

Estimates B – 4 July 2007

CCSA funding – River Murray forest – Mt Bold – Water meters

Mr PEDERICK: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 3, pages 12.28 and 12.38. In the **Conservation Council's budget** response press release, we see, 'No news is bad news, say conservationists.' On 7 June 2007, the CCSA stated:

We do have major concerns whether this funding will be sufficient.

Is the CCSA wrong?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: The answer is yes, it is wrong.

Mr PEDERICK: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 3, page 12.8, and the 2007-08 Targets/2006-07 Highlights of the Department for Environment and Heritage. One of the aims in 2007-08 is to complete the tender scheme for the **River Murray forest**. Has the government changed the original intent of the program by introducing the concept of including it in a carbon trading scheme? If so, how can the government provide a realistic market value before the market has even been established?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: The South Australian government has committed \$5.7 million over four years to establish the River Murray forest, involving more than 2.5 million native trees and shrubs. The River Murray forest will reconnect patches of valuable ecosystem sequestered carbon and promote sustainable new industries. I am informed that the sequestering of carbon was part of our original design initiative and continues to be part of our considerations.

The River Murray forest is entirely within the River Murray/Coorong nature links corridor, one of five biodiversity corridors being established under South Australia's Strategic Plan Target 3.2. Establishment of the River Murray forest will involve the use of both public and private land along a broad corridor, likely to be 20 kilometres either side of the River Murray and initially between Morgan and Renmark. Investment in the River Murray forest will be sought from the community, private landholders, business and industry. Individuals and groups will also be able to contribute to the project by volunteering their time to help plant trees.

The scope of the River Murray forest has been confirmed and project planning is well advanced on both public and private land components. An amount of \$450 000 was allocated in 2006-07; however, the drought delayed this initial project implementation, and only \$150 000 will be expended in 2006-07. The remaining \$300 000 has been carried over to the 2007-08 financial year, increasing the funds available in that financial year from \$1.7 million to \$2 million. A steering committee has been established in conjunction with the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin NRM board. A project manager has been appointed and initial contracts to collect seed and identify potential sites have been completed. Ongoing evaluation of public land for potential forest plantings has identified some promising locations, with site management issues currently being assessed; the balance of the plantings will be on private land.

Pilot tender specifications are being developed for plantings planned for 2008, and the pilot tender scheme will seek to maximise the biodiversity and carbon sequestration benefits from the planting. In terms of 2007-08 targets, \$2 million will be allocated for the 2007-08 financial year compared with \$450 000 in 2006-07. In addition, a project manager and implementation officer will be appointed in 2007-08. The pilot tender scheme will be undertaken and, subject to a cessation of dryland drought conditions, tree planting will commence in autumn 2008.

Mr PEDERICK: You mentioned the sites, minister, and it sounds as if a lot of the site planning has been done. Can you be more precise on what sites you have identified apart from the land between Morgan and Renmark? Why is there a different purpose stated in the budget documents between public and private land for the River Murray forest? The reference for this is in the DWLBC area, page 12.49, about half way down in the performance commentary under Natural Resources Management Services. It reads:

Public land plantings will be focused on achieving a biodiversity benefit. On private land the plantings will provide a balance between nature conservation carbon sequestration and other benefits.

I am not sure whether people have just used words, but why you would differentiate anyway?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: In relation to the first question pertaining to further site identification, further details are still being developed and will be made available in due course. Regarding the different purposes, the advice I have been given is that the project team involves both DEH and DWLBC members and that, in effect, there is no difference in purpose; it is simply the terminology used to describe the project within two portfolio statements.

Mr PEDERICK: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 3, page 12.49. I am asking this question just in case I get knocked out from here. Can the minister assure the committee that any plan to increase the capacity of the **Mount Bold reservoir** will comply with the native vegetation clearance regulations in the same manner as would any other proposal?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: Does this pertain to the impact of native vegetation?

Mr PEDERICK: Yes; the studies on the Mount Bold expansion.

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: That would come under the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity.

Mr PEDERICK: That is fine; I can ask the question later. I just did not want to miss out by not asking it now.

Later session

Mr PEDERICK: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 3, page 12.49, sub-program 1.1 relating to the performance commentary and the Natural Resources Management Services. Can the minister assure the committee that any plan to increase the capacity of the Mount Bold reservoir will comply with the native vegetation clearance regulations in the same manner as any other proposal?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: The viability of the Mount Bold reservoir is currently under investigation, and I understand that the Minister for Water Security is committed to conducting a feasibility study in relation to that. I understand that that feasibility study is likely to look at a number of different impacts, including native vegetation. The outcome of that, no doubt, will be a matter for the government to consider and respond to accordingly.

Mr PEDERICK: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 3, page 12.46, highlights of 2007-08, dot point 11. How long will it be before the Murraylands in the South-East are fully metered?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: The South Australian **licensed water use metering** policy has been phased in across the South-East region over the past four years. Licensees should have installed meters on all wells that are being used for licensed water extractions. Licensees are not required to install meters on wells that are not being used for the extraction of water for licensed use. As at 30 June 2007 almost 3 500 meters had been installed. The inspection of all meter installations is now being finalised. This will ensure that all meter installations meet the requirements of the state meter specification. A small number of licensees have failed to fit meters as required. A compliance program is now under way to ensure that meters are installed before the commencement of the next irrigation season.