

## WATER CATCHMENTS — SOUTH WEST RECOVERY PROGRAM

### *Motion*

Resumed from 3 June on the following motion moved by Hon Giz Watson —

That in the light of the declining rainfall and catastrophic decline in surface water inflow to our dams and the impact of salinity on our south west water catchments, this house calls on the government to implement as a matter of priority a comprehensive upper catchment recovery program based on farm forestry that aims to restore water and salt balance in the six key water catchments in the region.

**HON GIZ WATSON (North Metropolitan)** [11.03 am]: In my introduction to this motion, I talked about the need for a more coordinated and renewed emphasis on catchment restoration, and in speaking about six particular catchment systems I used the Collie River-Wellington Dam system as an example. I note that the previous government has been paying some attention to this matter. I refer to a document titled “Western Australia’s Strategy for Plantations and Farm Forestry: 2008-2012” about a program produced and launched by the former Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Kim Chance. The document outlines the then state government’s approach to addressing issues of salinity and waterlogging in catchments in the south west. I note that the five factors that are identified in that document as critical for success include those that I have already raised in my contribution to this motion. The document indicates that these factors are —

1. Identify a **lead State agent** to coordinate a whole-of-Government approach to plantations and farm forestry, and to implement the Strategy.
2. Develop **mechanisms to encourage investment** that will support **integration of plantations and farm forestry with agriculture** in the State’s medium and lower rainfall zones.
3. Facilitate **industry development** planning for future plantations and farm forestry, and value-adding processing industries.
4. Support **research and development** to optimise profitability of existing plantation investment, and develop new tree crops for medium and lower rainfall areas where commercial options are currently limited.
5. Establish a consistent framework for **land use planning** for plantations and farm forestry on cleared private land.

This strategy, which was to run from 2008 to 2012, is having some results and I would be very interested to hear, particularly from the now opposition and perhaps also the government, how they would view progress in this area.

The point that the Greens (WA) wished to make by moving this motion is that we still think that the mechanisms are not comprehensive enough and the funding is not adequate. We have seen with natural resource management funding and Natural Heritage Trust funding that if the reliance is simply on funding from the public purse and there are insufficient mechanisms in place to encourage private investment to adopt a whole-of-landscape planning approach that is needed to achieve environmental and water quality outcomes, we will run into trouble when the government can no longer afford to put public money into that restoration work and the budget for that is cut.

The challenge for all of us is to look at mechanisms that encourage private investment; for example, encouraging people who have land in those catchment areas by providing a credit system for maintaining and enhancing native vegetation. Some efforts have been made in this direction. However, those efforts are neither comprehensive enough nor quick enough to achieve the catchment restoration that we argue needs to be done in a much shorter time frame.

We have known about the drastic impacts on clearing of catchments since it was recognised 30 years ago by the Sir Charles Court government when it implemented further clearing bans. We have had 30 years to try to turn this around. In the light of a drying climate and the research and information that we have, we need a much more accelerated and coordinated approach, which, as Paul Llewellyn would say, provides pricing signals to encourage private landowners to participate. I know that there is a lot of willingness from people to participate more fully in these sorts of catchment restoration processes. At the same time, those farms have to return a profit. It is up to the government to ensure that the mechanisms are in place so that people can still farm their land and at the same time get multiple benefits for environment and water quality outcomes.

With those comments, I would be most interested in the contributions of other members to this motion. I hope that all parties in this place can support this motion. I am particularly interested in hearing the comments of my colleagues from the National Party, who clearly have a keen interest in this motion.

**Hon Max Trenorden** interjected.

**Hon GIZ WATSON:** Nobody can speak? That is a shame. We will try to keep this debate running long enough so that, hopefully, members of the National Party can speak after they have had the opportunity to make their inaugural speech.

Seriously, it would be a shame if the debate on this motion was completed before we have the opportunity to hear from members who live in the south west, because their input into this debate would be useful. We will see what we can do. Meanwhile, I urge the house to support this motion.

**HON HELEN MORTON (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary)** [11.10 am]: I had hoped to hear from the opposition before I spoke on this. However, I think we are doing the same thing.

**Hon Ken Travers:** It is not unusual for the government to provide a response when a motion is moved.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Yes.

**Hon Norman Moore:** Not always. Members often want to hear the argument before they speak.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** That is right.

**Hon Ken Travers:** I said it is not unusual.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** The government sees this motion as very important. Hon Paul Llewellyn, and subsequently Hon Giz Watson, have quite appropriately drawn this issue to the government's attention. I do believe, however, on the basis of information I have received, that although Hon Giz Watson has talked about the positive trends in this matter, some of the things she pointed out have been underestimated. I will make some comments about that.

There is no doubt that land and river salinisation in the south west of Western Australia is quite a serious environmental and economic problem. In the 1950s and 1960s, as clearing for agriculture in the medium and low rainfall zones became more widespread throughout the major catchments of the south west region, stream flows increased in both volume and salinity. When this motion was first put on the notice paper and I knew that I would be contributing to the debate, I thought to myself: what do I have to draw on here? Interestingly, my family farmed at Frankland in the south west. I recall that as a young child I saw my parents clearing a virgin block of land to establish a wheat and sheep farm. The process at that time was to use two bulldozers to drag a huge chain and a great big ball between them. They would run over great tracts of land, clearing everything along the way. I have good memories of that. Now, in retrospect, I can see that it was not such a good idea. I also remember going out and burning up areas—having great bonfires all over the paddocks. We would stoke them up night after night to get rid of any remnant bush that was once on the property. As the suckers started to come through, we would go on “sucker-bashing” expeditions; we would walk miles and miles making sure any suckers were not able to regenerate. If only we knew then what we know now. My husband and I had a pastoral property. We were involved in the Gascoyne-Murchison strategy as well. My father said much later in his life, when he had become a national parks ranger, that if he could have undone the damage that his practice of clearing the land had had on the environment in that area, he would have done so. Since then, of course, land use management for salinity control has been an increasingly practised approach throughout the south west.

In 1996 the Department of Water—then the Water and Rivers Commission—was nominated as the lead agency in implementing what is known as the salinity action plan in the five nominated water resource salinity recovery catchments. The five catchments included in the salinity recovery action plan are the Collie River, the Tone-Warren Rivers, the Kent River, the Denmark River and the Helena River. The salinity recovery plan set targets for achieving potable water quality at a particular gauging point in every one of these rivers by 2015 to 2030, depending upon what catchment was being referred to. The water quality being sought was 500 milligrams a litre of salinity, or less, even though the quality of public drinking water can vary between 300 and 700 milligrams. I can recall being on station property and thinking that if we found a bore with 700 milligrams a litre of salinity quality, it would be an absolute treasure!

**Hon Giz Watson:** It doesn't taste very nice though, does it?

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** One gets used to it!

Even though this motion does not outline precisely the six key water catchment areas in the region, from what Hon Giz Watson has said we have assumed that they include those currently affected by stream salinity at the Collie, Preston, Capel, Tone-Warren and Blackwood Rivers.

The water resource salinity recovery approach developed by the Department of Water balances the need to meet salinity targets, and takes into account economic, social and environmental impacts. The approach that the Department of Water has taken is not as immediate as one would want perhaps if one were focusing just on the salinity and not taking into account all of those other impacts. The plan uses both engineering and vegetative approaches for salinity recovery or containment. I think the motion is suggesting that we should focus almost entirely on the reforestation approach.

Salinity recovery teams were established for each catchment area in 1997. The Department of Water works in partnership with those teams, local communities, government agencies, industry and local government in formulating the recovery approaches. The Department of Water's recovery approach comprises five stages. Some of this might sound a little bureaucratic—it did to me when I first started reading it—but I came to understand it, and I think it is worthwhile mentioning the five stages that make up the overall approach.

The first stage is what is called a situation statement, when continuous monitoring is done to assess salinity levels. Monitoring has been undertaken in these areas since 1945, resulting in pretty good long-term data that the Department of Water can use in that process. I will quote from what the Department of Water has stated about stage 1 —

1. Situation statement — using long term data from river and stream gauging stations ... the situation statement is a study that identifies current and longer-term stream salinities, estimates how long before salinity returns to potable levels and salt is leached from soil profiles, and evaluates the hydrological impacts of selected salinity management or recovery options. The scale of intervention required to reach nominated hydrological targets is identified. The Salinity Situation Statements for the Collie River, the Denmark River, the Warren River, the Kent River, and the Helena River were published in 2001, 2004, 2006 and 2007 and 2007 respectively.

Situation statements have been published for those areas.

The second stage in this approach is defining the evaluation and management options. During that stage the water resource recovery approach defines the technical aspects of potential management options or scenarios and —

... identifies the economic, social and environmental impacts of each option; in consultation with key stakeholders and using multi-criteria analysis techniques, —

I am sorry about that language —

preferred management options are identified. Trade-offs and compromises implicit to stakeholders are recognised. Benefit cost analysis ... of the preferred options is then used to identify the final recommended options for implementation, ...

The third stage of this approach is the recovery plan for salinity. At this stage the recovery approach identifies and describes the major components of the options selected for implementation, develops an implementation strategy and identifies the funding sources. Those funding sources are not just government funding.

The fourth stage is when future options for water resource recovery are identified. Building on the salinity recovery plan and seeking to optimise water resource management, during the evaluation of management options and in the development of an implementation plan, the issues and opportunities that exist in the context of overall water resource management are identified, and the potential impacts and longer-term opportunities for key stakeholders are recognised.

Finally, there is the implementation of the actual plan. That is coordinated on the ground with the planning groups, and it includes implementing the preferred approach that has been identified, and monitoring and evaluating over a number of years.

The current situation is that situation statements—that is the first stage that I read out—have been published for the five water resource recovery catchments. In addition, situation statements for the Tweed River and the Gnowangerup Brook catchments of the Blackwood River are near their final draft. These are showing that as clearing of the catchment increases, the stream flow increases, but also the stream salinity increases. Conversely, as cleared land is reforested with trees, the flow decreases and the salinity decreases. In the Collie catchment area, for example, in 1950 the annual flow was about 100 gegalitres per annum, and salinity was 300 milligrams per litre. In 1970, after clearing in the 1950s and 1960s—so we are measuring a 20-year span from 1950 to 1970—stream flow was about 200 gegalitres per annum, and the salinity had risen to 450 milligrams per litre. In 1995, due to a drop in rainfall, stream flow decreased significantly to about 150 gegalitres per annum, but salinity had gone up to 800 milligrams per litre. Modelling as at 2001 shows that when the hydrological effects of the current and planned plantations are fully realised, stream flows will decrease to 134 gegalitres per annum, and

salinity will decrease to 750 milligrams per litre. If 50 per cent of the remaining cleared land is planted with trees, salinity will be reduced over time to only about 550 milligrams per litre, but stream flow will be 110 giganlitres per annum. That is just one example of —

**Hon Sally Talbot:** Just for Collie.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Yes, that was just for Collie. I cannot go through all these examples because it will take too much time. However, I will tell members what is happening and how the work is progressing in the Warren area. In the case of the Warren River, in the early 1950s, stream flow was around 350 giganlitres per annum and stream salinity was around 120 to 350 milligrams per litre. By 1970, the stream flow had increased to around 400 milligrams per litre and stream salinity was around 700 milligrams per litre.

**Hon Giz Watson:** Is that 400 giganlitres per annum?

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Yes, it should have been 400 giganlitres per annum. Again, average rainfall was significantly reduced from the 1970s onwards but by 1995, stream flow was still around 260 giganlitres per annum and average annual salinity was up to 1 000 milligrams per litre. If 50 per cent of the remaining cleared land is planted with trees, salinity would reduce over time to about 450 milligrams per litre and stream flow would reduce to 230 giganlitres per annum. Salinity situation statements for the Capel and Preston Rivers will commence in 2009-10. Evaluation of the management options for the Collie and Denmark Rivers has now been completed. Evaluations for the Tone-upper Warren region are due for completion at the end of this year.

It is clear that one size does not fit all in recovering water resources. I want to put some examples of that on the record. The recovery plan for the Collie River represents a short-term 20-year solution of diverting the saltiest flow from the river while aiming to find economically competitive and socially acceptable perennial-based farm systems in the long term, for example, using perennial pastures, farm forestry and plantation forestry. Due to the demand for fit-for-purpose water by heavy industry and irrigation in the Collie catchment, it is planned that the diverted water will be desalinated and used by industry, thus minimising the effect of reducing stream flow. In the case of Denmark, only a relatively small area that is still cleared remains, and the recovery plan recommends maintaining and expanding the area of plantation forestry and farm forestry. A different approach is being taken to those catchment areas. Early indications taken from the results of the salinity situation statements are that the Helena catchment will likely have similar recommendations to the Denmark approach, which is the reforestation one, and that the Kent, Tone-upper Warren and Tweed-Gnowangerup catchments of the Blackwood River will likely be recommended to pursue long-term farm systems, approaches of perennial pastures, farm forestry and plantation forestry.

Except for Collie, where harvesting and desalinating the saltiest water can be economically justified, it is not possible to reduce stream salinity significantly without a reduction in stream flow. To use forestry alone to reduce stream salinity to around 500 milligrams per litre, it is likely that around 50 per cent of the remaining cleared area in a catchment such as the Collie or the Tone-upper Warren would need to be planted, which is a challenge for farm forestry to achieve in that most farmers to date have been comfortable with planting up to only 25 to 30 per cent of their cleared land to trees, even with significant funding assistance. The issue of funding was raised by Hon Giz Watson, and it is recognised as an important consideration. Currently, to implement the recommended forestry-based options at the appropriate scale would incur major investment and costs, typically in the order of \$10 million to \$100 million, especially in catchments where there are significant areas of cleared land such as the Collie, the Tone and upper Warren catchments. Engineering-based options to reduce stream salinity are at least as expensive, except where local conditions apply such as in the Collie catchment area. This means that for public and industrial water supplies at a regional and state level, reducing stream flow salinity may not be as economically justifiable over the use of alternative sources of supply, such as fresh groundwater or desalination of seawater. However, this may change in the future as perhaps the economics of forestry or perennial pastures improves compared with traditional farming systems, and the cost of alternative public water supplies increases.

*Amendment to Motion*

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** It is my understanding, from briefings I have been given on this issue, that this is an important motion, but it has not taken into account the existing work that has been undertaken or the progress that has been made and that it requires more than just farm forestry to recover the water resource in the south west. As such, Mr President, I would like to amend the motion. I move —

Line 1 — To delete the word “catastrophic”;

Line 2 — To delete the words “calls on” and insert “notes” after “house”;

Line 2 — To insert the word “initiatives” after “government”; and

Line 4 — To insert the words “and other initiatives” after “forestry”.

If amended, the motion will read —

That in the light of the declining rainfall and decline of surface water inflow into our dams and the impact of salinity on our south west water catchments, this house notes the government initiatives to implement as a matter of priority, a comprehensive upper catchment recovery program based on forestry and other initiatives that aims to restore the water balances in the six key water catchments in the region.

**HON SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [11.33 am]: I am pleased to contribute to this debate. It is probably appropriate to acknowledge from the outset the role that Hon Paul Llewellyn played during his four years in this house. I know there were times when he contributed to debates in a way that was a little unusual, but he certainly grabbed our attention, and he played a major part in doing a couple of things. One was to raise the consciousness of everybody in this house about some of these vital issues. It is probably also fair to say that he contributed greatly to the stock of knowledge. Regardless of whether we agree with the views that he put, at considerable length on occasions, we certainly have to pay tribute to the depth of his understanding and the passion he showed when conveying some of those views to us. I understand that, unlike some members who have now departed this place, he also did a good job of handing over some of that stock of knowledge to his colleagues. It is a tribute to that that we are debating this motion today.

I was very interested in the contribution to the debate by Hon Helen Morton and in the amendment she has moved. As did she, I listened very closely to Hon Giz Watson’s remarks. The first point I want to make is that it is probably a little unfair to describe Hon Giz Watson’s arguments as being in some sense simplistic. I think that one of the things she did very well was point out how complex these issues are and how complex are the inter-relationships between the various parts of the catchment and river systems themselves. Even more than that, she pointed out the complexity of some of the relationships that we have to manage if we are to undertake the long-term rehabilitation and restoration of our catchments. The criticism that this motion focuses only on the reforestation of the catchments and that in some sense it is oversimplifying the problem is perhaps a little unfair. But I will go into that in more detail as I work through some of the arguments made by the opposition on the motion and the amendment moved by Hon Helen Morton.

I first came across the issue of salinity some years ago, largely due to a person who did a lot of work in the Department of Agriculture over, I subsequently discovered, many, many decades—namely, Clive Malcolm, whom I encountered in his retirement after he had moved to Denmark with his wife and become a key community player in the town of Denmark in a number of different ways. I did not discover what a key role Clive Malcolm had played in altering our approach to the question of salinity until, tragically, he died and I, along with Hon Adele Farina, was at his funeral. Some of the most respected experts in the field of salinity came from all over Australia to pay tribute to the work he had done. I suspect that we will be using the work of Clive Malcolm for many decades to come. As is often the case in these situations, I only regret that I had not sat down with him while he was still alive and talked through some of these issues. It was very sad for me, certainly personally, that it was only then I realised what an enormous resource of accumulated knowledge and wisdom on the issue of salinity we lost with his death.

On a slightly lighter note, honourable members will remember that some weeks ago we celebrated Conservation Week. I was one of several members from this place who went to the wind-up celebrations of that week at Kings Park. It was a beautiful night in the rotunda, which is a great location to celebrate something like Conservation Week. As well as a series of awards that went to some very worthwhile projects and individuals who have devoted a substantial part of their lives to the whole issue of environmental conservation, we had a real treat that night. That treat was a visit from “Sustainability Man”. “Sustainability Man” looked very spectacular as he bounded out of the shadows in Kings Park, because he happened to wear his underpants on the outside of his trousers, and he took the event by storm. I actually watched the expressions on the faces of the organisers very closely to make sure they had planned the arrival of “Sustainability Man”, and clearly they had.

**Hon Simon O’Brien:** What colour was the offending garment?

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I am terribly sorry, Hon Simon O’Brien, but I cannot remember.

**Hon Simon O’Brien:** Alas, the moment has gone, I think!

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** The colour is not what is indelibly imprinted on my memory, I have to say, but I might be able to do a little research on that.

**Hon Simon O’Brien:** I hope you are not enduringly traumatised, anyway!

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** No, it was not a traumatic experience at all. In fact, I am very pleased to be able to share with the house some of the contribution that “Sustainability Man” made to that event. “Sustainability Man”

talked at some length about water. I make it clear that I would not raise the issue of toilet paper in this house, but I do want to report a story that was told by “Sustainability Man” at that event. “Sustainability Man” said that his take on the whole issue of water conservation and improving the quality of water is that it is similar to opening a new roll of toilet paper. When we put a new roll of toilet paper on the holder, we take off squares and squares of paper at a time, because it is a nice new roll. When we get halfway through the roll, we think we must remember to replace the roll at some stage, and replenish the stock in the cupboard. It is not until we get to the last couple of squares of toilet paper that we realise just how far a couple of squares of toilet paper will go. He was drawing an analogy with our attitude to the use of our water. That was a very effective story to tell. It certainly stuck in my mind.

Last night in this house I talked about recycling and resource recovery. I pointed out that it is now a commonly-shared observation that when we talk about issues to do with conservation and the protection of scarce resources, we need to focus on change at the level of the individual. I think that is why that story from “Sustainability Man” stuck in my mind. If we are to effect real change in our attitude to water, we need to begin at the level of the individual. In the past decade or so since we started to take the conservation of our water resources seriously, we have learnt that we need to change individual patterns of behaviour. We have learnt also that we need to work on the relationships that form part of the whole cycle of the way we use water in our society. I think that is why I am so attracted to the wording of this motion. This motion captures that very well.

Like Hon Giz Watson, I am awaiting with considerable interest the contribution of the National Party members in this place to this debate. I want to remind honourable members again of a debate that we had more than three years ago in this house on climate change. That was the first debate on climate change in which I took part. During that debate, members of the Liberal Party made no attempt to disguise their disbelief and scepticism about climate change. I remember that I took an interjection from Hon Murray Criddle, who at that time was the only National Party member in the house. He made the point in that interjection that people in his party who were working on the land had been dealing with the concrete practical issues brought about by climate change for many decades; indeed, people who were working on the land had been trying to mitigate the effects of climate change by putting measures in place to prevent the degradation of their land. I am very much hoping that that is the nature of the contribution that National Party members will make to this debate. Therefore, I share Hon Giz Watson’s interest in their contributions, and hopefully we will be able to manage the business of this house in such a way that they can take part in debate on this motion.

Hon Giz Watson has raised in this motion, I think, a sense in which the elephant in the corner is our whole attitude towards the precautionary principle. I noticed in reading the background material that, as Hon Helen Morton has noted, a lot of it is very technical in nature and obviously relies on people who have more of a grasp of the science than perhaps anyone in this house does, certainly since the departure of Paul Llewellyn, I think it is probably fair to say. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental point to be made about our attitude to the precautionary principle. It seems to me that one problem is that in the past we always looked to the science of any particular area for certainty. We had all the debates amongst the philosophers and the people who are engaged in the humanities side of these debates about environmental protection and about the social effects of environmental degradation, but when we wanted the cold, hard facts we turned to the scientists.

I recall some years ago, I think probably perhaps even before I was sworn in as a member of this house, going to Collie with the then Premier, Hon Geoff Gallop, and busloads of people. There must have been hundreds of us. I do not know whether Hon Giz Watson was part of that event—she is shaking her head so I think not. The trip to Collie was to announce the commencement of one of our plans to combat salinity in the Collie River. That plan involved using the old mine shafts to take out the initial saline flush that comes down the river. We were met in the town of Collie by several buses that drove us to one of the sites, and on the bus I sat next to a very senior person from the Water Corporation. We started talking about the science and he explained to me something I thought was very interesting. It is another conversation that I have not forgotten, along with that with “Sustainability Man”. The man from the water authority said that they had done the science about water over the years based on readings that go back decades. Indeed, we must be almost at the point now at which we can talk about a century of statistics relating to everything to do with water from rainfall to run-off into the catchments to measuring the extent of salinity and other pollution in our water systems. This person explained to me that what has happened—I guess initially we want to say that it is happening because of climate change—is that all that statistical data is being thrown up in the air. All of a sudden we cannot look back decades and project what will happen. We have to keep condensing the time lines that we use because the change is happening so rapidly. Therefore, all the science associated with monitoring the catchments, the run-off and everything to do with our use of water is changing so rapidly that the science is almost not able to keep up with it. When that happens, of course the first thing we realise is that we can no longer look to science for the same kind of cold hard objective facts that we traditionally associated with the whole scientific enterprise. I think that is when we begin to realise that there are other ways of coming to understand the role that the precautionary principle can play in helping us

understand the science. There are other ways of talking about the precautionary principle, but it seems to me that in the issues raised by this motion we can come at it very clearly from the point of view that science can no longer produce the kind of objective data that it once could. It makes the whole underlying premise of the precautionary principle very relevant to this kind of discussion. The precautionary principle tells us that when there are a variety of projected outcomes, we must look to preventive measures, policy settings and all factors of managing a particular resource, that take into account the outcomes at the drastic end. That is why I strongly suspect that, in relation to the first part of this amendment, the mover of the motion, Hon Giz Watson—I have not had a chance to talk to her—will want to leave in the word “catastrophic”. I do not want to pre-empt her decision on that, but if it were my motion, I would want to leave that word in, because it draws our attention to the fact that the precautionary principle must be front and centre of all our deliberations on the protection of our water resources. As I have said, the precautionary principle has been difficult not only for us lawmakers who have to look at policy settings, but also for people across the whole range of work that goes on in the academies, in both the sciences and the humanities. While we are confronted with a range of options that includes catastrophic outcomes, our policy settings must pay more than lip service to the real possibility of situations with calamitous outcomes.

I want to make one other point in setting the general parameters for my discussion on this issue. I note that Hon Helen Morton referred to the triple bottom line. Although we should consider economic indicators, if we consider such indicators in isolation from social and environmental factors, we will not come to terms with all the crucial factors in this debate. The Greens (WA) motion has taken account of the triple bottom line, and Hon Giz Watson covered all three aspects of it very adequately in her discussion.

Moving on from those broader points, I noted also that Hon Giz Watson—I think I was also able to detect it in the contribution of Hon Helen Morton—expressed just a shade of praise for what the former government had done to guarantee the long-term future of Western Australia’s water resources. It is probably down to me to be a little more eloquent about the achievements of the former government.

**Hon Ed Dermer:** Don’t be too subtle!

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** That is right—one does not really have to be subtle about such things. I thank Hon Ed Dermer!

In 2001, with the election of the Gallop Labor government, it is fair to say that for the first time in the history of the state we saw some serious moves to change the way we as a community think about water. One of the first things that the Gallop Labor government did in 2001 was to convene the water symposium. That was a first. We had had symposia, summits, national conferences, or whatever else we want to call them, about a range of other issues. I remember the Community Drug Summit. We can go right back to the 1980s and recall the summits called in Canberra by the Prime Minister at the time, Bob Hawke. Of course, just recently we had the 2020 summit that was initiated by the current Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. We had had summits and national discussions about a range of other issues, but this, to my knowledge, was the first time we had ever had a water symposium. The important thing about the water symposium was that it acted on two levels. First, it was a very important symbolic gesture to bring together in this place people from right across the community—scientists, conservationists and, as I referred to earlier, volunteers who do much of the important work of environmental protection on the ground—so that they could pool their knowledge and understanding and, indeed, their hopes and expectations about future action. That was the symbolic level. I will try not to make a pun and talk about the wash-up, but one of the important outcomes of that symposium was that there was a very practical focus on the issue of water conservation and our use of water. That led to the release of the state water strategy in 2003—again, under the leadership of Geoff Gallop as Premier. It was the first time any government in Australia had produced such a document. It was a mark of the kind of understanding that Geoff Gallop brought to all issues related to sustainability that that document, the first of its kind in Australia, was released only two years into his term as Premier.

The Labor government started talking in 2001 about a strategy to drought-proof Western Australia. We all remember that language being used at the time. It was a very laudable aim, but I think that what happened in the discussions and thoughts on this matter over the following couple of years, especially after we looked at the outcomes of the water symposium, was that the concept of drought-proofing Western Australia was perhaps missing some of the key elements of the reality of living with water in this state. This is one of the driest places on the face of the earth, so to talk about drought-proofing it ran the risk, I suppose, of giving people the impression that what we were working towards was some kind of water utopia in which everybody could plant their lawns and water every day and that we could in some sense create an illusion that we were living in a place that was not constantly prone to drought. That language changed after a couple of years, and we moved to the concept that I think still has a great deal of currency, and I urge Hon Helen Morton to take this back to her discussions with her government—that is, the security through diversity water management strategy. I think that

much better captures the direction that we need to go in Western Australia. There is no way that we will be able to create a resource for ourselves that will enable us to have European gardens that are watered with the frequency that European gardens are watered. We have to move to a system in which people have a visceral understanding that they live in a place that is constantly beset by drought. I think that is the key that is captured by the notion of security through diversity.

I first arrived in Western Australia in the 1970s, and I remember that it was the decade in which people began to install reticulation at home. Until that stage we were a hand-watering state and we saw reticulation systems only in publicly managed facilities. Just after I had arrived at the end of the 1970s, I recall a discussion with somebody who was very proudly showing off his domestic reticulation system. I cannot remember the exact details, but I think at the time the then Water Authority was offering a kind of monitoring system for people who had a reticulation system installed in their home whereby they could invite somebody onto their property to monitor how it was going. He had just had his whole system assessed and the assessment had come back saying that his garden was actually receiving more water than a tropical garden situated right on the Equator that got hundreds of millimetres of water every year from monsoonal rains. Although I am talking about 35 years ago, there is still a strand of thinking that goes along these lines. We have not quite overcome the mentality that with the flick of a switch we can have lush lawns. As I said, the strategy adopted by the Gallop government captured that thinking very nicely through the concept of security through diversity.

Over the years the Gallop and Carpenter Labor governments then worked on building on the momentum that was created by the water symposium in 2001 and released the first state water strategy in 2003. That was then followed by the release of the state water plan in 2007. Again, it was a groundbreaking document and one of the first of its kind—although the rest of the country is slowly catching up with us—that put in place a very succinct set of priority actions that the Labor government had determined were going to be the priority actions from 2007 to 2011. I will go into those priority actions in some detail in a moment.

Before I move on to the specifics of the state water plan released in 2007, I want to draw the attention of honourable members to a couple of other things that happened during the reign of the Labor government in this state. I suppose the thing that has been most topical recently—tragically, as the reason for it totally escapes me and other members on this side of the house—is the government’s decision to scrap one of the best initiatives that we undertook while we were in government. I am talking about the initiative of the Waterwise rebate scheme. As I said, the logic of scrapping that scheme totally escapes me. I was very suspicious when the minister in the other place announced the scrapping of the program. I read very carefully his press release announcing that the program was being scrapped, because the whole press release refers to how successful the scheme was. There is no doubt about that and there can be no dissent about that in this place.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.