

House of Assembly

5 February 2009

MURRAY RIVER, LOWER LAKES

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (14:44): My question is to the Minister for Water Security. Why was a Lower Lakes freshwater solution not presented as an option for consideration at the 15 January community consultation meetings in Clayton and Goolwa when discussing management options for the Goolwa channel? The opposition understands that the government has so far purchased 47 gigalitres for critical human needs and a further 64 gigalitres to support permanent plantings, but has purchased none for the environment. At the Goolwa and Clayton meetings the public was presented with seven options, none of which canvassed the possibility of purchasing fresh water for the lakes to prolong the period that is critical to the lakes surviving and making a full recovery.

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD (Chaffey—Minister for the River Murray, Minister for Water Security) (14:45): This is a really important issue. We have a dire situation around the Lower Lakes. South Australia has limited quantities of water available to it. We are trying to manage the water that we have available to us in the best possible way. At the moment, about 100 gigalitres has been allocated to irrigation, 200 gigalitres is allocated for critical human needs over the course of the year, and 350 gigalitres is flowing into the Lower Lakes. There is also water for irrigation purposes that was available last year, which has been carried over from last year to this year, and we also have a small amount of water that we have allocated over above the 350 that is going into the lakes for wetland management in key areas—about 15 gigalitres. We are also putting a little bit of water back into Lake Bonney.

The aim of the public meetings in Goolwa was to talk about last resort options. South Australia wants a freshwater solution to the Lower Lakes. The South Australian Government—

Mr Pederick interjecting:

The SPEAKER: The member for Hammond!

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: —wants a freshwater solution. The opposition has continually maintained that all the lakes need is 30 gigalitres and, magically, everything will be returned to normal. Unfortunately, 30 gigalitres of water would evaporate in three or four days in the current circumstances. It is just a nonsense to spend a significant amount of taxpayers' money to see it travel down to the Lower Lakes and evaporate and extend our difficult decision making by perhaps a maximum of a week. We have to be ready for the worst case scenario in case a freshwater solution cannot be found. What we canvassed—

The Hon. R.J. McEwen interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order, the minister for agriculture!

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: We have quite rightly been open, honest and frank with the communities around the Lower Lakes, unlike members opposite, who continue to mislead the public in relation to the types of solutions that are actually achievable. At the Goolwa meeting we canvassed a number of engineering interventions that may be necessary if we are unable to find a freshwater solution. The freshwater solution needs to come from across the border. These options include an embankment at Clayton or embankments across the Finnis and Currency creeks, and an embankment at Laffin Point was also considered. We are being honest with the community. We are telling them exactly what the facts are in relation to these matters. We would really appreciate it if the opposition would come on board and support these communities instead of trying to drive a wedge between them, and actually move forward—

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: —so that we can do what is in the best interest of the community. Once we have completed all the investigations, we do not propose to make decisions based

on ad hoc advice. We are making decisions upon scientific investigations, and we will make decisions based on the best available information, just as we are with all the propositions for last resort management of the Lower Lakes if we are unable to secure a freshwater option across the border.

In terms of the issue of purchasing water, South Australia is, quite rightly, in the marketplace and has purchased water to shore up our critical human needs reserve for next year. That is a sensible thing to do; people need water to drink. We have done that. We have also secured and underpinned the permanent plantings of irrigators in the state by purchasing water to shore up their minimum allocations to keep their plantings alive, which is a sensible thing to do. To actually go into the market and purchase the quantities of water, to defer a decision on these last resort options—it would be an absolute travesty to actually spend tens of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money and still not achieve an outcome, which is what the opposition is suggesting.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: The opposition wants us to throw—

Mr Pederick interjecting:

The SPEAKER: The member for Hammond is warned a second time!

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: —tens of millions of dollars up into the air, because that is what will happen to the water if it is purchased and sent down to the Lower Lakes at this time. I think that the opposition needs to stop this nonsense of giving false hope to our communities and get on board and help these communities adjust to a very difficult time, a dreadful drought that we are trying to manage as best we can within the capacity that we have at our disposal.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Hammond.