

WATER CORPORATION — HARDSHIP MEASURES

677. Ms L.L. BAKER to the Minister for Water:

I refer to the large number of struggling households that had their water supply cut off under the previous Liberal–National government. Can the minister please update the house on how the measures the McGowan government has implemented are helping Water Corporation customers who are facing hardship?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

I thank the member for the question. I find it pretty distasteful that members opposite should laugh at the suggestion that struggling households were having their water effectively cut off in large numbers under the previous government. The Water Corporation does not completely cut off the water of non-payers; it reduces it to a trickle, so that if they are patient, they can get a glass of water, but they cannot have a shower and they cannot use their washing machine. Under the previous Liberal–National government, every working day, Monday to Friday, nine families in Western Australia were having their water reduced to a trickle for non-payment of bills.

Mrs A.K. Hayden interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Darling Range, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Almost 2 500 families a year in Western Australia were having their water reduced to a trickle under the government of members opposite. When I came —

Mrs A.K. Hayden interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Darling Range, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr D.J. KELLY: It is interesting that the member for Darling Range has just asked how many are happening now, under this regime, because I am about to tell her. When we came into government, one of the first issues I raised with the Water Corporation was the level of these restrictions. I said it was simply not acceptable for such a large number of families to experience this because of bill shock.

Mrs A.K. Hayden interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Darling Range, I do not want to hear your voice again.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I initially said to Water Corporation, “I want you to see if you can reduce the number of families that experience this situation by 20 per cent.” The Water Corporation went away and had face-to-face conversations with some of the concession holders and some of the families who typically had the most difficulty paying their water bills. Out of that program, the Water Corporation has introduced a number of initiatives to assist people. One is the bill shock prevention program. When the Water Corporation identifies a household that has had an unusual spike in its water usage, usually due to a leak, then rather than just sending out a bill and letting the family reel in horror at what is going on, it now intervenes personally to speak to the household about the situation. To date in 2018, 654 customers have benefited from that early intervention program. We have introduced a greater early intervention program across all customers who are experiencing difficulties.

As a result of that early intervention program, the number of families who have had their water restricted has decreased—not by 20 per cent, but actually by 57 per cent. In the financial year 2017–18, the number of families who experienced that went from nearly 2 500 down to 1 063. That is a 50 per cent reduction in the number of families who have experienced that inconvenience, not because they are now not paying their bills, but because the Water Corporation is talking to those customers early, putting them on payment plans, and people are managing to get through whatever the difficulties were that caused them to get into difficulties with their water bill.

On top of that, I mentioned that the Water Corporation actually contacted —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! You sound like a rabble.

Mr D.J. KELLY: In addition to the face-to-face conversations that the Water Corporation had with some of those customers in hardship, it also introduced a number of other initiatives. One is called Medical Assist, which we previously announced. That is a program for people who are on home dialysis and are therefore having —

Mrs A.K. Hayden interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Darling Range, I call you to order for the third time.

Mr P.C. Tinley interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Housing, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr D.J. KELLY: People who are receiving home dialysis have extraordinarily high water bills, so under Medical Assist, people getting home dialysis now get an allowance of 180 000 litres of water per annum free. To date,

78 Western Australians on home dialysis have registered for that program. Home dialysis is difficult at the best of times; having to worry about their water bill is something that we, as a government, think those people can do without. The good news is that we have assisted people to pay their water bills, and the Water Corporation has done that within its existing budget. This is an example of how on our side we care about the people of Western Australia. We want to assist them by making it easier for them to pay their utilities, including their water bills. If we are smart about it, we can do this without a significant increase to the public purse.