

SALINITY PROJECTS, NEW STATE MONEY

598. Mr R.N. SWEETMAN to the Premier:

In answer to a previous question today, the Premier said the State had put up \$88 million worth of salinity projects and the federal Government was prepared to put up only \$30 million. Will the Premier commit new money in the next budget to meet the federal funding guidelines to ensure that all these worthwhile projects receive funding?

Dr G.I. GALLOP replied:

In answer to the first question today, I pointed out that the State did meet the guidelines put forward. In the conversations held between the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Minister for the Environment and Heritage with their respective commonwealth ministers, Kemp and Truss, there has been clear recognition of the value of the projects the State has put up that add up to that \$88 million. Unfortunately, when the Prime Minister's office became involved in this issue, all of a sudden the important projects recognised by the federal ministers were said to be outside the framework of what the Commonwealth had offered. We have the ridiculous situation in which the Prime Minister is telling us that he would much prefer to have a signature on the agreement without having any specific projects signed up - that is, the general framework - so we can get on with planning what the projects might be. I think the people of Western Australia have gone well beyond that point. We have Landcare and resource management groups that are active; they know what needs to be done and have come up with proposals that we are able to put on the table now. The Commonwealth clearly has a budget problem and is trying to shift the problem to the States. The Commonwealth Government is incapable of dealing with the States on a proper basis in our Federation. I will draw a contrast. All the Labor States in Australia were presented with two challenges in the past two years: one was the insurance crisis we now face and the other was the threat of terrorism. On both issues, all the Labor States have sat down with the Commonwealth and examined the legislative, administrative and policy changes needed so our nation can deal with those challenges. That is the way the Labor States approach these issues. How does the Commonwealth approach the issue of salinity, which is another major challenge facing this nation, including Western Australia? What does it do? It plays politics. As the member for Peel said by way of an earlier interjection, it plays politics by sending in none other than Wilson Tuckey to try to stir the pot and stop a resolution emerging between the State and the Commonwealth.

That is where John Howard is with his Government today. He is letting down the people of this nation on one of the largest environmental issues we have ever faced.