorandum of understanding dated 26 March 2008 on the Murray-Darling Basin reform and its failure to take swift and effective action to provide water security for South Australian families and businesses putting forward instead indecision, prevarication and media stunts; and calls on the Premier to stop talking and start acting, meaningfully on the River Murray and Adelaide's water security.

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (14:57): We just hear the same speech time and time again from the so-called Minister for Water Security, and it goes on and on. We want less waffle. We want more water. In support of this motion, I want to bring to the house's attention the human dimension of inaction on the River Murray.

Once the state's dairy showpiece with a vibrant industry regarded around the country as among the very best, operated by second, third and fourth generation farmers, using water that nobody else wanted; dairies in the region are now almost non-existent. Those who have stayed are using truly desperate and dangerous methods to try to reach water they are entitled to: their so-called 32 per cent allocation.

While many 60, 70 and 80 year olds in the city are busy getting on with their lives, with no restriction on water use inside the house, their counterparts around the Lower Lakes are crawling around the mudflats on their stomachs, dragging pipes behind them in a frantic effort to reach the ever-receding waterline, and this is for water for critical human needs; not irrigation - that has stopped.

These are our fellow South Australians, mothers and fathers, cousins, grandparents. They have been growing our food, producing our milk, contributing to the state's economy and reputation. We do not seem too keen to help them now that they are suffering the effects of a disaster that is none of their making. This government has failed them and failed to safeguard South Australia's interests.

Here we are in April 2008 debating the inevitable: no water in the bottom end of the River Murray—Australia's greatest river, soon to become Australia's greatest shame. In the 17 months since the Premier's uncoded announcement of a weir, which has since blown out tenfold, nothing substantive has been done to address the inevitable consequences of low flows, let alone no flows.

Recent media coverage of the situation around the Lower Lakes has finally woken up people to just how much communities are hurting. The graphic images of desperate people struggling has finally hit home. Suddenly, others further up the river have a taste of what it could be like for them if the management of the river is not fixed quickly. Yes, I know that there is a new memorandum of understanding, one that was held back for another 12 months to allow the Labor Party machine to maximise political gain, but even that does not offer any real assistance to our struggling fellow South Australians with the problems they have right now.

Consider this: in the days following last week's announcement, there was little empathy from the government on the impending doom the people of the Lower Lakes were facing. Whatever general plans the government had to ensure the continued

supply of water for critical human needs for other South Australians, it carefully but clearly avoided the issue of what would be done for the people around the Lower Lakes. It was clear that they were going to be left to fend for themselves. To their credit, these people have battled on with little or no help until now—now that there has been a very public hue and cry about it, and now that the government has finally realised that it cannot go on ignoring the issue. We hope it has.

The government was quite prepared to sacrifice the environment below Wellington—and I notice the transport minister's glee at that—and all the people whose lives depended on it. But, suddenly, out of the blue, there is a plan to save Lake Albert from acid sulphate soils. How ironic! The government has gone from a position of abandoning the whole of the Lower Lakes and Coorong, and everyone around them, to suddenly showing compassion for the environment. There is still no real assistance for the critical human needs of the people who live around the area, but the government will spend \$6 million to save a piece of that environment from possible total destruction.

Do not misunderstand me; I am not saying that this plan should not go ahead. I am merely making the point that the government's priorities—

Members interjecting:

Mr PEDERICK: I am talking about the wall between Lake Albert and Lake Alexandrina. I am merely making the point that the government's priorities in this whole situation are inconsistent. All we have been hearing from this government for the past 12 to 18 months is the mantra, 'It's not our fault; it's the drought, and we can't make it rain.' Well, the government has forgotten that we have been in drought since 2002.

I put it to the houses that, if we accept that every bit of water in the entire river system is rainfall—that is, it would not be in the river if it had not fallen from the skies somewhere, some time, even in the northern basin—then I suggest that the government can make it rain. It may not fall from the sky directly above us, but anything that comes down that river is rain. What the government has to do to make it rain is get some more of it from upstream, now and forever. That is the key to this disaster.

It seems grossly unfair that, in the \$10 billion deal, \$1 billion is gifted to Victoria to fix its archaic infrastructure, and the efficient people at the end of the system have to beg on their bellies to get a few bob to help them. As was said by Sally Grundy, whose family operates the last farm on the whole of the Murray, 'We are the first to feel the effects of no flows and the last to get help.'

Time expired.