

SALINITY, BILATERAL AGREEMENT WITH THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT

**677. Mr R.N. SWEETMAN to the Premier:**

I refer the Premier to his media statement dated 26 November 2002, "Western Australia could look forward to a massive increase in funding to combat salinity following the signing of a bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth Government . . .".

- (1) Will the Premier confirm that he signed this agreement prior to the conclusion of negotiations and that the document was not part of the national action plan for salinity and water quality agreed to by the Commonwealth?
- (2) Will the Premier also confirm that in order to conclude this agreement and receive full commonwealth funding, the State Government must provide new and matching funds rather than funds that have already been derived from existing state government agencies?
- (3) Will the Premier inform the House whether these new and matching funds are contained in tomorrow's budget?

**Dr G.I. GALLOP replied:**

- (1)-(3) We did sign because the Commonwealth asked us to. The purpose of our signing was to respond to the request of the Commonwealth to sign. We could get the general agreement signed off and then work through the specific programs. I find it extraordinary that members of the Liberal Party and the National Party are now criticising us for doing something that they were calling on us to do.

Mr C.J. Barnett: You are meant to be the Premier of the State. You are a joke.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: Those worms are really working.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Just grow up.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: The Leader of the Opposition cannot cop it.

When it comes to the question of pre-existing moneys and new moneys, we accepted that principle with the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth wrote back acknowledging that we accepted that principle. That is not an issue. The issue is that we put forward a range of programs that would have contributed significantly to combating salinity and creating quality water supplies in Western Australia. They were knocked back by the Commonwealth. We will continue to negotiate until we get commonsense on these issues. My answer is yes, we did sign and the member for Ningaloo's party was calling upon us to sign. We have accepted that we must provide new money and new programs to justify getting commonwealth support. We put those suggestions forward and the two commonwealth ministers spoke of them in glowing terms. Unfortunately, when the matter got to the Prime Minister's office, it was rejected for reasons we do not understand. However, we will continue to take up the case. We are keen to get a resolution of the issue. I spoke recently to Wilson Tuckey about it in Albany. We have a difference of view on the matter, but we will work on it until we obtain a resolution.