

WATER CORPORATION — WATER PIPES

794. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Water:

I refer to the Auditor General's report into the Water Corporation's management of water pipes.

- (1) Can the minister confirm that despite spending \$465 million on the pipe network since the 2014 audit, there has been no progress overall in reducing water loss?
- (2) With the volume of unbilled water, including due to leaks and bursts, measuring some 52 billion litres, equal to almost 14 per cent of the total supply, what is the minister doing to ensure that the Water Corporation reduces these substantial losses?

Ms M.M. Quirk: It's in the pipeline!

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

(1)–(2) I missed that.

Government members: It's in the pipeline.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I would have been disappointed today if I had not got a question on this topic, but I knew it would come from the Liberal Party and not the National Party, who were the stewards of the water portfolio under the previous government.

What the member probably does not understand, because he probably has not read the whole of the report, is that the Auditor General did a report in 2014 because there was a series of really substantial pipe bursts, mainly in the metropolitan area in 2013, which caused a huge amount of disruption in the metropolitan area. I was the shadow minister at the time. It was an interesting time to be shadow Minister for Water. I remember driving along Vincent Street on my way to work. There was a small car halfway into a sinkhole on Vincent Street because a pipe burst and it caused major disruption in the metropolitan area. Therefore, the Auditor General decided to do an investigation into how the Barnett government was managing the pipe networks. The report was absolutely scathing. Basically, it found that the Water Corporation under the previous government was not monitoring its major pipe networks and was basically running them to fail: "How do we know when they are going to break? The water will start flowing." It was then they would do something. The Auditor General was very, very critical about the management.

Since then, \$460 million has been spent on improving the Water Corporation's systems, so that it now actively monitors, basically, the main trunk mains. It uses all sorts of very sophisticated technology so that it has a better understanding of what is going on with those big mains. The little mains are very difficult, but even with those, it has introduced really innovative technology. Members have probably met Kep the dog, the world's first water leak detection dog, who is able to detect leaks in small pipes. A lot has been done by the Water Corporation, so it is proactively managing its pipes.

The Auditor General's report was very complimentary of the improvements that the corporation has made in that regard, but she still highlights that there is too much unbilled water. The member picked up on the 51 billion-litre figure. What that includes—the member did not mention this in his question—are things like water that is used for firefighting purposes. When a hydrant is used to put out a fire, we do not bill people for that water. When there is maintenance and pipes need to be flushed, we do not bill for that water. The amount of water that could potentially be recovered is significantly less than that. What the report does note is that Perth has the lowest rate of leaks and burst water mains of any capital city in Australia—not the worst, the member might think from his question, but the best.

We are still doing a lot to recover and improve the rate of water that is lost. There is 35 000 kilometres of pipe in Western Australia, the biggest jurisdiction for a water utility anywhere in the world, so it is inevitable that there will be some loss. For the member to cherry-pick the Auditor General's report without reflecting on the appalling record of the Barnett government—that is why the Leader of the Opposition is head down with a pen at the moment—really just shows that the member does not do his homework.