

WATER PRICES — INCREASES

179. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Water:

I refer to the estimated \$5.1 billion dividend from Water Corporation projected over the forward estimates. How can the minister justify further water price increases on struggling Western Australians, many of whom are currently facing rental increases of between 10 and 20 per cent?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

I am happy that the Leader of the Liberal Party asked me that question. The fact that we have kept water price increases to approximately the rate of inflation this year—last year, water prices actually went down—shows how we have gone above and beyond to make sure that families can pay their water bills without undue stress. Compare that with what members opposite did when they were last in government. Between 2009–10 and 2016–17, the former Liberal government increased the price of water bills for families above the rate of inflation every single year, with a 6.7 per cent increase, a 10.8 per cent increase and an 8.5 per cent increase. It just went on every year. In budget after budget, the former Liberal government increased the price of water by above the rate of inflation. In its eight years, water prices went up by 66.8 per cent. What has this government done? Since we came to government, there has been a 13.1 per cent increase, plus the increase that was just announced in this budget, so our record on water price increases is far superior to anything the former government ever did.

Apart from looking at the raw numbers, a better way of dealing with this issue is to look at the number of people who have had their water cut off because they could not pay their bills. Under the former Liberal government, that number increased almost every year. In the last full year that members opposite were in government, when the current Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Water, 2 500 Western Australian families had their water cut off because they could not pay their bills. That is a terrible record. I have raised that in this Parliament time after time. When we came to government, one of the first things I said to the Water Corporation was that it had to deal with this issue differently. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we had reduced that number by almost 70 per cent because we were being proactive with those people who were struggling to pay their bills. Families were having their household water cut off when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Water—2 500 families a year. We cut that number by almost 70 per cent. Of course, during the COVID-19 pandemic, no-one had their water restricted for not paying their bills.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Our record on this issue is far superior to what the former Liberal–National government did when the current Leader of the Opposition was principally the Minister for Water. Our record is far superior than the former Liberal government's, to the point that the Financial Counsellors Association of WA has written to me about the way in which we have handled people's water bills, not criticising but complimenting the government on how it has handled this issue.