

WELLINGTON DAM — WATER QUALITY

677. Mr M.J. COWPER to the Minister for Water:

The minister well knows that there are —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: The previous question is finished; it is finished.

Mr M.J. COWPER: The minister will be aware that there are 184 gigalitres of water in the Wellington Dam. Recently, there was a request for a proposal to increase the use of the water in that dam. Can the minister tell us what the government's plan is in requesting these proposals?

Ms M.J. DAVIES replied:

I thank the member for the question and for his ongoing and very vocal interest in water issues in his area. As members will know, and as the member to my right here has just pointed out, Wellington Dam is a very large resource for this state, particularly in the south west, but it has limited use and availability of potable water and water for industry.

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston, I call you to order for the first time.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It has limited use due to its very high salinity. There has been a long history, as members to my right have pointed out, of trying to decrease the amount of salt that is going into the system so that we can use more of that water to unlock the economic potential of the south west. It is impacting on the productivity of the Collie River irrigation district. There are potentially options for the Myalup irrigated agricultural precinct, if we can improve that water quality. Previous solutions have focussed on trying to reduce the salinity within the dam—the catchment treatments above the dam wall.

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Under our Water for Food project with the \$40 million funding through royalties for regions, one of the projects is to look at below-the-dam-wall solutions. We recently sought expressions of interest for proposals to treat water below the dam wall. We have received great interest from industry not only from a technology point of view, but also from those in the agricultural sector. Seventy interstate, local and international participants who were interested in learning more about the EOI process came along. There is a real interest in trying to solve this problem that has vexed both state and federal governments of both persuasions.

The briefing provided quite a lot of detailed information on the EOI about the kinds of projects we will be looking to encourage. It does not require proponents to come forward with a full solution; it can be a part solution. Within the context of that project we have appointed a steering group so that people are on the ground, from industry, agriculture, local government and the Departments of Water and Agriculture and Food, who are very close to the systems. We also have a technical advisory group so that the appropriate technical expertise is involved. It is one of 11 projects.

Mr M.P. Murray: Are you talking to the federal government?

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, we talk to the federal government on a regular basis about all 11 projects running across the state. Water for Food is the biggest investment we have seen in trying to increase irrigated agriculture in Western Australia.

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: We are spending that as part of the \$300 million we are investing in agriculture in this state. It is a really exciting time. We are hitting some fantastic milestones in other projects. This one in particular has the opportunity to diversify the state's south west economy and a lot of people are looking to the outcome of this very positive project. I am very happy to keep the house updated.