

House of Assembly

1 April 2008

MURRAY RIVER, LOWER LAKES – Allowing seawater into Lower Lakes

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (16:44): My question is to the Minister for Water Security. Will the minister assure the people of the Lower Lakes, including those who live around the shores of the lakes, the Coorong, Hindmarsh Island and Goolwa, that the barrages will not be opened now or in the future to allow salt water to inundate those waterways? It has been widely reported that flooding this area with sea water is an option being considered by governments, both state and federal, to relieve the perceived threat of acid sulphate soils and reduce evaporation of fresh water.

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD (Chaffey—Minister for the River Murray, Minister for Water Security, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Small Business, Minister Assisting the Minister for Industry and Trade) (16:45): I thank the member for his very important question. The issues around the Lower Lakes and the dropping of the water levels down there as a consequence of low flows are creating serious concerns in relation to the health of the Lower Lakes and the Coorong. A number of issues and options are being looked at by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, and we expect the commission to report back to the ministerial council in October this year at the next ministerial council meeting.

One of the proposals that is being considered by that investigation is the inundation of sea water. But, as we have said publicly over and over again, this is not the South Australian government's preferred option; it is being considered amongst a suite of a whole range of different options to manage the situation. If low flows continue, there may be some options which will have to be considered which will not be options that South Australia would prefer, and that is one of them.