

WATER PRICES — INCREASES

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

I have a supplementary question. Given that the state government is expected to receive a \$5 billion surplus windfall, why is it not returning some of that dividend to struggling Western Australian families and continuing to freeze water charges?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

I just outlined to the member how in the last budget water prices went backwards. This year, we will be maintaining our election commitment by keeping increases to inflation. Compared with the former Liberal government's record, it is phenomenal that the Leader of the Liberal Party even has the gall to stand up and ask this question. But his supplementary question gives me an opportunity to mention two other ways in which we are assisting people and giving back.

We have introduced an allowance whereby people who are doing home dialysis—the member for Cottesloe might want to pay attention to this—and might otherwise end up with a large water bill get a free allowance of about 180 000 litres of water each year. Because they can do their dialysis at home, it saves the Minister for Health some money in his budget and those people do not end up with a huge water bill for that privilege. We call that Medical Assist. We have extended that program to people who have a family member who suffers from incontinence. If a family member has incontinence, people can end up with huge water bills, for obvious reasons. We have extended the Medical Assist program so that people who have a family member with incontinence do not end up with a huge water bill. The member asked me how we are giving back. They are two examples of programs that we have introduced because we have a very understanding attitude when people are struggling to pay their water bills. That is unlike members opposite, who, with the Leader of the Opposition as Minister for Water, were cutting off water to 2 500 Western Australian families each year because they could not pay their bills. That was under members opposite when they were in government.