

SOUTHERN FORESTS IRRIGATION SCHEME

42. Hon DIANE EVERS to the Minister for Regional Development:

I refer to the southern forests irrigation scheme and the review of data by the CSIRO's senior hydrologist.

- (1) When will the review be complete?
- (2) Will the review results and report be made public; if yes, when; and, if not, why not?
- (3) Is the minister aware whether the Environmental Protection Authority review process will include the results of the CSIRO review?
- (4) Will the minister request that the Minister for Environment suspend the EPA's review until the results of the CSIRO data review is completed; and, if not, why not?
- (5) It has been suggested that the flow of water for environmental purposes from the Record Brook Dam may be released from the lower section of the dam where the more saline water will occur. What conditions will be placed on the scheme to ensure that the released water is of a quality suitable to support the downstream vegetation, including the Stewart Tree?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question. I know that I have had the answer, but unfortunately a copy of it is not here. I will seek to recall the content and will be happy to provide any additional information.

- (1)–(4) As the member will be aware, we were concerned about the challenges that were being made to the data and the modelling that underpins the southern forests irrigation scheme, particularly in relation to the stream flows from the forested areas. We then undertook to have an independent review done by CSIRO. That has been commissioned by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development as opposed to the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, which is the department that has done the modelling. The well-known hydrologist who is doing that project is currently out in the field doing that work and we anticipate that we will have a report on that later this month. The member will be aware that I have made a very public pledge that that information will become public, obviously after we have received the report and considered it. We absolutely anticipate that this material will feed into the Environmental Protection Authority assessment and will become a part of the EPA assessment. If the EPA needs to take a longer time for its public environmental review process because of that information coming in, that is a decision that the EPA will make. But, clearly, this is going to be of use to the EPA in making its assessment of the project.
- (5) On the issue of the problem of saline water, where the environmental flow will come from and whether it will be released from lower sections, we are not familiar with that issue. I have sought further advice on it. When we obtain something, we will let the member know.