

PEEL–HARVEY CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT BILL 2014

Second Reading

Resumed from 25 June 2014.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [5.31 pm]: I am very pleased to speak on this bill, which was introduced by the member for Gosnells, as the shadow Minister for Environment, late last year, from memory. I am particularly passionate about this bill put forward by the member for Gosnells, and I want to outline, in my second reading contribution, from my perspective as a person who has lived in the Peel region for 27 years and is bringing up a family there, like many other people who live, work and recreate in the Peel–Harvey catchment area, the importance of what we hope to achieve in bringing this bill before the house.

This bill simply proposes to establish a new legal framework to oversee the environmental quality of the estuarine system, which is known as the Peel–Harvey system. Those who are aware of the region will know that the Peel region essentially surrounds a body of water known as the Peel Inlet. It is fed by three rivers—Harvey River in the south, and the Murray and Serpentine Rivers further north. The connection with and reliance upon the waterway by Indigenous people is very well documented through stories and in print. Aboriginal people occupied the area for thousands of years before European settlement in the late 1820s. People who have spoken with present and past elders will know that the waterway, the flora and fauna associated with the waterway and the terrestrial areas surrounding it have played and continue to play a significant role in the spiritual aspect of Indigenous history and are a significant element in the Indigenous story of the Peel region. The names of some of the places in and around the waterway system highlight the significance to Aboriginal people of the Peel–Harvey system.

Since colonisation in 1829, the Peel region has had a long history of white settlement, beginning with the failure of Thomas Peel’s settlement project. Then came the establishment of towns like Pinjarra and Mandurah. As we fast-forward to 2015, we see a tremendous growth in population in recent years. All through this time, the Peel–Harvey system has been harvested for its fish; it has been abused in some respects, misused and taken for granted. However, the system and its rivers are the fundamental underlying indicator of the health of the region. As I have said many times in this place, the health and wellbeing, be it social, economic or environmental, of the Peel region can be ultimately traced back to the health and wellbeing of that waterway and its catchment. Its protection as a viable lifeline is critical. It is absolutely essential for all of us, including those who live in or who seek to live in the region in the future and those who visit the region, to ensure its ongoing protection. Practices and uses that bring great enjoyment to residents and visitors should continue, but underpinning all those uses should be a commitment to its ultimate protection.

The history of the Peel–Harvey system is in some respects a history of neglect or indifference. I can remember this very well, because I was a boy when my family started coming to Mandurah in the early 1970s. My mum and dad used to stay in Falcon or at what was then the SEC caravan park in Mandurah central. The population of Mandurah back in the 1970s was only a few thousand. I can remember very well, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the eutrophied state of the waterway. It was not uncommon, particularly during summer, to smell rotting algae, dead shellfish and the regular fish kills. In fact, there is a history of harvesting the algae. Weed harvesters would be operated by either the Peel Inlet management committee, the Shire of Murray or the City of Mandurah to get the algae out of the water and away from the foreshore. Towards the middle of the 1980s there was talk of an engineering response to the eutrophication of the estuarine system, so the Dawesville Cut was proposed. Construction was commenced by the Lawrence government and the project was completed under the Richard Court government the early 1990s. The Dawesville Cut was always seen as the great silver bullet for the protection of the waterway, but we now know that that is not actually what has happened. Yes, it helped with the flushing of the estuarine system, the algal blooms and the weed infestations, but it also had an impact on the waterway environment. Since the Dawesville Cut was made, we have lost most, if not all, of the prawns that were spawned in the estuary because the system became a much more marine-style system than an estuarine system as such. We saw tidal increases that inundated a lot of the low-lying wetland areas and also an increase in mosquitoes and the issues associated with mosquito-borne diseases et cetera.

All through this time the government’s response was to more or less respond to an emergency. It was politically prudent to respond when there was a stink. Indeed, governments of both persuasions have done certain things or attempted to do certain things. The issue is not centred on just the waterway; it is all about the catchment. The catchment for the Peel–Harvey reaches way back to Pingelly, Williams, north through to Karnup and to all those areas that feed the Serpentine. We cannot look at just the health and wellbeing of the waterway in one box; it is about the catchment. This is where the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council comes in. I wish to give credit—I have done this publicly—to the late Don Randall. One of the things the late Don Randall did as a federal member was to recognise the importance of the Peel–Harvey catchment system in its own right. Originally, the Peel–Harvey

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Catchment Council was part of the South West Catchments Council. It was really the poor cousin in funding and attention. I think the people of Peel should be eternally grateful to the late Don Randall for his advocacy for the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council to become a natural resource management entity in its own right. I was very appreciative of him. Earlier last year and late last year he specifically invited me as the local member to some important federal government announcements on this issue. He did not have to. He wanted to ensure that this was seen as a bipartisan approach. I will be eternally grateful to him for that. I think the people of Peel, in particular, should be eternally grateful for his advocacy because now the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council is an NRM entity in its own right, which gives us a pivotal opportunity.

This bill seeks to establish a proper, overarching entity that oversees the management of the catchment. The member for Gosnells and I had some discussions and meetings with the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council and put this bill towards it. It likes aspects of it. It probably sees itself as the key stakeholder in a management entity. It is true that this bill is essentially modelled around a statutory body along the lines of the Swan River Trust. The reason we are proposing it is that lots of things have been tried. We had the Peel Inlet Management Council and different departments being the so-called lead agency, but when it comes to the crunch, they walk—they take one step back because no-one is given the ultimate overall management teeth. Yes, we can have committees with all the stakeholders around the table but, in my view, that is not how we can ultimately get a proper framework to oversee this. I say to the Minister for Water that whoever handles the response to this bill will be up for demarcation.

Ms M.J. Davies: Me.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, it could be, but it could also be argued that it is the Minister for Environment. One of the things about the whole management of the catchment and the management of the system is that there are various jurisdictions. The Department of Transport has a role. I have not written to the current minister but I did write to the previous minister, asking why we could not, for example, ban the use of propeller-driven boats similar to the ones that we see on the Everglades in the United States. I cannot remember what they are called. They disturb the Ramsar wetlands and the bird life—the migratory birds et cetera. Ultimately, no-one could tell me who had the power to do that. I thought it would have been the Minister for Transport or the Minister for Environment, but it was not. This is just one of many examples.

We should remember that this area of Western Australia is not only a biological hotspot, but also home to an internationally recognised and listed Ramsar site. It is incumbent upon all of us who live there and the government to ensure the protection of our obligations under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Interestingly enough, the Ramsar Convention, an international agreement, is a great selling point. I think it is totally undersold by us locally. Thousands of birds from as far away as Siberia and other parts of the world use the Asian flyways to come to the Peel to feed and nest et cetera. They do that in their thousands. Not only do we not celebrate that, but also a lot of people who live in the Peel do not even know that that is the case. There is an issue there.

I am going to run out of time. This bill that we have introduced attempts to tie together how this system needs to be managed into the future. I do not think that some of the things that have been tried have delivered. That is from both sides of politics. Both sides of politics have been in charge. This bill is an appeal to the current government to understand the importance of the Peel–Harvey catchment to the ecology of Western Australia, to the biology of this particular part of Western Australia and to the fact that it ultimately underpins the health and wellbeing of the community that lives there now and the thousands who will live there in the future. The document titled “Perth and Peel @3.5million” says that we will see, if we believe the figures, over 100 000 people living between Mandurah and Pinjarra, right in the middle of the catchment. What are the implications for the health and wellbeing of the system? If we are required as a region to shoulder the burden of the increasing population that the state has to absorb over the next 20 or 30 years, one of the key elements must be to protect the environment, the terrestrial areas of the catchment and of course the waterways in the system. The Peel–Harvey Catchment Management Bill 2014 is a good bill that proposes a way forward for that protection. It sets out very clearly a legal framework. There has to be a legal framework. I know there have been some good partnerships and discussions that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet has been overseeing. That is good stuff and I am not attacking that, but we need the keystone in the arch of this, which is the legal framework. The opposition’s bill addresses a whole range of issues associated with compliance, and determining and clarifying roles and responsibilities, because if we get this right—the window of opportunity is closing, unfortunately—we can not only protect the natural environment but also underpin the health and wellbeing of the entire Peel community into the future. I appeal to the government not to dismiss this bill, but to respond in the spirit that it is given.

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville — Minister for Health) [5.52 pm]: So there is no confusion, I point out that I am not the leader speaker from our side on the Peel–Harvey Catchment Management Bill 2014. The government will not support this bill, although I appreciate the huge amount of work put in by the opposition to develop such a comprehensive bill around the important issue of the management of the Peel–Harvey catchment. As the

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member for Mandurah said, it is the biggest estuarine system in the south west. I think it is the biggest in the whole of Western Australia. It is a massive estuarine and drainage system that is critical in importance to the people of Mandurah and surrounding territories. Like the member for Mandurah, I have been involved for a long period of time—probably longer, but perhaps less intensely—through the whole of that period. I was in Cox Bay in Falcon as a 10-year-old with bare feet—I do not think sandshoes had been invented then, unless it was for tennis—and I certainly would not wear shoes when in the water catching crabs. We were barefoot, wiggling our toes through blue holes dragging a galvanised steel washing tub behind us catching large numbers of crabs in Cox Bay. The sand was clean and there were no weed issues. The water was beautiful and there were huge numbers of crabs to catch. At other times, we would go with dragnets and catch prawns along the shore. I went to Mandurah Primary School for a time. When I was 10 years old, and then later with my children, when we bought a house, we would spend long periods of time doing similar things throughout the year. I saw the other end of the catchment.

In 1967, when I was 14 years old, my family had a farming property on the Hotham River, which feeds into the Williams River and then the estuary. Our family farm is still part of that catchment. In those days, we would spread superphosphate fertiliser; it was very soluble and with good rain it would leach into the river. The cattle and sheep were not fenced off from the river, so a lot of the degradation of the river was caused by animals walking into the river to drink and feeding off the grass on the riverside, and of course defecating along the catchments and often bringing weeds and other things into that catchment area. Gradually, as a result of that, those rivers and that estuarine system continued over the years to deteriorate and so too did the estuary. The weeds grew and built up and there was black mud along the edge. We would walk halfway up to our shins in deep black ooze. The number of crabs reduced and the weeds were a stinking, rotting mess. As the member for Mandurah said, the harvesting system was started to try to clear away the weeds. The next thing that was put in place was the cut, built under the previous Labor government. The Dawesville Channel was opened by the Liberal government, with Richard Court fortunately opening it about two weeks after we won the election in 1993. It has made a massive difference and turned the estuary into a seawater system, much more than a freshwater system. The water is much saltier. The cut has changed the environment. A lot of that weed has gone, because it has not been able to survive in the salty water, so cleaning is no longer necessary. The water is much cleaner and fresher as a result of those changes. Subsequent to that time, I was Minister for Water, and I well recall a media event in the estuary when I was wearing waders and collecting water samples with the Water and Rivers Commission.

Mr D.A. Templeman: When was that?

Dr K.D. HAMES: That was in the late 1990s—about 1998 or 1999. We were concerned about the quality of the water. The water quality has definitely improved. The opening of the channel led to more mosquito issues. The much stronger tidal movements affected areas of the Serpentine River where there was low-lying land, and with cattle on the properties, at the high-water mark, there were puddles in the footprints of cattle in which the mosquitoes would breed, so massive numbers of mosquitoes started coming down the estuary. At the last election, the Liberal–National government promised to eradicate those mosquitoes and we copped a huge amount of flak from the opposition, particularly from the member for Mandurah, about that, but I have to tell the member that I have not seen too many mozzies since. There is an occasional one.

Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I am not talking about Maylands. I moved away from the wording on the press release that said we were going to eradicate mosquitoes, because it was a bit extreme. It was written by people in the Liberal Party, as members opposite can imagine, but much to my surprise after that press release—the mosquitoes must have been listening—we hardly saw a mozzie. Before that, when we went out into the garden, we would be massed with mosquitoes. We do not get that anymore. Our eradication program has helped. We do a lot more spraying and we are working a lot more on that. The government put up money for environmental studies to do that, but I think it is a change of season with the El Niño, La Niña or whatever it is causing a change in tidal flow that has made the biggest difference; nevertheless, the water system has changed.

People talk about the unhealthiness of the estuary. I live in a house on the canals in Mandurah. I go to my backdoor and I can catch crabs when it is crabbing season; I can drop pots and continue to catch crabs. We also catch bream at the back. Our little system, which is the old estuarine system, is not as healthy as the new canals. Those canals get everything—octopus, dolphins, tailor, herring and certainly lots of bream. That is an extremely healthy system. I remember going out a couple of years ago on a really hot summer night. The prawns have not disappeared. People are not allowed to go along with their prawn nets anymore because they have been banned, but people can still go out at midnight when the tide has gone out and sit in the cut in the estuary with a scoop net and catch a lot of prawns. When it gets to a certain time of night, half an hour before the prawns come out,

the birds arrive—masses of pelicans and seagulls. Suddenly—whack!—the prawns come racing out through the canal. It is different today from what it was like before. We were out around Boundary Island, where the sand is very flat, and we used a spotlight while we were scooping some crabs. We ran that spotlight over the water and I was amazed by the water life. There were prawns jumping everywhere and yellowfin whiting racing along the sand, and crabs everywhere. The whole place was teeming with life. That shows that the estuary is not in a critical condition, but it does not necessarily show it is in a fantastic condition either, because those fish need nutrients to live off and it is the nutrients coming down through that estuarine system that feeds them and provides the foodstuff they need to live on. It is not a dead river by any means.

I have just come back from Turkey where, as I said, I went on a holiday with my wife. We swam off the back of a boat, and the water there is just about dead. We could see hardly any fish. We did not see mussels or oysters. We could see a few little fish swimming around, but that was about it. In Mandurah, it is anything but; there are massive amounts of wildlife within that estuarine system. If people put a net out on a Wednesday night, they will catch herring, tailor and mullet, and they have to go up and down the boat to get all the crabs out. There is life teeming within that system. That does not mean that system is not under stress, and it does not mean it needs critical management.

The opposition brought the Peel–Harvey Catchment Management Bill 2014 before the house because at the last election we had a different view on what should happen. The Labor Party had one view that it put to the people of Mandurah—that it was going to bring in a Peel–Harvey catchment management bill similar to the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Bill, and create a similar body to the Swan River Trust in Mandurah. We had a different view. I have been Minister for Water and been in charge of the Swan River Trust, and I found that system overly bureaucratic, restrictive and constraining on the development of that estuarine system, and not always in the best interests—depending on which party was in government—of the various groups that wanted to do anything. It was not a cohesive group that brought people together; it was either one point of view when the Labor Party was in government or a different point of view when we were in government, I think largely based around the people appointed to it. So we came up with a different solution. We came up with a solution that got all interest groups together as a single body, and we created the Peel–Harvey management group or Peel–Harvey inlet —

Ms M.J. Davies: It is the Peel–Harvey catchment management committee.

Dr K.D. HAMES: The Peel–Harvey catchment management committee is the correct —

Ms M.J. Davies: Estuary management.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Estuary management committee. It was a thing I created. I should know the name, because I put together the proposal to do that.

We had lots of conversations with the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council—Jan Star and her team. I had lots of conversations with Don Randall about how we could get an integrated system that took much better control of that catchment. So we decided on two components: Don would work with the federal minister to try to split the Peel management team away from the south west integrated catchment management group and be a region on its own. That gave it funding on its own that I think was up to about \$3 million a year or something of that order—it was significant funding that enabled it to provide high-quality management of that catchment. Then we would get all the departments that had individual responsibility for various aspects of the management, such as Planning, Local Government and so on, together. The minister will go through those things later and talk about the committee and how it operates. That committee was set up, with the Peel–Harvey catchment management group as the core component of that committee. Clearly, some people are paid under the funding they get from the commonwealth, but it is a largely voluntary group that has enormous experience in catchment management. The Peel–Harvey catchment management group is on that committee with government departments, so it can say, front and centre, “You should be doing that and you should be doing something else. Why aren’t you dealing with this? What are you doing about that new development? There’s a development proposal out near Pinjarra: what are you doing about nutrient run-off? What are you doing about all these other things that you need to have managed in a development to prevent further pollution of the estuary? What is council doing about drains? What is the Department of Water doing about drainage systems going into those estuaries?” We got them all into one room.

But what governance was there? When that group gets in there, the Department of Water could be confronted on something and say, “Nick off; we don’t care what you say, and we’re not doing it.” So we put the committee under a governance structure that led right up to senior parts of government, so that if a group like the Peel catchment management group said, “Look, we’re not happy; this isn’t happening”, it had a direct line right up to the Premier’s department to make sure that there was good oversight of those things. The feedback I have been getting is that it is working very well.

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I know no-one in Mandurah who is greener than Jan Star, the chair of the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council. I do not know how she votes, but I will bet my bottom dollar that she votes for the Greens, and I bet that is the group she is integrated with. When the Labor Party put a proposal to her and our proposal was put to her—I do not want to speak on her behalf—I know she was very supportive of our proposal. That is the feedback —

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Minister, our proposal did not come out until this time last year; you have it wrong.

Dr K.D. HAMES: No, no —

Mr C.J. Tallentire: This was before the election.

Dr K.D. HAMES: No—leading up to the election; they were together, at the same time.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: No, the bill we are discussing came out in June 2014, just to be clear about that.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Nevertheless, in the lead-up to the last election the member for Mandurah was talking about an equivalent of the Swan River Trust, was he not?

Mr D.A. Templeman: We announced we would bring legislation to Parliament, if elected; we are doing this as an opposition.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Yes, to create the equivalent of a Swan River Trust.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Yes, that is right.

Dr K.D. HAMES: There we go; the member for Gosnells heard that.

Mr D.A. Templeman: But the bill was drafted by the member for Gosnells.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Sure; the bill has come a lot after that, but this is what was created in response to the Labor Party’s commitment for a Swan River Trust equivalent. It is a body with similar powers that has oversight of the catchment. That is the pathway that it has taken. Along that pathway, a Swan River Trust–equivalent bill—it was not the favoured option, as I understand it—was put up. Maybe things are different when we are in government and the Labor Party is not, and a group that is getting some funding might have formed a different view. Nevertheless, the group was happy with the proposal put forward by us. It has been very supportive of it and has strongly participated in it, and the feedback I am getting from it is that it thinks it is doing a good job.

We think we have solved the issue of the management of the Peel–Harvey catchment through those two changes we made. As I said, Don Randall and I agreed we would do this together. He would look after the issue of the federal government change, and I would look after the issue of creating a state government change. We made that commitment before the election, including some funding for research that the Minister for Water will talk about. The plan for that research funding was that it would link in with the research funding being provided by the commonwealth, so that together we could have a very strong research program. In fact, that also linked partially to the mosquito management program, which also had some research funds attached. It was an opportunity for all those things to feed in together to better take care of the catchment.

There is a long way to go. There are critical issues and it does need intensive monitoring. I have confidence in the Peel management catchment group and its ability, as an outside-government body, to do the things it does in making sure everyone stays on the straight and narrow. It funds certain things along the catchment to improve the quality and keep stock away and so on. Also the Department of Water, as it has done before, has significant oversight of what happens and does the testing, monitoring and management. The Department of Fisheries is involved as well, of course, in the river fish stock. As the member knows, we have been restocking mulloway there—I think there are programs for further restocking into the future—and we have been critically monitoring crab numbers.

Of course, local government is a key participant in all this and is on that committee. Therefore, it has a say and a direct involvement in the things that need to be done to manage the estuary. There is state government involvement, local government involvement and federal government involvement, and there is a team of environmental experts all working together to make sure that everything that should be done to protect our estuarine system, and in fact improve it, is being done. It is my view that it ain’t broke, and people need to give the system we put in place time. It has been there now for probably two and a half years and the people involved are saying it is working well. We as the government think that needs to be given a reasonable period of time. If we are starting to get evidence from the Department of Water that the river is further deteriorating or that developments —

Mr D.A. Templeman: But there is already evidence of that in those reports. Have you read the latest report?

Dr K.D. HAMES: Not in the last two and a half years—but remember —

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Mr C.J. Tallentire: The EPA's report totally disputes what the minister is saying. You have not read this report. There is a whole section on the Peel–Harvey, and you've not read it!

Dr K.D. HAMES: I am speaking. Did I interrupt or interfere with the member for Gosnells?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Yes, that is right; there was no interjection asked for.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I am not accepting interjections.

The ACTING SPEAKER: That is fine, minister. If you are not accepting interjections —

Dr K.D. HAMES: That is very kind; you will look after me.

The ACTING SPEAKER: — I will absolutely offer you protection.

Dr K.D. HAMES: If we consider the issues of pollution in the Swan River and the carbon, phosphate and nitrate in the mud of the Swan River, most of it is a hundred years old. It has been coming down for all that time and settling in the sediment of the river. We still have those issues in the Peel–Harvey catchment. We still have the legacy of years of fertiliser use and years of not being able to keep stock away, so we would expect significant issues from those things. The Peel–Harvey catchment management group is working on that. People have very strong oversight over future developments that have to be carefully monitored to make sure that they do not increase the contribution of nutrients into that estuarine system. Just saying that a report shows that it is deteriorating does not mean that everything is not being done to address the issues with the health of the river. As I say, a great deal of that will be historical and we cannot turn back the clock on issues of pollution that happened 20, 30 or 50 years ago.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition) [6.11 pm]: I support the Peel–Harvey Catchment Management Bill 2014 put forward by the member for Gosnells. It is a very good idea that there be some integrated management of a very important part of Western Australia. I heard only the Deputy Premier speak on this issue, but it is quite clear that the government will not support this bill as a way of dealing with the issue.

I want to place on the record up-front that I am very familiar with the Peel Inlet. I have gone down there and enjoyed crabbing and all the other activities that go on there. The only person I have ever heard say that it is teeming with life and doing really well is the Deputy Premier five minutes ago. I have not heard anyone else say that before. He is the first person I have heard say it. Ordinarily, the commentary that I hear when I visit the inlet is that it is nowhere near as healthy as it once was and that the life that was once there is no longer there. The old-timers in the electorate of the member for Mandurah will tell people that it is not what it used to be. It is hardly surprising that it is not what it used to be. Maybe it is impossible to take it back to what it was 50 or 100 years ago, but I think it is entirely possible to make it better than it is currently.

When I came to Western Australia 25 years ago, one of the first policy committees I served on within the Australian Labor Party was the environment policy committee. As I recall, there was some considerable disquiet at that time amongst some of the policy committee members that the Dawesville Cut was being put in place. People objected because it was somehow inappropriate, it would not work or what have you. I had a look at it. I was aware of the broader issues of the eutrophication of the Peel Inlet. I suppose the jury is out in my mind on whether it has worked. I think the evidence is in that it did work and it did assist in improving the health of the estuary. However, I think the evidence is also now clear that, 24 years or so after it opened, more needs to be done.

This waterway is one of the most significant in Western Australia. Large numbers of people live in proximity to it and our major capital city is in proximity to it. It is clear that it is one of the most highly stressed waterways in the state. Other waterways have the benefit of being further away from, and do not have on their fringes, major population areas, agriculture and housing developments. This waterway does not. This waterway is in proximity to the City of Perth and communities of the Peel and it is highly stressed. It needs extra attention because it is so close to where large numbers of people live and also because, frankly, it is really quite beautiful. It deserves our attention and protection.

I always worry about these things for my children, my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren. What will it be like when they are my age? We have a duty to them. I am afraid that the evidence—I realise from what the Deputy Premier had to say that he has not even done a cursory examination of some of the documents that have assessed the health of the waterway—is clear that it is in trouble. I am sure that the member for Mandurah and the member for Gosnells have outlined this, but there is the recent Environmental Protection Authority report into the health of the inlet and there is the recent Murdoch University and CSIRO report into the Peel–Harvey estuary. All those documents state that there is trouble with the estuary.

As I said earlier, I take my children crabbing there every Christmas. They demand to go crabbing there. We cannot go crabbing in Cockburn Sound because there is a ban on crabbing in Cockburn Sound and because of the

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overfishing of crabs. The kids love to go crabbing. That is the extent of the fishing that I do; I take the kids crabbing once or twice a year. I can guarantee that last Christmas there were nowhere near as many crabs as there were a few years ago when we went down there, if that is any sort of test. I do not know where the Deputy Premier is getting his evidence that it is teeming with life, because I have not seen it operate in that way in any way, shape or form. The only life I see teeming in the Peel–Harvey estuary are blowies, of which there are many.

The key question is: do we proceed with what is currently going on or do we try to do something differently? This bill sets out some initiatives to try to fix the problem that exists. All the evidence is there to show that the current arrangements are not working. What is called the fragmented approach to the management of the Peel–Harvey estuary is causing the trouble. Therefore, this bill sets out a way of managing the Peel–Harvey estuary in a far more cohesive and effective way, with a single authority and a single board with certain powers to enforce improvements. To me, that looks like a good solution. As I said, it will not take it back to what it was 50 or 100 years ago, but we have to arrest the decline because that waterway is way too important for us to ignore it.

The bill provides for estuary protection notices and a new ability for development approval protection. That is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, the run-off into the Peel Inlet from both agriculture and urban development needs some better control over it, because that is how the nutrients are going in. One could argue, as the Minister for Health did, that nutrients are key to marine life and that they need more nutrients; but if there are too many nutrients, we start to kill everything, and I think that is where this issue is coming from: too many nutrients such as phosphates, nitrogen and the like are flowing into the Peel–Harvey system and that is causing the issue that we are confronting. It needs to be dealt with, and we need a body that is capable and has the legislative authority to deal with that. Dealing with that form of run-off into the rivers—I think it is predominantly the Serpentine River —

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Yes, and the Harvey and the Murray.

Mr M. McGOWAN: They feed into the Peel–Harvey system, and that is very important. I remember receiving a briefing here maybe 10 years or so ago on some of the run-off from some of the piggeries and some of the cattle run-off. Clearly, some effort needs to be made to try to deal with that. Urbanisation has continued around that area, and I can understand why people want to live there; it is a beautiful area. We also need to put measures in place to deal with that urbanisation. I accept that people already live there and that there is already farming there; we have to manage that in a way that prevents, manages or reduces the run-off to ensure that we reduce the inflows of nutrients into the Peel–Harvey system, or else, over time, it will die. Bringing it back from the dead will be a lot harder than trying to prevent that catastrophic outcome.

Twenty-five years ago the government of either Carmen Lawrence or Peter Dowding began the process of putting in place the Dawesville Cut. I think the evidence is in that that improved the situation for a time, but something more clearly needs to be done to prevent the health of the Peel–Harvey system from sliding backwards. I do not accept what the Minister for Health had to say about all these different organisations that have various responsibilities. I do not accept that that approach—a catchment council here, a local government there, a federal body there—is somehow fixing the problem, because the evidence is in that it is not. That is why we are putting forward sensible and reasonable legislation to try to come up with a way of fixing this situation.

That is what this bill is about. The health of our waterways, marine life, endangered species and those sorts of things are important environmental issues. These are some of the things that I care most deeply about, and that is why this is, to my mind, a very important issue that we need to deal with. I congratulate the members responsible for having brought this bill forward.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Minister for Water) [6.22 pm]: I thank all the members who have made a contribution to this debate on the Peel–Harvey Catchment Management Bill 2014; everyone was very engaged with and passionate about this very important area. Since becoming minister I have probably gained a very much heightened awareness of just how passionate people are in this space. I grew up in the wheatbelt, which is a permanently altered landscape, in a catchment area that drains into the Swan–Avon catchment, and we can see the very real impacts of some of the decisions that have been made over the past century coming into the Swan River, and also into the Avon River, which runs through some of the communities in my electorate. That is no different from the Peel–Harvey system or the Vasse–Wonnerup estuary. A large number of estuarine systems throughout this state are very sensitive and are impacted upon by some of the decisions that have been made over a significant period.

I reiterate the Minister for Health’s comment that the government does not support this approach, and I will go through the reasons why. From my experience, having been the minister for only the last year and a half, I have been involved in some decisions in exactly this space in the Vasse–Wonnerup region, so although there has been activity in the Peel–Harvey area, a report has been commissioned into the management of the Vasse–Wonnerup wetlands. Des Lord, one of the National Water Commission’s commissioners, was engaged by the state

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government to look at how those wetlands could be better managed, and he came back with several recommendations. When government considered them, the outcome was that we did not feel that a statutory authority was required in that space.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Recommendations were made to you that that's what the Vasse–Wonnerup needed.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have been interjected on a lot today, so I am probably not going to accept interjections, because I would like to get through this. A significant amount of work has been put into this and I would like to put the government's position.

We went down a similar approach to that which the Minister for Health talked about regarding the estuary we are discussing today. We felt that better coordination of the groups that were involved with and had roles in the management of that wetland could be effected as long as there was a senior reporting mechanism. A ministerial advisory council has been formed in that part of the world to look at how we can better coordinate all those stakeholders. The reports that I am getting back is that that coordination is starting to get some traction; the groups are working very well together, and it has been very positive from everyone. That includes local government and GeoCatch, which has been heavily involved over a long time as a group of community members who are passionate about that wetland and that estuarine system. Another point that the Minister for Health made was that a statutory authority may well exclude some of those organisations from retaining that very real and personal interest and the commitment they have made, because of the ownership they feel over a very long period of time.

The member for Mandurah went through a number of historical issues; obviously the Dawesville Cut has been mentioned this evening. I can remember when that was put in place, and I seem to recall coverage saying that it was going to be a silver bullet for that particular part of the world. I think he also made comments around whether it has been politically prudent to respond when there is a stink. As the minister responsible, when we have fish kills and when there are unfortunate algal blooms and things that impact on people's enjoyment of these systems, it becomes the responsibility of the Department of Water for our inland water bodies. The member for Mandurah's comment about treating the catchment as a whole problem is something that I absolutely agree with. To go back to the Vasse–Wonnerup system, we have been working very closely with the entire catchment, particularly the farming community and the Water Corporation, which plays a really key role in some of the drainage systems that have been set up in that space.

All of those learnings and similar stakeholder relationships have been brought to bear in how this government has decided to put in place coordination mechanisms for the Peel–Harvey estuary, and I think it is important to note that there is no single cause or simple solution. The Leader of the Opposition stated that we needed to try something different and that there were too many nutrients flowing into the catchment. He said that we needed a statutory body to deal with that, and also called into question the Minister for Health's understanding about and knowledge of how everything is working and the fact that perhaps the latest evidence it is not showing any improvement. I would say that, from the Minister for Health's point of view, he is absolutely spot-on. This has been a problem in the making over a long, long time and we are unlikely, from the management decisions we have made in the last year or two, to see a swift turnaround in what is a permanently altered system. I back up the Minister for Health's comments by saying that we need more time to see the impact of the intervention that has been made under the Peel–Harvey Estuary Management Committee. We are all struggling with the name of this group, but it is a very important one.

I want to go through some of the work that has been undertaken recently. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition is unaware of that work. It has been done in partnership with funding provided by both the state and commonwealth governments for on-ground works in Peel–Harvey and a substantial amount of effort has been put in. Again, these things take time. We will not see a turnaround of these interventions immediately, and in some cases it may well be decades before we see significant improvements, but in my view it is too soon to change the management structure that has been put in place only very recently. This area has been improved by fencing and revegetating 23 hectares of priority drainage areas. We have been assisting local governments to replace and improve four ageing stormwater drain outlets. The Lake Mealup recovery program includes the construction of a weir on the Mealup dam to divert one tonne of phosphorus from the estuary every year, which will also help maintain the ecological values of the internationally significant wetlands. There are two phosphorus retention trials at Buchanan's drain and Coolup D drain, and there are eight additional stormwater drain retrofits and two nutrient stripping biofilters. We have also prepared three sub-catchment plans and we have a significant amount of monitoring in the system. All of these actions are directly what the Leader of the Opposition was referring to. They are aimed at reducing phosphorus loads entering the system and they provide an example of what this state government, in partnership with the commonwealth, has been doing in recent times.

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The Minister for Health also mentioned that a senior scientist had been appointed to assist at the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council. This has been funded through the Department of Regional Development royalties for regions with a \$400 000 grant. I know that the member to my right often says we do not spend enough royalties for regions money in his part of the world. We have resources going to this very important issue that he raised and spent time talking about in this house this evening to assist the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council, and scientific advice and information is being provided to the council and assisting it in its interaction with local government. That is really important because local government is an important stakeholder in all of these matters. Feedback is also being provided to the state government and the Department of Water about the monitoring taking place there. A lot of good work is being done in this space, but having said that, I am not saying we have the answer and we have got it nailed down; there is always more to be done in this space. As Minister for Water, it is pleasing that wherever I go there are people who want to partner with government or be involved with their catchment councils to improve the health of these systems for a variety of reasons. From a state government point of view, the environmental aspect is incredibly important and unique in some cases, and there are some unique aspects to the Peel–Harvey system. There are also the matters of tourism, the economy and the general amenity for the community living around the area.

That is exactly why the government established the Peel–Harvey Estuary Management Committee. We think that is the way to proceed in this case. We have a coordinated approach to address some of the issues facing this iconic area. The committee is chaired by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and includes the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council; local governments; the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority; and the Departments of Water, Parks and Wildlife, Agriculture and Food, and Mines and Petroleum. Very similar to the number of people sitting around the table with the Vasse–Wonnerup task force, it requires a degree of collaboration, but I think it is a positive outcome to get people in the room making sure we are not working in state government silos, but communicating with those people who have good relationships with the community—GeoCatch in Vasse–Wonnerup’s case and the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council in this case. The committee has the responsibility of overseeing activities right across government, so we are taking a whole-of-government approach on this matter. The committee is responsible for guiding major policy development related to the health of the estuary and coordinating those initiatives for improved efficiency and alignment of expenditure by agencies so we do not have overlap and the dollars are spent most efficiently. The committee is also very closely involved with the strategic assessment for the Perth–Peel region project, otherwise known as SAPP. That project is very important, because a lot of the issues that have been raised by members opposite relate to how we manage some of the broader issues impacting on the estuary. That strategic assessment is driving a coordinated planning and policy response to the challenges of future development in the Perth and Peel regions, infrastructure provision and environmental conservation, and it supports the Perth and Peel region’s growth to a population of 3.5 million people. The strategic assessment has been undertaken in conjunction with the preparation of the Western Australian Planning Commission’s “Perth and Peel@3.5million” strategic planning documents and it will respond to the Environmental Protection Authority’s recently released interim strategic advice on that.

We are developing a coordinated and long-term approach to protect areas of national environmental significance in Perth and the Peel, and that includes the Peel–Harvey waterways. At the centre of this is a whole-of-catchment strategy that will target the most critical water-quality issues, including the impact of land-use changes—something that members opposite have spoken of—nutrient run-off and residual water-quality issues. This assessment has the input of senior members and cabinet ministers sitting around the table, and their departments. It will deal with facilitating sustainable the development and the growth of the region so we do not have ad hoc developments that could further impact. We do not want to see a flatline, I guess, in the improvement of the region. We want to see some of those indicators go back to —

Mr D.A. Templeman: Yet your government supported Point Grey.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Undertaking SAPP means we have a coordinated approach to all of these issues and I am sure we are working to the issue. That strategic assessment is still underway, member, so once it is completed, actions that will have been developed and agreed as part of that assessment will be implemented. There will be on-ground actions as a result of this process, but they are yet to be rolled out because we are still in the process of going through the assessment. I think the government —

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The member was not in the chamber, but I have been interjected on an awful lot today and I am trying to get through my response.

I think the government already has the right people sitting around the table and I disagree with the Leader of the Opposition that a statutory authority is needed to drive some of the initiatives we have already rolled out and some of the initiatives we have planned that will fall out of this strategic assessment. We already have a way of

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coordinating all the stakeholders and dealing with some of these complex issues. It is not always easy; it is nice and simple to put them to a statutory authority and let them roll off into the sunset.

Mr A.P. Jacob: It sounds good!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, it sounds good, but it may actually not achieve what we want, because we may well lose people from the community who are very involved in this process, as well as other stakeholders who will not continue to participate because it becomes someone else's problem. I think that is a big challenge and a real risk. The solution we have proposed and are already implementing with money on the ground rolling out already is to work with all of our key stakeholders. We have taken that approach in the Vasse–Wonnerup as well. My commitment is that we will continue to work in this space. The Department of Water is incredibly passionate about taking a lead role in these matters. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet is taking a lead role in Peel–Harvey and there is a commitment from me as minister to work collaboratively with all those people and ministers who are responsible for getting an outcome. It is a very, very important issue. I understand and commend the member for the bill. Obviously a significant amount of work has been put into this and I understand the concerns of those who have contributed. The Department of Water is there to partner and work with everyone who has an interest in this space. The Peel–Harvey estuary system has the attention of both the state and commonwealth governments at the highest levels, and I think that bodes well for the future. Hopefully we will start to see some improvements as a result of the interventions we have seen thus far.

MR A.P. JACOB (Ocean Reef — Minister for Environment) [6.40 pm]: I thank the house for the opportunity to speak on the Peel–Harvey Catchment Management Bill 2014. As the member for Gosnells knows, although the government does not support the bill, it supports some of the intent of what the bill seeks to achieve—that is, a better outcome for the Peel–Harvey estuary and the Peel–Harvey catchment more broadly. In fact, that is something the government supports very strongly. I will take this opportunity to outline some of what the government is doing, although it will build largely on what the Minister for Water and the member for Dawesville have just outlined. I assure the house that the Liberal–National government is absolutely committed to protecting not only this waterway but all of Western Australia's waterways, and it already has a strong track record of achievement in this space.

As the member for Dawesville outlined, the government established the Peel–Harvey Estuary Management Committee because it is the most effective and coordinated approach to address the issues facing this iconic estuary. Its establishment has honoured a pre-election commitment to invest in the science and management structures needed to improve water quality and the health of the Peel–Harvey estuary. In contrast, what is proposed in the bill is a reinvention of the Swan River Trust model, as it existed previously, which in essence is a separate microdepartment of state government to manage one particular region in isolation. That management-in-isolation approach is the basis of why I disagree with this bill.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: It's not management in isolation; it's a coordinating role. You are giving powers to a head body. We have fragmentation at the moment and we have got to solve that.

Mr A.P. JACOB: We do not solve fragmentation by creating more fragmentation, member for Gosnells.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: No; this isn't about creating more fragmentation.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I know that is not the intent. I am not saying that is what this bill intends to do, but the reality of how these things work in practice is that it ends up creating more fragmentation, not less.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: It didn't happen with the Swan River Trust.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Yes, it did.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Where was there more fragmentation with the Swan River Trust?

Mr A.P. JACOB: The Swan River Trust is now merged with the Department of Parks and Wildlife so we have a dedicated agency that can truly manage not only the immediate area that the Swan River Trust previously had in the riverpark, but also the entire catchment, because that entire catchment, as the member knows, extends to an area that is three times the size of Tasmania and is a significant chunk of this state. Building on what has been done with the Peel–Harvey Estuary Management Committee, the government has bolstered that with funding that has gone through as a result of the election commitments that the member for Dawesville and others made, and a range of other funding commitments as well. The overarching approach the government is taking will ensure that we consider this issue not in isolation but in a broader context, as the Minister for Water outlined, in a strategic assessment of the Perth and Peel region. That, until now, has been the largest strategic assessment undertaken anywhere within the commonwealth of Australia. Melbourne and Sydney have previously pursued strategic assessments over their metropolitan areas. For the sake of convenience, member for Mandurah, I will roll the Peel in, but not refer to it as metropolitan.

Mr D.A. Templeman: No, otherwise I will hurt you!

Mr A.P. JACOB: Can I use the term “greater metropolitan Perth”?

Mr D.A. Templeman: No. I don’t even accept that. Peel is a separate entity.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Okay, member for Mandurah. The two regions in this context are inextricably linked because the catchments and the overlap mean that if we are taking an approach to manage the regions as it sits within a biodiversity hotspot, as members have said, the best way to approach that is through a broader high-level strategic assessment. I do not have the opportunity to go into too much detail of what is within the strategic assessment, but I saw the member for Gosnells hold up what I believe was the section 16(e) advice from the Environmental Protection Authority, which at this stage has provided those into the subregional structure plans of the Department of Planning. I think members understand that that is really early section 16(e) advice into the strategic assessment.

I will read a few excerpts of what the EPA has said on this matter. I will touch on only the executive summary at this point. One point I might make is that only three pages into that document there is photo of what the Murray River looked like in 1882 and in 2008. Even before we get to any text in that document, it makes it very clear that is a key consideration of the strategic assessment in this approach. The first photo, if you like, member for Mandurah, is a historical photo of the catchment area as it was and the challenges we now face. As the member for Dawesville said, those challenges have been built up over more than 100 years. As we have discussed previously in the context of the Swan and Canning Rivers, some of those are now unchangeable. We probably could not easily undo what were previously freshwater systems from becoming increasingly estuarine, particularly in an era of declining rainfall, dams having been built further up the waterways, and changes generally to those ecosystems. We are in an adaptive space, but I have appreciated, in the section 16(e) advice from the Environmental Protection Authority, the acknowledgement of what the Western Australian government is actually doing.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Why does the minister not go to page 50 of that document and quote the comments of the EPA there? That is about the Peel–Harvey system. It states —

The EPA also supports the appointment of a body to coordinate the implementation of actions across agencies and the community to address nutrient issues.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Yes, we have that.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: It should be a statutory body. It is the only one that is going to pull all those agencies together.

Mr A.P. JACOB: My point is that, in the document that the member just referenced, the Environmental Protection Authority has recognised that the work we are currently doing as a government through the strategic assessment of the Perth and Peel regions is the best possible approach that we can take to fix up the challenges of this region in the long term, coordinating state and federal environmental requirements. The EPA uses language such as —

The EPA strongly supports the Western Australian Government’s initiative to undertake the Strategic Assessment of the Perth and Peel regions to protect and maintain MNES.

MNES stands for matters of national environmental significance. Also, the Environmental Protection Authority has learnt over time that case-by-case assessments are not usually the best way to achieve broader strategic environmental outcomes, particularly in areas with a range of cumulative environmental impacts, complex biodiversity and many competing land uses, which absolutely applies to the Peel–Harvey catchment. I think the intent of both sides in this matter is much the same, but if I were to look at the lessons of history, I would see that the management agency needs to have as much muscle, if you like, and as much weight as possible behind the outcomes it is trying to achieve. The reality of the way that things operate within government means that works better within a larger agency. That is why we have made the decision to merge the Swan River Trust with the Department of Parks and Wildlife. There is still an important role for the statutory authority, but to achieve outcomes across the entire catchment area, a larger agency that can coordinate the entire catchment region —

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Peel–Harvey doesn’t have that. It has fisheries, transport, local government, state and federal, water, environment, agriculture—all those agencies and no-one is pulling them together.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Adding another one in the middle does not necessarily get there.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: A body with authority over the others would work, and that is the recommendation that is made time and again—a catchment management authority.

Ms M.J. Davies: It is being headed up by the Department of Local Government and Communities.

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Mr A.P. JACOB: That is exactly the point, from the Minister for Water. The strategic assessment is being headed up, through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Environment. The strategic assessment is addressing all the long-term environmental problems and is simply the very best approach.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: It is a planning and development assessment process.

Mr A.P. JACOB: No, it is not a planning process. It is very far removed from a planning and development process. In fact, it is, if you like, a complete rethink of planning principles that have underpinned the development of the Perth and Peel regions up until this point, which were based on the Stephenson–Hepburn principles, broadly. This is a flip around entirely. This is building the future planning —

Mr C.J. Tallentire interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): I have not stopped the interjections because the minister has invited them. I get that you are having a good debate across the chamber, but perhaps the minister can make his comments and the member for Gosnells can then respond, because it must be very hard for Hansard. It does not bother me, but Hansard might not be able to hear it.

Mr A.P. JACOB: The point I am getting at is that this has implications for planning principles. I suspect that, to a large degree, the strategic assessment process will inform the planning framework of the Perth and Peel region in the future, but it is not built on a foundation of planning principles, which has been the practice of our urban planning up to this point. It will be built on a foundation of environmental considerations under both the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act and the state Environmental Protection Act.

Mr D.A. Templeman: With the strategic assessment and the overseeing of that, what will be the milestones in terms of reporting? As Minister for Environment and a stakeholder in this, what do you expect? What will be the milestone? Will it be a state of the environment report for the Peel? What will it be? What can we expect, because I think one of the big problems you face is that the wider community in Peel do not know about the Department of the Premier and Cabinet’s involvement. There is the rose-coloured glasses approach of the Deputy Premier, but very few people know about the process and how it will be reported to the community, which has a vested interest. What is your response to that?

Mr A.P. JACOB: My response is that the community will have a large degree of interest, and when we reach the point at which we can engage at that level, it will be on for young and old, I think, in passing out messages and getting word out of what is proposed. The report that sits before us that has been referenced is the only one from any environmental agency that has made it into the public domain at this stage. I think it does a good job of laying down some of the groundwork for what we are looking at in laying some of the context, but there will be more of that down the road. Today is maybe not the day to go into that in too much detail—not until we are ready to take that to the next step. As I said, I support the broader indent, which is to ensure the improvement of the health of the Peel–Harvey estuary into the future, as we are seeing the improvement of the Swan and Canning River systems going forward after the lows that it hit in the late 1990s and early 2000s. I think both sides agree with the intent, but I firmly believe that the best approach is the approach taken by this government both at the local level through the bodies that we have set up and at a broader level through an overarching strategic assessment approach that is largely centred around the office of the Premier and cabinet and other relevant ministers.

MR M.J. COWPER (Murray–Wellington) [6.51 pm]: It is very interesting to sit here and listen to members talk about one’s electorate. Ninety per cent of the Peel–Harvey catchment area is in my electorate, including the estuary, which is 167-odd square kilometres, including the Serpentine, Murray and Harvey Rivers that feed into that waterway. As the local member, I can say that it is a very diverse electorate with a diverse ecological area. The number one problem in my electorate revolves around planning issues—it is number one by a street. It is about the rights of landowners to be able to conduct business on their own property without being interfered with by various government agencies, and it is about pieces of legislation that have impacted significantly on their capability to go about their lawful business. Apart from planning issues, the next impost on my position as the local member involves transport issues, particularly Main Roads. We have built major roads and freeways through the length and breadth of the electorate, including Forrest Highway and a number of other strategic roads.

The third biggest problem in the Murray–Wellington electorate involves water and the Department of Water. Of course, the contribution of the Murray–Wellington electorate to Western Australia is somewhat significant. It supplies 60 per cent of the food that is eaten domestically in Western Australia; it produces 60 per cent of the water that is transported to the metropolitan area, whether it be desalinated water or water from the dams; and, 40 per cent of the power generation for Western Australia comes from our Alcoa gas turbines in Wagerup and

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Pinjarra, which are fed by gas from the north west. We also have the third largest mining region, which contributes to the royalties for the greater wealth of this state.

We are throwing into the mix a very old farming community that makes the Shire of Murray the fourth oldest municipality in Western Australia—older than Perth. Pinjarra was established because it was on the end of the river and the boats could have access into that region. It was largely responsible for saving the Swan River colony from starvation. When the new settlers came to the Swan River colony, they found that the land in and around the Swan and Canning Rivers was not the land of milk and honey, as was described to them back in England. They found these very sandy Bassendean soils that were very low in productivity. It was not until later, by accident, that a report came through from some of the settlers about a significant river to the south. Governor Stirling dispatched a whaling boat to the south to discover what he thought was the mouth of the Murray River. It was so named before it was even discovered by a group of sailors in a whaling boat. There is a significant story in and around that. When they came across the Harvey estuary on the way back from Preston Beach and Singleton Beach, they found the mouth of the Harvey estuary through the breakers. They followed it and explored what is now known as the Peel–Harvey catchment and the hinterlands of the Harvey River, the Serpentine River and the Murray River.

Members may know that a lot of fine produce, particularly beef, is still produced today in and around the Murray River plains. That area produces some of the best beef in Western Australia through iconic brands such as Harvey Fresh and Harvey Beef, Goodchild Meats, V&V Walsh and the Dardanup Butchering Company. A lot of the beef produced in that area goes to local abattoirs for domestic consumption.

There has been significant impact on and degradation of the rivers. I found it interesting that the picture that appears in the report that was mentioned by the Minister for Environment shows the Murray River as it was and how it looks now. It has changed. In essence, that is a snapshot of the problems that I am facing as the local representative in trying to get access to various government departments that deal with issues to do with the Peel–Harvey estuary. This is not just a recent phenomenon; it has been going on since the moment I came into this place. I have discussed these issues with the former member, John Bradshaw. One of the very first issues that I had to contend with was the impact that the Dawesville Cut had on the estuary. The increased water flow in and out changes the oscillation of the water in and around the Peel–Harvey estuary, causing silting of water access ways into the Murray, Serpentine and South Yunderup canal systems.

A few years ago the state government had control of the management of the Peel–Harvey estuary through the Peel Inlet Management Authority, which was established under the Burke government. It was a very well-intended authority. I thought it had a great deal of merit. To this day, I am still perplexed as to why the Labor government did away with the Peel Inlet Management Authority in 2004. If the member for Gosnells knows why that was done, I would be most interested to hear from him.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: You'd like to see something come back, similar to it?

Mr M.J. COWPER: Absolutely. I am just getting to that point. I heard from the Deputy Premier that there is an arrangement through the Premier's office, which in itself is commendable. However, one thing it lacks is input from the people on the ground. I find it extraordinary that from time to time we see opinion pieces in the local newspapers in which people comment that development in the Shire of Murray should be restricted and that this should happen and that should happen. Most of the time they make extraordinary claims whilst sitting in their double-storey mansions on the canals around Dawesville and Port Mandurah that have resulted in the Creery wetlands being filled in. I find it incredulous that they then turn around and say that we should do this or we should not do that with the land, particularly those landowners who have been impacted by a range of government instrumentalities.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm
