

LAFFIN'S POINT WEIR – 27 Nov 08

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (14:46): My question is to the Minister for Water Security. Does the government support the proposal to construct a weir (or similar) at Laffin's Point, just upstream of Goolwa? The opposition is aware that the government is considering a proposal to block the river at Laffin's Point and fill the resulting weir pool between it and the Goolwa barrages with either fresh water or sea water.

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD (Chaffey—Minister for the River Murray, Minister for Water Security) (14:47): I appreciate the opportunity to respond to this question because it misrepresents the situation.

An honourable member: Again.

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: Again. Surprise, surprise!

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr WILLIAMS: A point of order, sir: I think the minister is debating. How on earth can a question misrepresent a situation?

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr WILLIAMS: It is question time: it is not time for debating the question itself.

The SPEAKER: I would need to have a close look at the question and what the minister said. It is one of those areas that is a bit hazy in terms of what is debate and what is not. I think it is fair enough.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! Are members interested in my ruling or not? I am more than happy just to move on.

Mr Williams: I am interested to hear it, sir.

The SPEAKER: Then members will be quiet and listen to it. I do not think it is unreasonable if a minister is asked a question which has some basis in an assertion to question whether or not that assertion is correct. I do not think that is debate. I can see how in some circumstances it perhaps could be debate, but I will listen to the minister's answer. If I do think she is straying into debate, I will call her to order. The Minister for Water Security.

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: Thank you, sir. A number of community groups in Goolwa, one being the boating community and another being the Progress Association at Goolwa, approached their local council and, with the local council, they approached government to investigate on behalf of that community some options about raising the weir pool around the Goolwa community to assist the boating and tourism industries around Goolwa.

A number of the suggestions that the community put forward were an embankment at Laffin's Point, an embankment at Clayton—in fact, they put forward to the government a number of options for consideration. So, as this government is responsive to communities and to the needs of communities that are doing it tough as a consequence of this particularly extreme drought, we agreed to do those investigations. We are undertaking those investigations which include some drilling and understanding what is at the base of the river—what the riverbed is made up of and if it is possible or feasible to build any infrastructure in those areas to assist those communities.

In those investigations we are also looking at other options such as around Clayton, whereby we might be able to maintain a fresh water environment at the junction of the Finniss and Currency Creek inflows into the Goolwa channel. There is a lot of fringing vegetation around there that has extremely high biodiversity values, and at this time they are suffering from some points of acidification and salination that are of concern to the government and to

the communities around that area, given that as the summer goes on those areas could be further put at risk.

In that investigation we are undertaking a number of investigations into different options that may enhance the environmental benefits around that region by managing the system a little differently but also by looking at ways in which we can assist the Goolwa community to have access to higher levels in the Goolwa channel. These are investigations which we are making on behalf of the community following requests from the community and requests from council. There is no secret agenda by government, and the implication—

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: The implication in the question asked by the member was that we were going to block off the channel. The government is not doing any such thing. What the government is doing is, on behalf of the community, undertaking investigations that we have been requested to undertake. As a responsible government that is the right thing to do. What the opposition chooses to do now is to try to play politics, again, with what the community has requested us to do.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: We could do what the opposition does and we could do nothing and tell the community that we are not going to do anything.

Ms CHAPMAN: I rise on a point of order. The member for Hammond asked the minister, on this very important issue, a simple question: is she considering it; does she support it or not? Quite clearly she is debating the matter now. She has identified that she has not made up her mind yet.

The SPEAKER: Order! The deputy leader can take her seat. Yes; the minister is now debating the matter.

The Hon. M.J. ATKINSON: I rise on a point of order. I heard the member for MacKillop audibly refer to the minister as a goose and I ask him to withdraw it, as it is unparliamentary.

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! The house will come to order. I did not hear the remark. I have heard such epithets being exchanged across the chamber. I urge members not to engage in childish name calling. The Minister for Water Security.

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: The question was whether or not we support a proposal. What we do is that we support the community in undertaking these investigations. You cannot make a decision before the investigations are undertaken. It is stupid and foolhardy to say whether you support something or not without having first undertaken a full investigation into whether or not it is feasible.

We have a concept; we have an idea that has been put forward by the community. We are going to investigate; we will look at whether it is feasible, and then we will make decisions with the community as to whether or not a project like that should go ahead. There are also implications in relation to funding and who is going to fund it and the like.

So, I think that, rather than making a decision before we have actually investigated it, as the opposition always does—they did with the desalination plant: \$400 million and we were supposed to plonk a desalination plant there without a pilot plant, without anything. That is its idea of how you make decisions. What this government will always do is the proper and thorough investigations before making—

Mr WILLIAMS: I rise on a point of order.

The Hon. K.A. MAYWALD: —a decision as to whether we will support a project or not.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Water Security will come to order.

Mr WILLIAMS: The minister is now entering debate. She is making things up.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! The house will come to order!

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: The member for MacKillop does not have a point of order and, if he uses points of order to attempt to make debating points, I will not give him the call when he rises to make a point of order in future.