

WATER — BURST MAINS PIPES

26. Mr D.J. KELLY to the Minister for Water:

I refer to the chaos during peak-hour traffic in North Perth last week caused by yet another burst water main and to this month's Economic Regulation Authority report that shows that the number of burst water mains in Perth is at a six-year high and that unplanned interruptions to supply for Perth residents has more than doubled since 2010. Has the minister's financial mismanagement, resulting in over a billion dollars in cuts —

Mr F.A. Alban interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Swan Hills!

Mr F.A. Alban interjected.

The SPEAKER: I know who I am calling next, member for Swan Hills, and you are the one. I call you to order for the first time.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Has the minister's financial mismanagement, resulting in over a billion dollars in cuts to the Water Corporation's capital works program, not caused this mess?

Ms M.J. DAVIES replied:

I am sure that everyone in this house is sick of the scaremongering that the member opposite generates about the Water Corporation and the Department of Water. Again, the member has cherry-picked parts of the report, so let us just put it in some context. Overarching, the Water Corporation compares very favourably with other utilities of a similar size. There are always improvements to be made. We do not walk away from that. But can I also explain that that 15.4 per cent increase represents two more breaks—from 13 to 15 per 100 kilometres of pipeline a year. We have an enormous network to maintain, and it is an aging network. As a consequence, and recognising that, we have increased our asset renewal program—we have almost tripled it—and we have increased our maintenance budget. We have introduced a number of programs —

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cockburn!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: We have introduced a number of programs to assist us in managing this, and we have almost finished placing 350 acoustic sensors on pipes in the Perth CBD so that we can identify earlier when these pipes are likely to fail.

I am sure the member opposite is not suggesting that we gold plate our network, because that would have an impact on the customer and on the amount of money they would have to pull out of their pocket to pay for water. The Water Corporation ensures it manages this enormous network. Sue Murphy and the board are tasked with doing that. That means from time to time we do have breaks, but it is an ageing network. I can only go back to the fact, member, that we have increased our asset renewal program—almost tripled it—and increased our maintenance budget.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Do you want the lecture that the Premier just gave the shadow Treasurer about how to read a budget? For goodness sake!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bassendean, you will get a supplementary. We need to move on.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: In addition to the work that I was talking about in relation to the acoustic sensors, a program that is almost completed, we have replaced nine water mains in the CBD—I saw one as I drove home from work—and another one is underway at the moment. We have increased our investment in the farmland supply scheme because that is where we lose a significant amount of water. There is a \$32 million investment program out there. That is to reduce the number of leaks and breaks, and the impact on the customer.

There are some positives in that report. I go back to the fact that we compare favourably with other utilities of a similar size. Our customer consumption continues to decrease. We have the unfortunate record of having high per capita water use but we continue to decrease that. We have seen sewer overflows halved and the duration of those interruptions have decreased. That is a number of the positives that have come out of that report. Yes, we have seen an increase in the leaks and breaks. To put it into context, we seem to be performing favourably in comparison with other utilities of a similar nature. That is the purpose of that report.