

WATER RESTRICTIONS

**275. Mr O'GORMAN to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage:**

Given the exceptionally dry season that Perth has just experienced, and the forecast that there is only an average chance of a wet spring, what action is the Government considering to improve water conservation, and is the Government considering water restrictions?

**Dr EDWARDS replied:**

I thank the member for the question. As members know, the picture at the moment with our water resources is particularly bleak. We have had the driest summer on record followed by the driest ever start to winter. Until recently, we have had a drought - the driest period since 1914 - and the problem is that as of yesterday, the metropolitan dams are at only 26 per cent of their capacity. This issue affects country electorates because those dams supply the towns along the goldfields agricultural water system. However, it is not only the dams that are a problem. We also have a problem with ground water. People ask why Perth has water problems when there is so much ground water. Currently, 75 per cent of Perth's water comes from ground water but we are running close to having to accept some unacceptable environmental consequences due to our use of that ground water. The problem is that for the past 30 years, it really has not rained like it used to. Stream run-off is down by 40 per cent and, as a consequence, if it does not rain in the next few years, we will have a big crisis on our hands. The Government is in the process of looking at long and short-term strategies for this solution. We will continue with the work started by the previous Government, which built the Harvey Dam and accelerated the water resource program. However, the problem is that dams can be built everywhere but if it does not rain, those dams do not fill.

The Government is looking at imposing water restrictions on the days when reticulation and sprinklers can be used now. If we have to, we will restrict the use of sprinklers and allow only hand watering. We will also investigate how people use their domestic bores. It is really crunch time for our water resources. We are in a 25-year spell of really low rainfall. It is part of a 75-year spell of lower than average rainfall. We do not know what will happen in the next few years and it is crunch time. We are facing a crisis because we cannot manage mother nature. However, we can manage the water that we do have. I will be taking this message to the community through a government education program. We will be asking all members of the community to work together to help protect a resource that other parts of the world go to war over.