

FEDERAL BUDGET - ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO

**220. Mr R.C. KUCERA to the Minister for the Environment:**

Before I ask my question, as a Welshman who grew up in the shadow of the pits in South Wales, I just say what a magnificent effort the miners in Tasmania put in to rescue the two trapped miners. We should all be thinking of that and also thinking with great sadness that they bury one of their colleagues today.

Today, minister, media reports have stated that there will be a further \$500 million in federal funding for capital works in the Murray-Darling basin. Has there been any indication of how much will be spent on similar environmental problems in Western Australia?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

I thank the member for Yokine for the question. I read with interest this morning that the commonwealth government will be announcing in the budget a further \$500 million towards the Murray-Darling basin for initiatives to deal with the problems faced by that river system, particularly salinity. That will take spending on that river system by the commonwealth government over the term of the Howard government up to \$2 billion. I welcome that commitment; I think it is a good thing. That river system is incredibly important to Australia. Its health is incredibly important in an environmental and ecological sense. However, there is also a range of important environmental issues in Western Australia. The Swan and Canning Rivers have difficulties with nutrient loading; there is degradation of rivers throughout the south west of this state; there are incredible problems with salinity throughout the wheatbelt; and there is the threat of cane toads coming from the Northern Territory into Western Australia. On all those issues, this government in five years in office has spent a record amount of money to address them. However, we seek a little interest in Western Australia from the commonwealth. I agree with the decision to make available additional funding to address the problems in the Murray and Darling Rivers. However, what about the Avon catchment; what about the Swan River, what about our rivers in the south west; and what about salinity in the wheatbelt, where the commonwealth government is spending about one-tenth on the amount it will spend on the Murray-Darling basin? It is about time that the commonwealth government recognised that in many respects this state is carrying the national economy, and that it needs to put some resources back into Western Australia to address those environmental issues.