

WATER SERVICES INDUSTRY REGULATION — WATER SERVICES ACT 2012

930. Mr V.A. CATANIA to the Minister for Water:

Last year, the Liberal–National government introduced the Water Services Act 2012, reducing red tape for the water services industry. What other steps is this government taking to reduce unnecessary regulation across the water industry?

Ms M.J. DAVIES replied:

I thank the member for the question. He is entirely right—the Water Services Act 2012 and its supporting regulations did come into effect late last year. The old legislation for water services was spread across 10 separate acts, and many of the provisions were quite difficult to interpret. That made it a very hard and expensive process for anyone who was trying to understand the law and how it applied in a particular case. We have seen since this new legislation was passed that Busselton Water has expanded its operating licence in the south west to take advantage of the new level playing field that has been created by this act. In a state the size of Western Australia, with a vast range of different water resources and communities, it is important that we have legislation and regulations that are flexible to meet the needs of local communities. An example in the member's electorate is the Shire of Murchison. The Shire of Murchison has applied under this new legislation for an exemption from the requirement to hold a licence to provide a water supply service to the Murchison settlement. Only about 20 people live in the Murchison settlement, and the water is sourced from two different bores. Given the remote location and the small scale of the service, the previous regulatory burden was quite high, and the imposition from the licensing under the previous legislation was quite considerable. This new legislation will allow it to apply for an exemption, and we will still make sure that it is operating within a certain licence, but it will certainly reduce the burden for that small community. Saving time in licence processing and management also allows the government to increase its efforts in other areas of water management. We have had fewer licence applications to process and a faster turnaround of applications awaiting assessment, and that is a win for the whole community.

We are currently working on further reform in this space—the second stage of water reform—and the range of proposed reforms have been presented to the public in a consultation process. This is, again, streamlining very old and outdated legislation into a single contemporary act. This proposed legislation will be more capable of accommodating the fact that we live in a drying climate, have water resources that are reaching their allocation limits, and there is a more complicated environment than perhaps when the original legislation was envisaged and created. Ultimately, we will simplify that process. We are continuing to work under the current legislative framework, but I know that in the coming months we will endeavour to try to progress that even further, and, hopefully, in the new year we will see further legislation to streamline that process.