

WATER QUALITY — TOTAL DISSOLVED SOLIDS LEVELS

Statement

HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (Agricultural) [10.04 pm]: I want to make a few remarks tonight about some questions that I asked in question time today of the Minister for Water. Those questions were answered by the Minister for Mental Health; however, it is the Minister for Water that I have a bit of an issue with. I asked questions specifically relating to total dissolved solids levels in drinking water according to Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. I will quickly repeat the questions I posed. I asked: What are the minimum TDS requirements for Australian drinking water; can the minister name the 10 sites meeting those levels in the 52 midwest sites tested; and what action is the government taking to address the unsatisfactory TDS levels in the remaining 42 testing locations? I draw members' attention to the fact that earlier I quoted standing order 105, which states that an answer shall be concise and relevant. I know this happens in legislatures throughout the Westminster system but the responses I received today were —

- (1) This information is publicly available on the web. Please refer to the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.
- (2) This information is publicly available on the web. Please refer to the Water Corporation's "Drinking Water Quality Annual Report".

Hon Helen Morton interjected.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I will not respond to the minister but I will say that government by Wikipedia or Google is totally inappropriate. If ministerial staff are employed to gather information and put it in the public domain, to then turn around to a backbencher in the opposition and say, "You go find out the answer" is totally irresponsible and I do not believe it is in the right spirit of this legislature.

Hon Ed Dermer: Is it bordering on contempt?

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I do not know whether I would go quite that far. We genuinely need to adhere to a spirit of cooperation, fairness, accuracy or transparency—we can call it whatever we like. I would not have asked the question if I had a countless amount of time to go away —

Hon Helen Morton: You have the time.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: I ask the minister to wait a second. There are people out there who listen to Parliament and who carry out research, whether they are in libraries or elsewhere. They do not necessarily have recourse to this information or to the websites or they might not have the time. This is the reason we have a fairly civilised question time in the Legislative Council. If it happened in the other place, I would say "so what". I can understand the sort of things that happen over there, though I do not agree with them. I think that ministers and parliamentary secretaries in this chamber need to observe the standing orders protocols. I suppose the answers were concise; as they said, I should look at the website. That is fairly concise. However, the answers were totally irrelevant and totally inappropriate. I call upon the Leader of the House to perhaps take up this issue with the government. If the answers cannot be provided, that is fine; we all accept that, and that is a frequent occurrence. When we were on the government side, that happened and it certainly happens now. But to say that the information is publicly available on the web and we should find the answer ourselves, particularly when there are people in the broader public who want responses to questions and who are seeking information themselves, is not in the right spirit of the Legislative Council of Western Australia.

Hon Ed Dermer: Also, what's on the web today might be different tomorrow, I suppose.

Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM: That may well be so.

The PRESIDENT: I will give the call to Hon Helen Morton. If you take the call as it is, you have seven minutes and 52 seconds. If you make a request to speak under that new provision that I mentioned last night, you will have 10 minutes.