

Question time - 2 July 2009

WATER TRADING

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (14:56): My question is to the Minister for Water Security. Has the department ceased buying water from willing sellers in South Australia? A constituent at Jervois recently offered 400 megalitres of permanent water to the SA government, as he was anxious it should stay in South Australia. On inquiring, he was told by an SA Water officer that the government had bought all the water it wanted to at the moment and was not interested in his 400 megalitres. The constituent, much to his disgust, has now found it necessary to offer the water to the federal government and perhaps an interstate buyer, knowing that that water may now never reach this state.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Pederick interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Hammond will settle down. He has asked his question.

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD (Chaffey—Minister for the River Murray, Minister for Water Security) (14:58): I find it a really interesting question, because, at the federal level, the federal Liberal Party, in the first instance, was strongly opposed to the purchase of water from willing sellers up until a couple of years ago. As a consequence of significant lobbying by the South Australian government through Malcolm Turnbull, who was the former minister for water, only a couple of years ago we achieved acceptance that purchase of water from willing sellers was important. We also had an agreement across governments that we needed to coordinate the purchase of water and we could not have everyone out there buying water all over the place for permanent water, because the initiative that we needed to support was a national approach to the management of the Murray-Darling Basin, a national approach to the application of the purchase of water for the environment.

However, we had an agreement across states that we would continue to invest in the Living Murray initiative, which we had all agreed upon and which was the first step to returning water to the river—500 gigalitres by June 2009. South Australia was in the marketplace purchasing permanent water for that purpose, and we were successful in achieving our 35 gigalitres in the required time frame. South Australia was the first jurisdiction to meet its targets under the Living Murray.

We also agreed with the federal government that it was important that a coordinated approach did occur for the purchase of water for the environment across the Murray-Darling Basin. We also agreed that it was critically important that we established a national commonwealth environmental water holder to hold permanent water entitlements on behalf of the environment and manage that environmental water for the best interests of the Murray-Darling Basin, a Murray-Darling Basin without borders.

When you have a Murray-Darling Basin being managed without borders, you actually have water held by the commonwealth to do just that. It does not include whether that environmental water is South Australian owned, New South Wales owned or Victorian owned; it is in a bank of water to be managed in the best interests of the basin on the basis of the priority needs within the basin.

We met our requirements to purchase permanent water out of the marketplace to achieve our 35 gigalitre target and, since then, we have concentrated on the purchase of temporary water, because South Australia has needed to meet our immediate critical human needs and also critical water allocation for our permanent plantings. Also, we have purchased critical water for the environment, to enhance our environmental water into South Australia on the temporary market. There is a market out there for people to sell their water to the federal government for the purchase of water for the environment.

Mr Pederick interjecting:

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: If the member for Hammond truly wanted a national approach to the management of the Murray-Darling Basin, he would encourage his constituents by saying that the federal government is the appropriate place to hold water for the environment.

Mr Pederick interjecting:

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: If you were genuinely intent upon supporting a national approach, that is what you would do. Instead, you are not—

Mr Pederick interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr VENNING: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: You are not focused on supporting—

The SPEAKER: Order! There is a point of order.

Mr VENNING: On a point of order, the minister is impugning improper motives.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not think the minister is impugning improper motives, but she is referring to the member for Hammond using the second person pronoun, which she should not do. She should direct all her remarks through the chair.

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: I apologise to you, sir. I did not mean that it was you; it was the member for Hammond, who seems to be confused about what he wants to achieve through the national reform being undertaken at the moment. The member for Hammond wants a national approach. The member for Hammond wants the federal government to take strong leadership. The member for Hammond thinks that we should have a river system run without borders, but he thinks the states should actually be able to buy water themselves, which means that he expects New South Wales and Victoria should be able to do that as well. If the member for Hammond wants South Australia to do that, he obviously wants New South Wales and Victoria to do it as well. That would not be in the long-term interests of the basin, so the member for Hammond needs to take a long, hard look at himself and advise his constituents about what is necessary to have a national approach to the management of the basin. A national approach means that you take the states out of it. He needs to understand that.