

WATER FOR FOOD PROGRAM — SOUTH WEST

96. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Minister for Water:

The Myalup–Wellington Water for Food project has the potential to create 200 jobs in construction and 1 500 ongoing jobs through the expansion of irrigated agriculture and a reduction of salinity in the Wellington Dam. When will the minister’s government stop dragging its heels and commit to this transformational project?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

It is a very good question.

The SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr D.J. KELLY: Sorry.

The SPEAKER: Members on the right, your own minister is up talking. Do not interrupt.

Mr D.J. KELLY: It is a very good question. The former Minister for Water was extraordinarily busy in the dying months of the previous government, committing to numerous projects worth tens of millions of dollars—money that government did not have! In the area of Water for Food, I think she turned a \$40 million program into a program worth \$127 million. The former Minister for Water committed to four projects during December and January in the dying moments of the previous government. One of those projects was in conjunction with Harvey Water to try to make good the water resource that is currently Wellington Dam. Wellington Dam is too salty to get best value from that resource. The project committed the state government to \$37 million worth of funding. It includes an application to the federal government for, I think, \$140 million, so Barnaby Joyce is keen to see whether the project will go ahead. It is one of the many projects that we are currently looking at to determine whether it is money well spent. One of the things we know about the previous government—the previous Minister for Water is a good example—is that it had no idea what good value for money meant. When I get projects on my desk —

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I am getting to that.

When I get projects on my desk that have been approved by the previous government and the briefing is that the previous government approved them —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! Member for Collie–Preston and Leader of the National Party, if you want to have a chat, go outside!

Mr D.J. KELLY: When I get projects on my desk that show the previous government committed tens of millions of dollars’ worth of public money on the basis that it was in the public interest and good value for money, believe it or not, I do not take that on face value. I do not because I have seen what the former government has done to the state finances! Before I commit \$37 million worth of state government money, I will give those projects due consideration. I have met with the proponent of that project, Harvey Water, and I have met with the Department of Water to get advice. My department has communicated with Barnaby Joyce and the minister responsible at the federal level. We have told him that we are still considering the project. It may well be that we come to the conclusion it is good value for money, but we will do it in a timely fashion. We will not commit taxpayers’ money, which we do not have, to multimillion-dollar projects, just because the former Minister for Water said it was a good idea, because we do not trust what members opposite say.

Point of Order

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The minister referred to what looked like a block of official documents on his desk. I saw him refer to them on at least two occasions during his response to the question.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I ask you whether you would ask that the minister table those official documents, please, Mr Speaker. It looked to me like a file.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister was clearly not quoting from any documents. He was merely referring to notes, so there is no point of order.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: I saw him clearly reading.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! Minister, were you quoting from an official document?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I was not quoting it. If you go back and look at the video, I do not think I looked at it even once.