

## NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR SALINITY AND WATER QUALITY

### *Motion*

**MR B.J. GRYLLS** (Merredin) [5.05 pm]: I move -

That this House calls on the Gallop Government to immediately prioritise and fund projects through the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality that have been developed by the community and accredited through regional natural resource management plans, and to re-submit these plans to the federal Government so that Western Australia does not forfeit matching funding to other States.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.W. Andrews): The member for Merredin has the call but there is too much noise in the Chamber.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I am very happy to be able to move this motion in the Parliament today. Salinity is a critical issue not only for regional Western Australia and the National Party in the country areas that we represent but also for the whole State. As the salinity issue has developed over the years, the whole of Western Australia has recognised the importance of what is happening to our dry land agriculture and our dry land landscape. There is some momentum behind a push to find a solution to the salinity issue. That push is coming not only from country people in Australia who have an interest in the issue but also from people in the metropolitan areas. This is a very critical issue. It is about the great Australian environment and what we love about Australia, which is under jeopardy from this salinity scourge. The motion that the National Party brings to the Parliament today calls on the Government to immediately prioritise and fund projects through the national action plan, which is a federal initiative that provides moneys to local and regional resource management groups so that they can build and work on projects that will in some way alleviate salinity. I was hoping that the Premier would be in the Chamber today because most of my comments today are directed towards him, as he has taken over the portfolio on the national action plan for salinity. I hope he will take the time to read this debate as it unfolds and will act on some of the issues that will be raised.

The National Party calls on the Premier to come to the party and to stop playing political games that are putting at risk the \$158 million on offer from the federal Government under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. Debate has arisen again in the past few days because the federal Government has not signed off on Western Australia's proposal for many reasons that I will outline in this debate. One thing I will quickly refute is the claim by the Gallop Labor Government that the federal Government is slashing its environment budget, and that this is the reason money is not flowing to Western Australia. That claim is misleading, and I will outline why. The allocation of funding for the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality has been made. The commitment has not altered. In fact, I will outline the commitments that have been made. New South Wales was offered \$198 million by the federal Government and also committed \$198 million of state funds. Victoria was offered \$152 million and committed \$152 million. Queensland was offered \$81 million by the federal Government and accepted that offer. South Australia was offered \$93 million and accepted that offer. Tasmania was offered \$12 million and accepted \$12 million. The Northern Territory was offered \$6 million and accepted \$6 million. All other States have accepted the full allocation of money that was allocated to them under the national action plan. As members know, Western Australia, on the other hand, was offered \$158 million by the federal Government but accepted only \$80 million. That \$80 million is still not flowing to this State because agreement has not yet been reached.

It is disappointing that neither the Minister for the Environment and Heritage nor the parliamentary secretary who represents the Minister for Agriculture in this House, the member for Cockburn, is here. What is happening is that the Labor Premier of New South Wales has accepted 100 per cent of the money on offer from the federal Government. The Labor Premier of Victoria has accepted 100 per cent of the money on offer. The Labor Premier of Queensland has accepted 100 per cent of the money on offer. The Labor Premier of South Australia has accepted 100 per cent of the money on offer. The Labor Premier of Tasmania has accepted 100 per cent of the money on offer, and the Labor Chief Minister of the Northern Territory has accepted 100 per cent of the money on offer. However, the Labor Premier of Western Australia has accepted only 50 per cent of the money on offer. This is extremely disappointing to me. On my election to this House in 2001, I immediately picked up this issue. I have been pushing for a solution to this issue since that time. Every other State is taking up its full allocation of money, and that money is flowing to natural resource management projects in those States. However, Western Australia accepted only 50 per cent of the money on offer and that money is still not flowing to Western Australian projects.

Western Australia's inability to gain its full allocation of national action plan funding is not about party politics. It is also not about federal budget pressures, as the Premier incorrectly stated on Monday, 7 April. Clearly, all the money offered by the federal Government has been accepted, allocated and committed, except for the money

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

offered to Western Australia. The federal Government offered Western Australia \$158 million. It was the Premier who said that he would put only \$80 million on the table. The above numbers clearly refute the idea that this problem is a result of a federal coalition government vendetta against state Labor Governments, which is how the Premier has tried to frame the issue in his recent comments and media statements.

Now that we have ruled out that theory, purely by looking at the facts and not using any emotion or party politics to make the point, I will look at the actions of the Premier that have led to the mess we are in today. The intergovernmental agreement was sent to Western Australia in December 2000. The previous Deputy Premier, Hon Hendy Cowan, had this agreement for approximately two weeks before Christmas 2000. Cabinet does not meet during the Christmas and New Year period, and the election was then called. I refute the argument that the coalition refused to sign the agreement. Clearly, looking at the facts we have at hand, the previous Cabinet did not have the opportunity to consider and consent to this agreement before the change of Government at the last election.

The Premier's claim that he is following the position of Hon Hendy Cowan is also irrelevant. Six months after the intergovernmental agreements were sent out, South Australia announced that it had signed up. It was the first State to sign up to the intergovernmental agreement. Seven months later, Victoria signed the intergovernmental agreement. Every other State signed the intergovernmental agreement by 13 July 2001. Western Australia signed the intergovernmental agreement 12 months after every other State, in May 2002. The facts are on the table. By delaying the signing of the intergovernmental agreement for 12 months after every other State, the Premier and Treasurer nicely averted committing funds for another budget round. I will present the facts to back up this statement. I do not have to look further than the Gallop Labor Government's own budget papers. The Treasury 2001-02 midyear financial statement contains a policy decision that affects expenditure. It states that \$4.2 million would be deferred from the state salinity strategy. There are two very important points here. The first is that this was a policy decision that affected expenditure. The Premier and his ministerial colleagues made a conscious policy decision to defer expenditure. Secondly, this deferral of expenditure was of state funds and not of matching funds that should have been committed over and above state expenditure on the national action plan.

I also refer to the Water and Rivers Commission section of the 2002-03 budget papers, which proudly states that one of the major achievements for 2001-02 was to delay distribution of \$10 million of funds to agreed engineering projects. At the time, this was of great concern to my National Party colleagues and me, because engineering options have gained a lot of credibility in solving salinity problems. In the past 10 years there have been some excellent examples of deep drainage plans that have caused a draw down of the water table. Land thought not to be viable was returned to productive use. The fact that \$10 million of funding was delayed to these engineering projects was of great concern to us at the time. A group in the wheatbelt currently is looking at engineering options. I hope that the minister will support their claims and the projects that they will put forward. I hope that when the national action plan is finally signed, some of the funding will go to such groups, which are doing the hard work on the ground.

Based on the evidence presented in the Treasurer's budget papers, the Government has clearly taken every opportunity to delay state-based funding for salinity projects in Western Australia. The Premier made it clear in his media statement of 7 April that the national action plan will be the State's sacrificial lamb to make up for the \$20 million of general funding cuts from the federal Government. This is a problem we are seeing more and more in regional Western Australia. When it is identified that there will be a budget shortfall in some area, the first place the Government goes is regional Western Australia. Dollars are clawed back from the regions to help prop up metropolitan-based projects that this Government is pushing forward. Once again, because of the \$20 million of general funding that the State has lost under the federal Government's funding agreements, the national action plan seems the likely loser. Straightaway, that affects on-the-ground projects in regional Western Australia.

The next stage of the national action plan is the bilateral agreements, which will allow funding to start to flow to individual States. Every other State has now signed a bilateral agreement with the federal Government. More than \$70 million of actual funding is flowing to other States and projects. The other States currently have projects up and running.

In October last year I travelled to Mildura to attend the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality round table, at which all the relevant agencies that are involved in the salinity issue came together to look at moving forward and to compare projects, plans and ideas. This was a real coming together of some of the most innovative thinkers involved in fighting salinity problems. It was disappointing for me to be one of the only Western Australian representatives at the round table. Neither the Minister for the Environment and Heritage nor the Minister for Agriculture was there. The parliamentary secretary who represents the Minister for

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

Agriculture in this House also was not present. It was left to the National Party to provide a Western Australian representative to the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality round table.

Mr B.K. Masters: Do you know why nobody was there from the Government?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I do not think it was a priority.

Dr J.M. Edwards: Government officers were there and gave us reports.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: The government officers who were there certainly were not very vocal in outlining what projects were going forward. Someone from the other State Governments stood and outlined what they were doing to combat salinity. They talked about projects and the results of their projects. In October last year tens of millions of dollars were already on the ground in the eastern States of Australia. It was very concerning to me, as a Western Australian representative at this water quality round table, because the Western Australian submissions could cover only the fact that we were still in negotiations to sign off on the national action plan. There was no talk of any money going on the ground and there was no talk of the valuable work that was being done by coordinators and volunteers. Every night in the wheatbelt towns the lights are on until late when people are volunteering their time doing countless hours of very important work to find solutions to the salinity issues at a regional level. They are doing that work with the hope that our State Government will sign off on the national action plan so that money can start to flow for the projects they have put forward. Those groups are very concerned because Western Australia is the only State that has not signed this agreement; it is the only State that has not seen money flowing to its projects. At the moment these people are just hanging on.

Western Australia has already lost many land care coordinators to the other States, because as soon as the other States receive their millions of dollars in funding under the national action plan they can put up projects and advertise for staff, experts and coordinators. We have seen a brain drain from Western Australia of these committed, enthusiastic and intelligent land care people who have gone to other States where the money is already flowing.

The salinity and water quality round table conference that I attended in Mildura was distressing for me as the member for Merredin and as the member for the wheatbelt where this issue is so critical. Every other State Labor Government had committed to this process and money was flowing, whereas Western Australia - the State most in need of the funding; the State with the biggest problem; the State that relies on dry land agriculture for such a large proportion of its export income and such a large proportion of its wealth - was lagging well behind the other States and was really losing out. The other States did not mind that Western Australia had not signed up for the national action plan. An amount of \$158 million was available for the other States to get their hands on. These points were raised at this round table conference and the other States said that if Western Australia could not get its act into gear, the federal Government should put that money in places where projects were up and running and were identified. It was left to me as the National Party spokesman on water and salinity to defend Western Australia and say that it was a critical issue for this State; that we needed that money and it should not be allocated to other States. The last letter from the Prime Minister indicates that Western Australia's \$158 million allocation is under threat from the other States and is a direct threat from the Prime Minister that unless Western Australia gets its act into gear the money will go to the other States.

The Premier finally released a media statement on 26 November 2002 claiming to have signed the bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth that would allow funding to flow to Western Australia. This was not correct. Every other State, upon signing a real agreement with the Commonwealth, released a joint statement with the Prime Minister. Is it any surprise that the Prime Minister was not mentioned in the Gallop Government's statement? The Premier sent a self-serving draft agreement that pre-allocated the bulk of this national action plan funding to six projects that were largely developed by state government agencies. I am disappointed that the Premier is not in the Chamber, because last week in this House he said, when referring to me -

Obviously the member knows more than I do.

Frankly, I do know more than he does about this issue, because I have been working on it day and night. This issue is so critical to the people in my electorate, the people in regional Western Australia and, as I outlined at the beginning of my speech, to the people in the whole of this State, that it does need someone to work on it day and night who knows the real issues and why this money is not flowing to Western Australia. This debate was brought forward today to try to get some commitment from the Premier and the ministers involved to move this issue forward. First, the Premier should direct the two ministers responsible for the environment and agriculture that they need to take charge of this process and accept responsibility, rather than direct that responsibility back to their departments. At the moment the departmental heads are causing a backlog in this process and it will require some strong leadership from the two ministers to move this issue forward. It is heartening to know that the Minister for Agriculture will be meeting with Minister Truss on Friday on the east coast to try to move this

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

issue forward. That is what it needs. Ministers should be talking to ministers to solve this problem. At the moment Western Australia is in a quagmire and it is not moving forward at all. Secondly, the Premier and the two ministers responsible for this issue need to obtain the regional natural resource management plans that the five regional NRM groups really want to see implemented. I make this clear distinction because we do not want these regional NRM groups pressured into promoting semi-commercial, government agency developed projects out of fear of losing funding. Six major projects take up the vast majority of Western Australia's allocation of \$158 million.

It is of extreme concern to me, as the member representing the wheatbelt, when I see these volunteers and other workers feverishly working to develop projects at a grassroots level. In my home town of Corrigin there are two or three meetings a month at which people put forward ideas and projects. They would like some of that national action plan funding to become available so they can turn those projects into reality and achieve a result. At the moment six semi-commercial, government agency projects have been put up for funding, and we are concerned that the NRM groups are being held over a barrel, because they fear that, if they do not agree with these big picture agency projects, in a year's time the national action plan still will not be signed and they will not see any money flowing. The two ministers responsible should get back to the local NRM groups and move their plans forward, which is what the national action plan requires. It should not be for a state government agency to put forward projects; NRM groups should put forward projects, which will then be matched with funding from the federal Government. The plans from these five NRM regional groups should be executed and accredited, and that means being signed off by the Prime Minister and then by this Labor Government. Once that happens this money will commence flowing to Western Australian land care groups.

Throughout this process members of the National Party have argued the facts, we have crunched the numbers and read the detail of the agreement with the Commonwealth. Right from the start we have raised in Parliament, through media statements and privately with the ministers, that Western Australia should follow the criteria set out in the national action plan. While we argue for old money to be matched by the Commonwealth, while we try to have existing projects and agency-based projects funded, the Commonwealth will keep coming back and saying that Western Australia's plans do not meet the national action plan criteria. The problem is that every other State has come up with new money. Every other State has come up with projects that fit the criteria, and that is how they have managed to get the money under the national action plan flowing through to their local land care groups. The Gallop Labor Government is certainly out on a limb on this issue. Until it has gone through this process, which is clearly outlined in the national action plan, there will not be any break in the deadlock that has developed on this issue.

The National Party will continue to push for this essential program so that we do not lose the funding to other States. We are really under pressure to do that at the moment. Following my time in Mildura and after spending some time on the Murray-Darling Rivers, I could see the rapid expansion in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. They have some innovative plans that will return good dividends to the regions that they affect. Western Australia is under a great deal of pressure to not lose the federal government money to those plans.

I end my contribution to this debate by asking a question of the Premier. He is not here today, but he will be able to answer me in time. If the Premier is delivered a regional natural resource management plan, accredited by the Commonwealth - a process that the National Party has been trying to facilitate until now and is more than willing to facilitate in the future - will he guarantee to sign these agreements? I put that question to the Premier, and we need that question answered so that valuable national action plan money will flow to the regions in Western Australia that are affected by salinity.

**MR B.K. MASTERS** (Vasse) [5.31 pm]: I am very pleased to offer my personal support to this very good motion moved by the member for Merredin. It is worthwhile to summarise what the motion says. It calls on this so-called green Gallop Government to prioritise and fund projects through the national action plan and to resubmit those plans to the federal Government as a matter of urgency, so that we can gain access to 100 per cent of the \$158 million that the federal Government is offering to Western Australia under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.

I will spend one minute, maybe two, giving a brief summary of my credentials on this issue of salinity. I was, and still am, a member of the Vasse-Wonnerup Land Conservation District Committee. I am a former chairman of the Geographe Bay Advisory Committee. That catchment management group has now transformed itself, with the help of the Water and Rivers Commission, into the Geographe Catchment Council. I have also been on regional assessment panels three times - twice for national land care program funding and once for Natural Heritage Trust funding, whereby money for projects that were proposed in the south west region had to be assessed for their technical and other merits. In addition to that, in my capacity as the President of the Busselton Naturalists Club, I have been intimately involved in understanding salinity in an area of this State in which, until

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

recently, no-one believed there was any salinity. I am referring to the high rainfall areas of the south west, specifically the Swan coastal plain in the Busselton-Capel area.

Since 1987 the Busselton Naturalists Club has been managing 75 hectares of remnant vegetation known as the Ambergate reserve, which is situated about nine kilometres south of the Busselton town site. It contains threatened ecological communities and endangered plant and faunal species. Its conservation value is extremely high, and it is in very good environmental condition. This is in spite of the fact that in the 1930s it was used as a camp for the group settlers of those days, prior to their going onto their individual group settlement blocks.

In the 1950s a small portion of it was used by a person who, on horseback, delivered mail to those group settlers who were still left on the land. That postal worker dug a well close to the centre of those 75 hectares of bush. In the middle of winter when the water in the well is almost at ground level, if one drops a salinity meter down into it, it goes through less than one metre of drinkable water, and the remaining two to two and a half metres of that well contain saline water that is up to one-third as salty as the sea. Should that saline water get into the root zone of those 75 hectares of bushland, all that bushland and all the birds and animals that depend on it will curl up their toes and die almost overnight. In other words, there is salinity in that part of the world. The government agencies refused to admit that there was a problem, and it took a lot of pushing by me, by people involved with the Geographe Bay Advisory Committee, and later on by people from the Geographe Catchment Council to get the government officers of the day to accept that there was a salinity problem that needed active management. I will not go into details. It is a different salinity problem from that in the wheatbelt. Nonetheless, I hope I have given the House an idea of the fact that I am well aware of not only the salinity problem but also the causes of it.

This motion has been moved today by the member for Merredin essentially because the Gallop Government is a Perth-centric Government. It is basing almost all of its decisions on the hope that one vote, one value will be enshrined in our electoral legislation before the next election needs to be called, in which case there will be a transfer of eight country seats into the city, leaving just 15 seats in non-metropolitan Perth; that is, the rest of Western Australia. In almost everything that has been done, including the failure to provide money in a way that meets the guidelines of the national action plan, and a range of matters that I will briefly touch on in a second, all the decisions have been influenced to a greater or lesser degree by a Government that believes it can get one vote, one value through, and therefore the value of the votes of country people at the next election will be virtually zero.

I point out that most members of the Country Labor Alliance, or whatever they call themselves, are pretty reasonable guys.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.W. Andrews): Members, I think the comment was rhetorical.

Ms J.A. Radisich interjected.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I am sorry, I do not consider the member for Swan Hills to be a country member. I must say to all those members that they are expendable when it comes to the deliberations of their Government and what one vote, one value will mean should it be passed and put into law. The member for Eyre is a little lucky, because the new seat that will be created around Kalgoorlie-Boulder will probably be a somewhat safe Labor seat. Therefore, we might see the member for Eyre back in this place again in two years. However, nice guys that the members for Albany and Collie may be, I do not think we will see them again. I hope that a Liberal Party member will be back in Albany, and I believe there will probably be a National Party member in Collie. Those Labor members should be aware of how expendable they are. Even though I would love to see them here next time around -

Mr M.W. Trenorden: You had better be careful.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: No, from a personal point of view - the reality is that they will be considered expendable by their own Government. We need to look only, for example, at the decision that was made to basically close down the timber industry in the south west of Western Australia.

Mr R.C. Kucera: You profess to be a conservationist. What a joke!

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I will ignore the minister. I will treat him as he deserves to be treated. We also need to look only at the amount of money that is not being spent on roads in rural Western Australia, and the amount of money that is not being spent by the Water Corporation on deep sewerage schemes and so on in towns such as Busselton and Dunsborough that desperately need those sorts of expenditures. We also need to look only at the lack of genuine and honest commitment to fund with new money, according to the requirements of the intergovernmental agreement between the Western Australian Government and the federal Government, the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. The lack of commitment to fund that plan is determined by the Perth-centric nature of this Government.

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

I am sorry to have to say this to members on the other side, but the Government tends to blame everyone except itself when things do not work out the way it wants. It is about time the Government realised - I will not mention health - that on the issue of salinity it is because the Government is not prepared to live up to the commitments enshrined in the intergovernmental agreement that the federal Government is saying it will not fund all the \$88 million for projects put forward, because not all of what it is doing is in compliance with the intergovernmental agreement.

What are the issues on salinity? I have a document that I downloaded from a federal government web site on the Internet. It is about the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, and the first sentence under the heading "Purpose" states -

This Action Plan identifies high priority, immediate actions to address salinity, particularly dryland salinity, and deteriorating water quality in key catchments and regions across Australia.

The Premier said in this place yesterday, in response to a question without notice from the member for Cockburn, that there were two very good projects for which the Government had sought funding from the federal Government, but it had been knocked back. Those two good projects were the Wellington Dam in Collie, and proposed forestry projects, presumably throughout the wheatbelt. I repeat the purpose of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality -

This Action Plan identifies high priority, immediate actions to address salinity, particularly dryland salinity, and deteriorating water quality in key catchments and regions across Australia.

Let us consider the two projects that the Premier said deserved funding under the national action plan but did not get funding. I accept the need to reduce salinity in the Wellington Dam. There is no argument about that. However, measures have been implemented by successive State Governments since I think 1979, when Graham MacKinnon was the responsible minister in the upper House of this Parliament. My understanding is that salinity has now plateaued in the Wellington Dam and is starting to come down; or, if it is not getting close to its plateau, it will start to come down over the next few years as the tree plantations and other measures that have been put in place start to have greater effect. Therefore, how does that project comply with the purpose of the national action plan? The answer is that it may have a high priority - no argument there - but the water quality is not deteriorating. As I have said, my understanding is that it has plateaued or is coming down, and once that water is made available for other purposes it will be used to essentially provide Perth people with more water.

The member for Collie is well aware of the furore that is going on in the south west about the southern Yarragadee. I will not bait the member by asking him for his opinion on that matter, but I can certainly tell the member that many south west shires are very concerned about water leaving the south west and going to Perth so that Perth people can use that water - I think the figure is 48 per cent - on their lawns and gardens. I can fully understand why the federal Government is saying that it does not place a high priority on the need for water in the Wellington Dam to be improved to such an extent that it will be taken to Perth to put on people's lawns and gardens. For that reason I have no difficulty in supporting the federal Government in saying good project though it may be, it does not comply with the national action plan.

Mr M.P. Murray: Are you going to vote for or against the motion?

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I am voting for the motion.

Mr M.P. Murray: After the money has been withdrawn from one of the major projects -

Mr B.K. MASTERS: The money has not been withdrawn. That is the problem. The Government has not put forward -

Mr M.P. Murray: It was the biggest chance we have ever had to tidy up that river, and you are going to vote against it.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: No. The member for Collie should listen to my words. This is not an issue about tidying up problems associated with salinity. This is about high priority, immediate actions to address salinity, particularly dryland salinity, and deteriorating water quality in key catchments and regions across Australia. I have no problem with saying that the Wellington Dam project that we are all talking about at the moment is a good one, but I am sorry I cannot say that it is high priority and that the water quality is deteriorating, and therefore it meets the national action plan guidelines. I therefore accept what the Federal government is saying on that matter.

Mr F.M. Logan: The member for Collie's question to you is the same as mine. Do you support the Prime Minister's rejection of the Wellington Dam proposal?

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

Mr B.K. MASTERS: Yes, except that he is not rejecting the proposal. He is rejecting the funding for that proposal. If the State Government wants to go ahead and use state money for that project - as it should - it should go and do it. That project does not comply with the guidelines of the national action plan.

Mr M.P. Murray: There is no recognition at all of the amount of money that farmers have already spent out of their own pockets to try to -

Mr B.K. MASTERS: There is a lot of recognition. The member for Collie is missing the point. The member for Collie is being very parochial - and I understand that; I am not critical of the member for that - but the bottom line is that the national action plan is about new projects and new money for high priority, immediate actions to address salinity and deteriorating water quality.

Mr M.P. Murray: It meets the lot.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: It meets a few of those things, but not in any detail. The Premier referred yesterday to proposed forestry projects that did not get funding from the federal Government. Most of the people who actually understand the salinity problems in the wheatbelt region of Western Australia were, like the farmers in the wheatbelt region, absolutely flabbergasted when about three years ago the Department of Agriculture or the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, or both, said they now realise that we need to have between 70 per cent and 80 per cent of the catchment put over to trees if we are to make any significant difference to ground water salinity - not the 10, 20 or 30 per cent that everyone has been talking about, but 70 or 80 per cent. To apply that degree of reforestation to almost any farm anywhere in the wheatbelt or the south western half of Western Australia would immediately mean a loss of economic viability. Perhaps in the medium term we might get some viability back as those tree plantations matured or developed into something that could be sold, but there was a recognition that for probably eight to 10 years, at the least, there would be no economic gain for those farmers and they would not be able to survive.

[Leave granted for the member's time to be extended].

Mr B.K. MASTERS: Therefore, having recognised that tree plantations help - no-one is arguing about that - they are not the panacea that everyone thought only three years ago they were. About two years ago, courtesy of the previous Minister for Agriculture, a study was done on deep drainage. I think I have my dates right. It was about two to two and a half years ago that the deep drainage report was released. The report showed that planting 20 to 30 per cent of the land with trees would not work, but that there was potential for deep drains to do some good.

In the middle of last year Dr Tom Hatton of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation reported publicly on the results of his monitoring of the Narembeen deep drain, which was constructed by John Hall. Tom Hatton's work showed that instead of a drainage catchment removing water from the land on the sides of the drain at 10, 50 or 100 metres, we could at a minimum expect drainage to occur naturally on the side of each drain at 400 to 500 metres, and in some cases at as much as 800 or 1 000 metres. That immediately taught us something new about the economics of constructing deep drains, and that the cost of each hectare of productive agricultural land that would be protected or have its salinity problem removed could effectively be reduced to one-tenth of the original cost. It was a profound piece of information. Quite understandably, farmers, catchment groups, land conservation district committees and other land care groups in the wheatbelt are now saying that although they acknowledge the need to plant trees, it is not the high-priority immediate action needed to address salinity. They know that we must instead look seriously at this issue of deep drains. The Premier stood in this place yesterday and said that the Prime Minister would not support the proposed forestry projects - although he will morally - by contributing national action plan money. That is because those projects do not comply with the national action plan guidelines, which require high-priority immediate action to address salinity, particularly dryland salinity, and deteriorating water quality.

Dr G.I. Gallop: Are you saying planting trees has no relation to salinity?

Mr B.K. MASTERS: It does, but it is not the high-priority immediate action that is provided by deep drainage. The Premier has not been out to see deep drains working or talked to the farmers who have either put them in place or want to put them in place. He may have the best of intentions, but he does not understand what is happening out there.

Dr G.I. Gallop: Unlike you, we committed money to the engineering works.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I am very pleased to hear it. Is that money other than the \$4 million or \$6 million that has been allocated to the engineering evaluation committee?

The federal Government is prepared to put money forward for new, urgent, immediate-action high priorities so long as -

Mr F.M. Logan: Where? Identify them.

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

Mr B.K. MASTERS: Deep drains is one project. I will not go through the list. The parliamentary secretary should know that list better than I.

Mr F.M. Logan: A Wilson Tuckey project.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: It is not a Wilson Tuckey project. I point out to the member for Cockburn that on the Notice Paper is private members' business notice of motion No 3, which is about the wheatbelt salinity crisis. Notice of this motion was first given on 13 August last year. It reads in part -

That this House calls upon the Government to urgently provide appropriate funding for the assessment of innovative solutions to the Wheatbelt's salinity crisis, . . .

Such an innovative solution is the deep drain proposed by Peter Coyne. A realisation has occurred. It is a paradigm shift that I think has bypassed this Government. It really does not understand it. To a certain degree, some of the public servants also do not understand it. I will talk about that in a minute. That paradigm shift is that trees are good and provide some returns and salinity benefits, but in themselves they are not enough. We have known for about three years that they do not provide enough of the benefits we must have if we are to remove the salt scourge from our wheatbelt.

I give three examples of how I believe one of the problems we are facing is that the bureaucracy is not prepared to accept that times have changed and that we need to move on and incorporate actions that will make a big difference. About a month ago I visited a deep drain trial in Dumbleyung. That trial was set up with Natural Heritage Trust money. I am told that it is part of a \$1.2 million project but that so far less than \$200 000 of that money has been expended. The farmers involved in various land care and catchment groups are wondering where the other \$900 000 to \$1 million is hiding. Four projects were approved. One, the deep drain trial, has been put into effect, but the other projects seem somehow to have been lost. I think a few public servants need their backsides kicked. This group of four projects was fully approved for funding by the previous Government and the federal Government three years ago. After three years, only about \$120 000 of the \$1.2 million allocation has been spent on the ground. This deep drain trial was set up on one farmer's property and is being intensively monitored by the Department of Agriculture. In principle I do not have a problem with a trial. The rough shape of the placement of the drains on the farm is similar to that suggested by the three fingers and thumb of my hand. The three fingers represent side drains. The drains were put in 160 and 180 metres apart respectively. The Department of Agriculture adviser to this group said that the drains were put that close together because the department wanted to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the lateral impact of a deep drain was more than 160 or 180 metres. The first drain went in at a depth of two metres, and a little bit of water started to flow. The backhoe operator then dug the next drain 160 metres away to a depth of three metres. Drainage from the first drain stopped because the second was so close and, being a metre deeper, immediately sucked the water sideways. It was a waste of money. It is unfortunate that those farmers who are desperately looking for solutions had to stand back and watch this money not be expended in the wisest possible manner.

Earlier in my three-day trip to the wheatbelt last month I went to meet John Dunne, a farmer in the Beacon area. He has a few problems with salinity, and that has affected the way in which -

Mr M.G. House: He has problems with other things as well as salinity.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I was going to say that that has affected the way in which he views some of the issues. He has at least one very significant gripe. He has been trying for about two years to get his deep drainage project on the Beacon River assessed and approved. The appropriate authorities told him that there needed to be a flora survey to make sure that a deep drain would not have any impact on endangered plants or ecosystems. A consultant was hired at a cost of \$30 000. The consultant produced a lovely report stating that there were no rare and endangered plants in the entire area and therefore a deep drain would have no impact on conservation values. A competent botanist could have been hired for one day to drive along the route of the proposed drain. He or she would have seen that the area was basically devoid of native vegetation. For the price of \$1 000, we could have got the same answer as that provided by the gold-plated survey costing \$30 000.

Finally, I was told - I do not wish to identify the area or the Department of Agriculture officer - that the officer in charge of a particular Department of Agriculture district office refuses to acknowledge that deep drainage, including pumping and a range of other solutions, is the answer at all. All he is saying is plant more trees. With respect to that person, I must say that he is living in a past century. At least three years ago the realisation came to wheatbelt farmers that trees by themselves were just not enough in most circumstances and that more needed to be done. If trees are the answer, why is saline water being pumped from towns such as Merredin, Narrogin and maybe others?

Mr R.C. Kucera: You would have to say that because you want to keep cutting them down.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: That is a really stupid statement.



Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

Mr R.C. Kucera: You made that statement earlier about old-growth forests. You are happy to keep cutting them down.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I will not waste my time on a dumb statement from the minister in that regard. I am so exasperated.

Mr R.C. Kucera: The hypocrisy of it is amazing.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: The minister is very good at what he does; it is just a pity that he cannot be good at being a minister.

The bottom line is that we have the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. It has purposes, goals, accreditation requirements, a need for capacity building and a range of other matters. To date, most of the projects that were put forward by the State Government for funding support have not been enshrined in approved catchment management plans from the regions; they are draft plans, as the Premier admitted today. In many other respects, what the State Government is trying to do does not meet the Commonwealth Government's guidelines. If the Premier is to get serious about this issue - he has already signed the intergovernmental agreement - he should meet the guidelines of the Commonwealth Government and let us get on and spend every one of its dollars as well as the matching amount from our State.

**DR J.M. EDWARDS** (Maylands - Minister for the Environment and Heritage) [6.01 pm]: I am pleased that we are discussing this issue because it is a very serious one. However, I prefer that we were discussing it in a more bipartisan way. I will go over some of the history in this State. In 1996, the previous Government released an action plan for salinity. I believe that that was a milestone moment in treating salinity in this State. When that action plan was released, the Labor Party had its own policy document drawn up. We were about to go to the election with the policy document, but we quietly put our document in the bottom drawer and said that we believed that the then Government's document was a very fine one. That document has since gone through a number of iterations. Everyone would agree when I say that since then, the Commonwealth Government has been catching up to the State Government. We have a fine record in this area, and it is a record that we have been building on since we came to government. We have attempted to allocate more money to salinity than was allocated when the previous Government was in power. Indeed, not only have we done that but also we have set aside and not touched other moneys, such as the money from the sale of AlintaGas, which has been sitting in our budget for over two years waiting to be matched under this plan.

We were quite pleased when the Premier got a letter from the Prime Minister last year referring to the national action plan and the negotiations that had been taking place and thanking us for moving away from prior recognition - a position that the previous Government had adopted. Despite what the member for Merredin says, the documents that we had access to do not show that what he is saying is the total truth. We took advice from the federal affairs unit in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and we continued the same line; we did not veer from the line taken by the previous Government. We were pleased to receive a letter from the Prime Minister in November last year saying that he understood that Western Australia had identified approximately \$80 million in funding and that it sought matching funds under the national action plan. Further on in that letter we were urged to sign up to the plan as a demonstration of the commitment of the two Governments to this major problem and to conclude the bilateral agreement as quickly as possible, before some of the issues were resolved, so that the bilateral agreement could be signed and some money could flow onto the ground and negotiations could be continued on the rest of the program. When we got that letter, we made sure that the senior public servants in this State met with the senior public servants from the Commonwealth. We received advice from all quarters that both Governments were ready to sign the bilateral agreement. On 26 November last year we signed the bilateral agreement because we genuinely believed that the Commonwealth Government was at the negotiating table. That is the advice we got. As the Premier signed the agreement, we phoned Canberra to let the Government know what we were doing. Our understanding was that everybody knew that an agreement had been reached. In the past few weeks I have had some very interesting discussions with my counterpart, the federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage. I pointed out that when we signed this agreement, we did it in the genuine belief that an agreement had been reached, which was in the spirit of the letter from the Prime Minister on 3 November, that money would flow and that some progress would be made in this State.

During the months that followed, I became increasingly concerned by the number of plane loads of bureaucrats from Canberra in particular, who were travelling to places like Collie and meeting community groups. The bureaucrats were told yet again by the local catchment and environmental groups on the ground and the local catchment councils that they supported the projects. The difficulty was that we had no sooner dealt with one plane load of bureaucrats when another plane load of bureaucrats would arrive and the process would have to start again because the former bureaucrats had moved to other jobs. Minister Chance communicated with his counterpart, I communicated with my counterpart, the Department of Premier and Cabinet communicated with

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. We have put a lot of pressure on the federal Government to let it know that we want to sign the agreement. We have the money for the projects, now we want the federal Government to provide money on the ground. Indeed, the national resource management groups have twice written formally to the federal Government saying that they support these projects, they have community support and they want them to happen.

Members have talked about six projects, which I will refer to in a minute. However, it is important to recognise that the Prime Minister has acknowledged a number of proposals we have put on the table. At least there is some glimmer of hope and acceptance that something can be done with the \$30-odd million.

Western Australia was the second State in Australia to sign the National Heritage Trust 2 agreement with the federal Government. However, to date, no commonwealth money has flowed from NHT2 to any State. We were asked to identify \$10 million of in-kind and matching funding. In fact, we have identified between \$40 million and \$50 million because historically this State has spent a lot of money on natural resource management programs. We had no trouble finding that \$10 million. As I said, we have between \$40 million and \$50 million. However, despite the continuing plane flights full of bureaucrats and high-level negotiations and agreements, we have yet to receive any money from the federal Government.

Mr M.W. Trenorden: Were you involved in those negotiations?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I was involved in some of them, but not the last lot of negotiations when we got the money.

Mr M.W. Trenorden: I suggest that is what is required. It needs your personal input.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I will tell the member for Avon about my level of frustration. I had a very good conversation with the federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage. I carefully went through what we had done and why we had done it, and I explained about the timing. I also told him that earlier in the year I visited a number of regional communities. At that stage it had rained on the east coast but not in WA. People in some of the communities the member for Avon represents have suffered from high levels of distress, although that has probably eased somewhat because of the rain that has fallen over the past six weeks or so. I phoned David Kemp and explained that. It is to his credit that the federal Cabinet had a very long cabinet meeting. I would like to know what was discussed. Minister Kemp did not leave it until 8.00 pm Eastern Standard Time. He gave me the courtesy of listening to all the things I said and acknowledged that some of what I said was new to him. He said that he would go straight to the Prime Minister's office and that he believed things were about to happen and that we would get a positive response. It was a very helpful conversation. I have had a number of conversations like that with Senator Robert Hill and with people in his office. However, before they get any further, there is a blockage and a problem occurs. I will read a letter dated 27 March from Hon Dr David Kemp to Mrs Barbara Morrell, the Chair of the Regional Natural Resource Management Chairs Group. The letter was written in response to Mrs Morrell's letter in which she and the regional chairs expressed community support for state projects and progress with implementation of the Natural Heritage Trust extension and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. Dr Kemp wrote -

I am pleased to see that the Regional Groups now consider that the projects proposed as matching funding by Western Australia should produce on-the-ground results in a relatively short time and are fully supportive of the projects.

Yet, at the same time as Mrs Morrell received that letter, the Premier got a letter from the Prime Minister - which went to the member for Merredin first - saying that he did not believe the regional groups had that community support. Therefore, David Kemp in writing acknowledged the community support that the NRM groups and the councils had given to these projects; the Prime Minister said that there was no community support; the member for Vasse put a further interpretation on that, which I question; and Wilson Tuckey said, "Hang the lot of them anyway; let's just put in a whole lot of deep drains and transfer all the money to them." I do not believe the federal Government knows what it is doing. Hon Kim Chance, the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and I can do anything we like to put personal pressure on our counterparts, but it appears that there is some sort of block in the Prime Minister's office.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Don't they want to see the regional groups implement the NRM plan? Isn't that what is required?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Mr Speaker, I share the frustration of the community. The Prime Minister's letter refers to the need to focus initially on capacity building and plan developments for the NAP. When I go into communities, they tell me that they have been working on capacity building for years. They have the capacity and they know what they want to do. Their plans are virtually ready to go but at this stage the State is funding

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

the NRM groups and has given them additional funding to ensure they continue doing their work and develop accredited plans. The member for Merredin should listen to what happens to people in other States when they believe they have accredited plans. It is not a matter of a tick-off. Out comes the red biro and in go the crosses, the underlinings and the questions. They are put through what we have just gone through: plane loads of bureaucrats fly over to their State for briefings and go away believing that the community supports the plans but, lo and behold, that changes and another plane load of bureaucrats flies over. It is a cargo cult and that is what is going on.

Mr Speaker, the Minister for Agriculture and I met the NRM chairs today. They are on their way at the moment to Brisbane for a national forum of NRM representatives. There was unanimous agreement at our meeting for support of all the projects that are part of our initial \$88 million bid. I will refer to those projects. The first amount on the Prime Minister's list is \$1.2 million to regional coordinators as approved, which is supported; the second is \$6 million for catchment demonstration projects as approved, which is supported; and the third is the engineering evaluation initiative. Despite what the member for Vasse has said, we are making very good progress with our engineering evaluation initiative. A recent seminar was held with a very good range of presentations on work being done on drains, syphons, pumps and a range of other factors. It is exciting to see the direction in which we are poised to go with that work.

The Commonwealth has acknowledged that we are sitting on AlintaGas funds, except for the small amount that was used and matched for the bush bank program. The Commonwealth has also acknowledged the availability of funding for state administration. It is therefore nonsense to say that six projects have been rejected. However, it indicates that we have engaged the community and we have its support.

Mr B.K. Masters: Which projects have been rejected?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The Wellington Dam, plantation forestry and native vegetation protection.

Mr B.J. Grylls: They haven't been rejected. It has been clearly said that these proposals could come forward for joint consideration once the accredited NRM plan for this region is finalised. The NRM plans aren't finalised. That is the sticking point.

Dr G.I. Gallop: Plans, plans; we have done all that.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: This is a fantastic chicken and egg process. Where do people get the money from to finalise the plans?

Mr B.J. Grylls: Is that the hold-up?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: No, it is not a hold-up because we have now allocated \$500 000 to prop up these groups to enable them to do their plans. In other States they have had funding to do that. We are frustrated at every turn.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Is the argument that we need funding to do that?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: No, because we are doing it.

Mr B.J. Grylls: The letter clearly says that once those plans are done, the proposals come forward for joint consideration.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Plans have been done and submitted. They include some of the proposals.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Have they or have they not been done?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Some of them have been done but they are in draft form.

Mr M.W. Trenorden: So all of them are not done.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: All of them are not done because there are six natural resource management groups.

Mr M.W. Trenorden: At last we have seen some light.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Finish the plans, submit them and then the Wellington Dam and plantation will come up for consideration.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I know it will seem really strange to the member, but the plans must be done by the community. We have been allocating money to get the communities to do the plans. The plans include some of the matters that have been rejected.

Mr B.J. Grylls: It is saying, "Show us the plan and we can sign off on it."

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: That is the draft plan that has been submitted. Some of the draft plans have been submitted and others are still being worked on.

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

Mr M.W. Trenorden: At Brookdale you would not accept a draft plan. You do not accept draft plans through your office.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: If the member refers to the Prime Minister's original letter, he will see that the Prime Minister was referring to getting work done ahead of the accredited plan. In the meetings that I have had with federal ministers I have reiterated the importance of getting projects moving and proposals flowing ahead of the plan. Because of all these delays, we have encouraged the groups to keep working on their plans. Some of them have got to the stage of having draft plans, some of which incorporate these very features that are being rejected because they have not been embraced by the community.

Mr B.J. Grylls: No, rejected because the natural resource management plan has not been put forward, not because they have not been embraced.

Dr G.I. Gallop: This is bureaucracy talking.

Mr B.J. Grylls: It is not bureaucracy.

Mr B.K. Masters: We are not being pedantic.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: Some plans have been submitted that include some of these projects.

Mr T.K. Waldron: Are you saying that they have seen some of those plans?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: When they see the plans, they get the big red pen out -

Mr T.K. Waldron: Have they seen the plans?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: They have seen some of them.

Mr M.W. Trenorden: Why are you bucketing them if they are only in draft form?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: I am not bucketing them. It is quite a detailed process to get accredited. When I have talked to my counterparts in other States, we have found that accreditation has been really difficult. All sorts of, I would like to say unbelievable barriers, but I must now say believable barriers, have been put up. We agreed minister to minister that ahead of these quite difficult plans, certain proposals and projects needed to flow. We have agreement in various groups that things like native vegetation protection is incredibly important and that to implement the project, it must meet what we believe to be the outcomes of the national action plan, and that is generally endorsed. In fact, it builds on the work that the member for Stirling did. We have been working away and playing properly, according to the rules, bringing the groups with us, encouraging them to talk to members' colleagues and communities and getting them to come forward.

We received three conflicting statements and letters in one week in which Minister David Kemp acknowledged the ministerial council, the Prime Minister ignored it and Minister Wilson Tuckey said to hang the lot of them, ignore the ministerial council and ride over it. As I speak, the natural resource management group chairpersons are arriving in Brisbane. They are totally supportive of the \$88 million and the projects that we have put on the table. They will be arguing those cases in the next couple of days. In addition, the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is meeting his federal counterparts, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, in Brisbane on Friday. We will be going through the points with them, that these projects have our support, that they are consistent with the national action plan and they should be funded immediately as plans are accredited.

This is a complicated issue, which has been made unduly complicated by the federal Government. I believe budget issues do come into it given that at the moment there has been a \$300 million budget cut to the Avicultural Federation of Australia and Environment Australia. I urge all members to get behind their community groups, to get them engaged in this process, and to put on more pressure, so that we can get money on the ground.

While I am totally committed to plans, I am distressed when I think that a lot of the money that is set aside may end up as documents and not as work on the ground. I, like other members, want to see work, such as drains, completed. The drainage group came to see me. I told the group that its proposal needed a bit more work, and that it would need to submit the proposal to the engineering evaluation initiative, so that it would be treated as a proper proposal, would be worked up and could well get a guernsey. I hope that it does. As a Parliament, we need to be united if we are truly serious about what is the State's number one environmental problem.

**DR G.I. GALLOP** (Victoria Park - Premier) [6.20 pm]: I admit that I was a bit bemused when I saw the member for Merredin's motion. The projects that Western Australia put on the table have the support of the community, including the support of the local natural resource management groups and groups such as Harvey Water, which is the cooperative that supplies the south west irrigators. Despite conveniently receiving the Prime

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

Minister's letter before I did, judging by the member for Merredin's motion, he appears not to comprehend the content of that letter. The Prime Minister stated in his rejection of our priority projects that there is a -

... need to focus initially on capacity building and plan development for the NAP, with the result that the quantum of funds tied up in priority projects has generally been small.

If that is not clear enough for the member for Merredin, on the second page of the letter Mr Howard goes on to state -

... any Commonwealth contribution beyond the initial \$31.48 million would be subject to Western Australia's matching contribution being new funding that is not tied to specific projects -

In the member for Merredin's haste to get the matter to Parliament last Thursday, he failed to comprehend the detail of the Prime Minister's letter. The National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality is not about on-the-ground community-supported projects that would really make a difference in salinity and water quality. Apparently, it is about -

... capacity building and plan development -

In other words, Canberra's solution to salinity is to add another layer of money wasting and time-consuming bureaucracy to the process. That is the view of the Government of Western Australia, which is supported by the national resource management groups out in the community.

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.J. Dean): Member for Merredin!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: The member for Merredin is not the only one to have fallen into this trap. Mr Tuckey stated earlier this week that he believed a drainage proposal in the eastern wheatbelt, which has not been formally considered by the State, the Commonwealth or regional communities, would be endorsed by the Commonwealth. We do the homework, engage the groups and come up with the proposals, and they are knocked back by the Commonwealth. However, according to Minister Wilson Tuckey, the Commonwealth would support a project that has not been endorsed by the community and has not gone through the proper process of consideration. The Commonwealth refuses to recognise projects that are developed in conjunction with and publicly supported by local communities, but Mr Tuckey says it will recognise this project. What hypocrisy on the part of the Commonwealth!

Mr M.W. Trenorden: What hypocrisy on your part. You should know this subject.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: I do know it. I know it very well.

Mr M.W. Trenorden: Absolutely. You are reading your speech!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: I want to get the words exactly right.

Mr M.W. Trenorden: Exactly. It has been written for you.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: The member for Avon should not go down that road. I think he knows what I am saying.

The member for Merredin should be working with and not against the State, which is what he has decided to do. His federal colleagues have spoken to him on the phone and told him that this is an issue he can run in the state Parliament. I remind the member for Merredin that he is in this Parliament to represent the people of Western Australia and not to be a lap-dog of the Commonwealth.

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: The member should take a bit of advice from the man sitting next to him. The member for Stirling will give the member a few lessons on dealing with the Commonwealth.

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.J. Dean): I call the member for Merredin to order for the first time.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: It is easier to deal with the Commonwealth if both sides of this House work together. When we were in opposition, whenever a matter that we supported went to the commonwealth level, we got behind the State because it was in the interests of WA to do so. The member for Merredin has a choice.

Mr M.W. Trenorden: You opposed everything!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: Did we?

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

Mr M.W. Trenorden: Yes, you did. You sat over there like a galah and squawked, like you do now. Your problem, Premier, is that you've not grown into the job yet.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: Here we go - Uncle Max! He reminds me of Uncle Arthur who used to be in the *Sunday Times*.

The member for Merredin had a choice between more planning, more bureaucracy and more capacity building, which is the Commonwealth's approach, or the State's approach of on-the-ground projects to deliver real benefits to the people of Western Australia. The member for Merredin has gone down the Canberra path. His decision has been made, and he must carry that accountability to his regional community. We will be out there telling the regional communities where the National Party lines up on this issue.

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: He is trying to wriggle his way out of his position now because he knows he has created a problem for himself.

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order, member for Merredin!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: It is clear that the Commonwealth Government does not understand or care about the plight of regional Western Australia. That is why I and the chair of the regional NRM groups in Western Australia, Mrs Barbara Morrell, will write to the Prime Minister and invite him to visit our State and look at these excellent projects the Commonwealth is knocking back. The community and the State Government, without the support of the Liberals or the Nationals, will write to the PM to invite him to WA to see the excellent projects he has been told to knock back.

My colleague the Minister for the Environment and Heritage made the point that the State, not the Commonwealth, is currently underwriting the operations of the regional natural resource management groups in Western Australia. State Cabinet understands the urgency of the regional groups' plight, and has made available more than \$575 000 in funding and agency support through to June 2003 for the groups to maintain their basic day-to-day operations. That is on top of a contribution of \$280 000 provided by the State since the start of the year.

The Opposition has a choice: it is either a lap-dog of the Commonwealth or a fighter for Western Australia.

Mr B.J. Grylls: I've made our position clear.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: The member is trying to wriggle his way out. The member for Merredin got caught. He came into Parliament because his mates in Canberra gave him a little story to run, and gave him the Prime Minister's letter before he sent it out. He grandstanded on the issue and now realises he has a problem: the Government has the support of the community. The member now tries to wriggle out of the position he created for himself.

We should work together as a Parliament on this issue. The former Minister for Primary Industries, the member for Stirling, knows how hard it is to fight Canberra on these issues and how important it is to be united.

My final point that shows the Opposition to be out of touch relates to accredited regional strategies that the NRM groups are required to produce under the national action plan. The Minister for the Environment and Heritage developed the point better than I will now; nevertheless, I repeat it. The member for Merredin somehow thinks that the regional NRM groups have completed these plans, and it is simply a matter of taking them out of the back pocket and giving them to the Commonwealth to be stamped "Approved". Again, the Opposition has failed to comprehend the detail in the Prime Minister's letter. The regional groups have been crying out in the media and in local community newsletters for support to develop their accredited regional strategies. The Opposition has not been listening. My Government, in particular the Ministers for Agriculture and the Environment and Heritage, have been listening to the regional communities. That is why I signed the NAP back in November 2002. Perhaps if the Opposition had been aware that the regional strategies had yet to be accredited, it, too, might have been more supportive of the Government. Of course, it has not been.

One of the tasks I have asked my ministers to explore with the regional groups is the fast tracking of that process, but this relies on cooperation with the Commonwealth, which up until today has caused lengthy delays. The member for Merredin is not supporting us in putting pressure on the Commonwealth to move these issues through the process faster. The member for Merredin needs to listen a little more closely to his regional constituents, not to Canberra, so he understands what he is talking about, because Canberra's decision not to recognise these important projects will hurt regional Western Australia and set it back in the fight against salinity.

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

Mr B.K. Masters: At this point in time?

Dr G.I. GALLOP: So time is important to the member?

Mr B.K. Masters: It is a crucial problem.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: I signed up last November. What has been happening in the past four months? The minister has described meeting after meeting at which we thought we had agreement on these issues. The federal Government has a budget problem, and it is shifting that over to the States. Do members know who is supporting the federal Government? The National and Liberal Parties in Western Australia are. They have deserted their constituents and they are supporting the cost cutting of the Commonwealth Government. That is where opposition members line up.

Mr B.K. Masters: Is this a conspiracy?

Dr G.I. GALLOP: It is not a conspiracy. The Commonwealth Government knows that opposition members are easy meat. Someone from the Commonwealth rings up and says, "We have a problem with that evil state Labor Government in Western Australia; can you help us out a bit?" He does not tell opposition members what the problem is. The Commonwealth's problem has nothing to do with the ideas we are coming up with. Its problem is that it does not want to spend the money. Members opposite are being used by the Commonwealth.

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.J. Dean): Member for Merredin!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: I remind the member for Merredin that the Commonwealth has agreed to funding of \$30 million, but it has not agreed with two projects that are supported by the community and are absolutely fundamental to our future. One could solve our water quality problem now - it is agreed to by the community - and we could move on; and the other would play a significant role in the development of the plantation industry and would address salinity throughout our State.

To summarise: firstly, we have been let down by the Commonwealth. It should be paying money to the State of Western Australia to help fight salinity. The Commonwealth is in cost-cutting mode; it has decided to back off on two projects that are very important for this State, and it has used contradictory arguments for that decision.

Mr M.W. Trenorden: And you haven't done that?

Dr G.I. GALLOP: No. Where are the contradictory arguments?

Mr M.W. Trenorden: You are a photocopy of Wilson Tuckey; you are doing the same thing as he did on the ABC. You are ranting and raving as he loves to do. You should get down and finish the plans and submit them.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: We have put excellent projects forward to the Commonwealth and they should be supported, but they are not being supported. The Liberal and National Parties in Western Australia are the Commonwealth Government's willing agents that take money out of Western Australia. That is what this is all about. Those members opposite are in there playing a role. I forgive the member for Merredin; he is a new member of Parliament; the Commonwealth is using him.

Mr B.J. Grylls: Do not be patronising to me.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: The member for Merredin is being used, but we will hold him to account. We will be happy to tell everyone in his constituency the way he has acted as a lap-dog for the Commonwealth.

**MR W.J. McNEE** (Moore) [6.34 pm]: I can say this with absolute confidence: if the people in my electorate were here listening tonight they would say it is no wonder nothing has happened about the salt problem. Look at the Premier in action! The Premier should get in his car tomorrow morning, drive down to the Governor and say that this job is too big for him, because it obviously is. Why is it that every other State has managed to negotiate an agreement? They have all signed up but the geniuses opposite cannot sign up. Why is it so? It is like old shifty and his mates, is it not? That is what they are like. They are like jellyfish - they move and they are gone. Talk about making an agreement! They obviously cannot. Every other State in the Commonwealth has negotiated except Western Australia. The Government tells us we have the biggest problem in Australia but it cannot negotiate. Does that not say something? The Minister for Health bemoans the fact that he cannot help the hospitals because of the Commonwealth. There is always someone else to blame.

Mr J.L. Bradshaw: He could fix them before the last election.

Mr W.J. McNEE: Not a problem. I remember the Premier with the now Minister for Agriculture at a lake in Cunderdin - they should have stayed there! They talked about \$10 million. They said they could fix the problem. I would like to see the \$10 million. There is nothing around my patch - that is par for the course.

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

Everything has stopped since this mob got in. Bit by bit we will get it back. We will change the Government at the next election; this lot will all be gone. We will be rid of them.

Mr F.M. Logan: So will you!

Mr W.J. McNEE: I am going because I plan to go. A lot of members opposite will go but not when they plan it. That will happen. I am going because I am planning to go; that is a great advantage to me. That is the difference between the member and me. Members opposite will get a great shock on the morning after the election because they will be swept out and we will get a decent Government. That is when we will resolve the salinity problem.

Members opposite have been whingeing and moaning. I have a real interest in salinity; I have farmed amongst it for more than 50 years. I want to see the problem resolved. I do not have a university degree. I got my degree at the university of hard knocks. The experience I have I paid for myself. I have paid for all the advice I have ever received. Some was good and some was rubbish. I remember when Graham MacKinnon was Minister for Water Supplies in the late 1970s. The Government at the time did not conduct a summit - members opposite conduct summits; they are like the Himalayas! Every time they want something done they have a summit. All they want to do is talk but nothing happens. I remember attending a conference, which had speakers from around the world. They were interesting people - Americans, Dutch and Israelis. They did not call it a summit, they had a better name. The Government keeps on having summits. I would not mind if it actually did something. The conference I attended achieved something. It was probably the most informative session I have ever attended; it was on salinity and ran for two days. I still remember the lessons I learned; they still stick with me.

Mr J.L. Bradshaw: What did Graham MacKinnon do? He put in place a process in Collie to try to stop the salinity in Wellington Dam.

Mr W.J. McNEE: That is right. We went to the Wellington Dam. They brought some farmers along. They made some moves and upset a few farmers.

Mr B.K. Masters: It cost the minister his seat at the next election.

Mr W.J. McNEE: It probably did, but what a good minister. He was courageous enough to make those decisions. The properties were bought and we were shown what it was proposed to do.

The damage done by salinity is not something that can be repaired in 24 hours, 24 weeks, 24 months or even 24 years. It will take a long time. Considerable progress has been made in that area. I am very well aware that the farmers there want that project concluded. However, does it not strike members as passing strange that government members are sitting here whingeing because 30 million lousy dollars -

Mr J.L. Bradshaw: Fifteen million dollars each.

Mr W.J. McNEE: Yes - will fix the problem? However, what did the Government take off the Water Corporation last year as a government subsidy? I believe it was about \$300 million. It ripped off the Water Corporation, and now it is complaining that it cannot fix the problem for \$30 million because the Commonwealth will not do it. Why will the Commonwealth not do it? It is because the State Government has not satisfied the guidelines. There are no better people at talking about guidelines than those opposite. They are the ones.

Mr F.M. Logan: It is the bureaucrats.

Mr W.J. McNEE: They are the Government's bureaucrats. I remind the Government that it said it would fix these problems.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Along with the health system.

Mr W.J. McNEE: That is right. It was going to fix the health system, the education system, the salinity problem and whatever else. They would all be fixed. It even invented country Labor - another bit of window-dressing.!

Mr P.B. Watson: It worries you, doesn't it?

Mr W.J. McNEE: It does not worry me. Country Labor would not get two votes in my area. In fact, I have told members before what happened in the last election.

Several members interjected.

Mr W.J. McNEE: It would have to be a very small telephone box. They would never overcrowd it.

Those opposite invented country Labor because they thought it would appeal to the people. It has not, of course. They have no guts. Not once have I seen them stand up for those country people whom they claim to represent. I do not suppose it is likely that they will.



Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

Mr J.L. Bradshaw: What about what the Deputy Premier said today? It is too bad about the devaluation of the properties that the powerlines go through. Those people can just wear that because it will help offset the cost to the people in Perth.

Mr W.J. McNEE: That is what this Government does.

The salinity problem is a huge problem. The people in my electorate are full of frustration because nothing is happening. People today are going off to a natural resource management meeting or some other meeting. That is all that is happening. Bureaucrats are writing reports about reports, but nothing is happening on the ground. I want those opposite to show me which piece of land, which hectare they have improved. Will they show me one anywhere in Western Australia? Will they show me which one it is?

Dr G.I. Gallop: A few old-growth forests have been protected.

Mr C.J. Barnett: It is a stuck record.

Mr W.J. McNEE: Is he not a pain?

Dr G.I. Gallop: It is not a stuck record. It is just re-emphasising one of the most significant commitments that a Government has ever made in Western Australian history.

Mr W.J. McNEE: I would like the Premier to show me where he has improved any hectare of land. I can find nothing, other than continual meetings and committees. The Government is doing nothing.

The resolution of the salinity problem will take a long time, because there is no simple answer. In some areas the answer might be deep drains. However, there is clay in Western Australia, and there may be some difficulty draining it. It is very tight clay. I am not saying that drains are bad; they are part of the system. In fact, in the New Norcia part of my electorate, thousands of trees are doing very well. If a person said to those farmers that that is not helping the situation, they would say that that person does not understand the problem. Other farmers would say that they have lost a lot of trees. We have planted 100 000 trees, and the only trees we have lost - this will strike members as passing strange - are those about which we sought professional advice, and the wrong tree was planted in the wrong place. As I said, I paid good money for them, but after I had written the cheque the bloody trees died!

Salinity is a complex problem. If any member in this place claims to have the answer, I will run away quickly because I know that member will not have the answer.

Mr F.M. Logan: Will you pass on to the member for Vasse the story you told us about the trees that died, because he is not aware of it.

Mr W.J. McNEE: I will not go to war with anyone about their view. I have been around long enough to understand that not everybody shares my view and I do not share everybody else's view. However, if we listen to other people's views, we will eventually get the answers. If the member for Cockburn were to talk to my electors, he would realise that they all have a different view about this problem, although they will not differ greatly.

I said to someone not long ago that I could not see why we could not drain the lakes. He said that the only way we could do that was to start down by the Avon River somewhere. He could be right - I do not know. When some people were digging drains in some lakes recently someone from CALM phoned them and accused them of encroaching on CALM land and told them to stop. They asked the CALM officers to visit the site and explain the situation. Sure enough the troopers from CALM arrived. The young farmers involved are top young farmers who are spending their own money on the problem. They have probably spent around \$100 000 so far. Not many members opposite would spend \$100 000 to fix a problem like that. The officers from CALM arrived, full of enthusiasm. They told the young farmers that they could not go onto CALM land. However, it seems logical to dig a drain in an old salt lake that has been there forever. The young farmers asked the CALM officers what they thought the answer was. They looked around very intelligently and said, "The land should never have been cleared." The farmers said that they understood that and agreed, but that they wanted to know how to fix the problem. What did the CALM officers do? They got in their car and drove back to Merredin.

Dr J.M. Edwards: Did they ask if you were still shooting the birds you admitted to once?

Mr W.J. McNEE: What does the minister mean by shooting the birds?

Dr J.M. Edwards: Do you remember the speech you gave in which you admitted to shooting birds and then realised that they were declared? I am pleased that CALM did not raise it!

Mr W.J. McNEE: Members should not encourage the minister.

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

I cannot emphasise the frustration people in the farming community are feeling. The Government should not talk about the problem; it should simply sit down and negotiate. Every other State has negotiated, but this State cannot do that. That tells us something about this Government. It should negotiate and get the problem solved. It is a very simple matter, but the Government will not do it. John Howard does not have a problem with his budget; the budget problem is in this State. I want to know where the money is. This Government has collected record taxes and stamp duty.

Mr B.J. Grylls: It hasn't spent any of it in regional WA, has it?

Mr W.J. McNEE: It has not spent a cent. I do not know how much the member for Merredin's electorate has received.

Ms A.J. MacTiernan: What about the Mt Magnet, Tom Price and Marble Bar roads? It's the first time the Marble Road has been sealed.

Mr W.J. McNEE: I am glad the minister has interjected. I attended a shire meeting the other day. By how much does it expect to have its road funding reduced this year?

Mr M.W. Trenorden: By \$18 million

Mr W.J. McNEE: Is it \$18 million this year? The Government must have the money in an old sock somewhere. It will be interesting to see where the money is spent if the Greens fall over and the Government's one vote, one value legislation is passed and the new electoral boundaries are drawn. I can tell members that the money will not go into Merredin, Moora, Greenough or Ningaloo. I know where the money will go and where it will all of a sudden appear.

I have another suggestion for the Government. What the Government should do, because as a negotiator it is pretty hopeless, is get Burke and Grill on the job, because obviously they can negotiate and bring things to a successful conclusion.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Were they the people who planted the trees for you?

Mr W.J. McNEE: No, they were not.

There is no single, simple answer. It is a complicated, complex problem. As a young fellow, I learnt one thing from the man who used to fix our farm machinery. He used to say to me, "Young fella, look for the simple things. If it is a big crash, you will know about it, because you will hear it." That is what we need to do with salinity. However, we need to get a power of research in there, and that is what we are not getting. A chap from New Norcia said to me the other night that by growing lucerne he has managed to lower his watertable by one metre. In the early days no-one was interested in monitoring that with him. Now he has people monitoring it. We need people to move out into the paddocks. There is a saying that the best fertiliser on our paddocks is our own footprints. The people out in the paddocks are the people who are doing it. They are the people the Government needs to talk to. The Government does not need to talk to the bureaucrats around the morning coffee table. They have never made a decision in their life that is worth two bob. It needs to talk to the people who know what they are talking about. However, those people need some scientific back-up. Those people are available, but we are not making use of them. The answers are there. There are people out there who have heaps of experience and observations to share. Those people are important. We need to turn those what I call paddock observations into something that has scientific backing. The Government stands condemned for its inaction on this most important problem.

**MR R.N. SWEETMAN** (Ningaloo) [6.52 pm]: I should say at this stage, following the member for Moore, that the prosecution rests!

Dr J.M. Edwards: What did you shoot?

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: Nothing yet! Howard has taken the guns away!

Mr J.C. Kobelke: As well as the money!

Mr F.M. Logan: What did you do to get the call over me?

Mr R.N. SWEETMAN: I thank you, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr Dean), for giving me the call over the member for Cockburn; I am sure we will hear his pearls of wisdom at a later date.

Salinity is a problem, as has been highlighted in the debate today. I concur with much of what has already been said. The member for Merredin deserves acknowledgment for bringing the motion into this place, because although this is not the first time that salinity has been debated since the Gallop Government has been elected, it nonetheless remains the most significant, and certainly the greatest, environmental crisis that we have in this State. I have been in the salinity portfolio for only a short time. I understand a bit about salinity. There are five

Mr Brendon Grylls; Acting Speaker; Mr Bernie Masters; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Geoff Gallop; Mr Bill McNee;  
Mr Rod Sweetman

---

solar saltworks in this State, and three of them are in my electorate, so my electorate has a history of growing salt rather than trying to solve the salt problem. A great deal of energy and capital has been spent trying to develop those solar saltworks in my electorate, so I get to look at salt from the other perspective. In the short time that I have been the shadow opposition spokesperson for salinity, I have been able to look at what I will not say are the worst affected areas in the wheatbelt but certainly areas that are severely degraded and are getting worse as each year goes by.

Recently I went to Bencubbin and Beacon with the member for Vasse, who is the Liberal Party opposition spokesperson on the environment. That was a rewarding trip, and it reinforced just how significant this problem is to Western Australian grain growers and the community of Western Australia in general. The extent of the environmental calamity that is salinity has not yet registered in the psyche of people. This is not a country versus city issue. It is a shared responsibility in a significant problem. Somehow we must communicate the message well enough to the city people so that they understand just how serious this environmental calamity is.

The most lasting impression of the visit to Bencubbin and deep into the Beacon catchment area was not just the devastation and the dead trees. It has been a little over a decade since tens of thousands of trees were planted in the Beacon catchment, and we saw hardly one of those trees still alive. The rising water table and salinity have severely devastated that area. We visited three farms owned by one family - 27 000 hectares in total - and 9 000 hectares have already been lost to salinity. Although the area is still very dry and, to all intents and purposes, still in the grip of a drought, many of the natural lakes that occur in that area are just about dry. Many of the lakes had probably 300 to 400 millimetres of concentrated salt crystals at the bottom. We walked to Job Lake - if I correctly recall - which is about three kilometres long and a couple of kilometres wide, and I am told that when it fills with water it can become up to seven metres deep. It regularly fills, in a normal rainfall year, to about four and a half to five metres deep. All the salt dissolves and it is basically filled with freshwater. The freshwater run-off is sufficient to dilute the concentrated salt crystals on the bottom of the lake.

Apart from the visual impact of some of the salt-affected land, other senses also came into play. I recall walking from the car for about three-quarters of a kilometre to the edge of the lake. The most lasting impression I have of that area was the pungent toxic sulfur smell. I do not know why that happens but someone who understands a bit about chemistry and things like that would know. The odour was so pungent that it shortened one's breath. I was told that that is easily solved with a good rainfall that neutralises the smell. They tell me some grass would then grow on what appears to be a wasteland on which nothing could grow again. I guess that is typical of many places throughout the grain growing area in Western Australia. It is an increasing problem, as members know.

During what would have been a lunch break today, I met with Professor Ahmed Hasson. He is Iraqi by birth and a very well-educated man. He has travelled the world and was educated in America. His curriculum vitae states that he has a PhD - Agronomy, and a Master of Science - Agronomy from the University of Wyoming, Laramie, United States. He also has a Bachelor of Science - Agronomy, and a Diploma of Science - Soil Science from the Institute of Agricultural Technology, Iraq. He is a very interesting man. Many people are experts and have good ideas on how to combat salinity across the grain growing areas; however, there is no silver bullet. There is no "one size fits all" approach to this problem. It will take a lot of effort in a range of areas to make inroads to this problem. It was interesting to talk to this chap because he was up-front and very honest. He said that he was not the person to talk to in relation to drains, bores, the deviations and the different varieties of crops to ameliorate the salinity problem in WA. He said he had worked in the Middle East and in America. I think he said that Portugal was another place he had been to. It is not until we talk to people such as that that we understand that salinity is a worldwide problem. We are not the only country in the world that has a problem with salinity. Professor Hasson also has several patents listed in his name for products he has developed to mitigate against further salt encroachment. He is at the next frontier where salt-affected ground needs drastic things done to it to try to ameliorate the problems. He is working at the interface where semi-arid land meets salt-affected land.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Mr. J.C. Kobelke (Leader of the House).

*House adjourned at 7.00 pm*

---