

WATER SUPPLY — REGIONS

166. Ms J.L. HANNS to the Minister for Water:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to addressing the impacts of climate change on water supplies in Western Australia.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on this government's significant investment in securing regional water supplies for agricultural communities?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how this investment is supporting communities across the wheatbelt and great southern regions?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

I thank the member for Collie–Preston for her question.

- (1)–(2) I am very pleased to outline some of the projects that the state government has undertaken to assist regional communities to deal with the impacts of climate change. Members on this side of the house understand that the south west of Western Australia is one of the places on the planet most impacted by reduced rainfall due to climate change, with a 20 per cent reduction in rainfall since the 1970s. That has an impact on regional communities, and particularly farmers' ability to access non-potable water when their on-farm supplies run dry. In 2019, Western Australia had an unprecedented 12 water deficiency declarations across dryland agricultural areas. WA had never had more than two water deficiency declarations before, but there were 12 on foot at once. That resulted in the state government spending almost \$4 million carting water to community points so that farmers could access water for animal welfare purposes. Despite the good rains last year, we currently have two new water deficiency declarations, one in Grass Patch and the other in Salmon Gums.

The government understands the difficulties that not having sources of non-potable water presents for farmers, including in many cases the distances they have to travel. That is why the government has invested over \$4 million on over 100 projects for community water supplies so that farmers can access off-farm non-potable water supplies. These projects can also provide water for towns to water public open space and for firefighting purposes. Over 100 of those projects have been completed by this government since it came into office.

I was very pleased to recently go to Merredin with Hon Sandra Carr to look at the 100th project, which will improve the town's stormwater network and enable the shire to capture stormwater to irrigate public open space. In dry parts of the state, having green public open space is very important. That project was half-funded by the state and half-funded by the shire. Having completed 100 of those projects already, the government has committed to provide \$7.3 million for a further 70 projects. A project could involve additional work to bring online an old town dam or an old railway dam that will provide valuable watering points for communities in the agricultural regions.

These projects often have great stories. I visited one of those projects in Lake Grace. Councillor Ross Chappell told me about the railway dam that his father built 100 years ago for the railway. He told me he had been arguing with the shire for years to bring that railway dam back online as a source of water for farmers and for firefighting purposes. The government has delivered that dam to the community, so this water source is now accessible. He is really chuffed to see that the dam his father built, which was full of water but had not been accessible to the community, has now been brought back online by this government.

As I said, we have already spent \$4 million and have committed another \$7.3 million to these projects. In the eight years of the previous government, it spent \$780 000 on similar projects. We, on this side of the house, understand the difficulties that climate change poses in many parts of the state, and we are getting on with assisting farmers and communities to have a reliable source of non-potable water.