

WATER CORPORATION, GROUND WATER DRAW

868. Mr EDWARDS to the Premier:

I refer to the media statement on Perth's water supply that was released this morning.

- (1) Is the Premier aware that as a direct result of the former coalition Government's \$220 million investment in ground water infrastructure, the Water Corporation has the capacity to draw 240 gigalitres of ground water a year?
- (2) Is the Premier also aware that the Water Corporation is drawing less than 160 gigalitres from that ground water supply, leaving some 35 per cent of its capacity, or 80 gigalitres, unused?

Several members interjected.

Dr Gallop: I cannot hear the questions.

The SPEAKER: Order, members! It took about five seconds for members to realise that I am standing. Members should take notice of the questions and should let the Premier hear them.

Mr EDWARDS: I will continue.

- (3) Has the Government limited the Water Corporation's ability to draw more heavily on Perth's ground water supplies in a year when low rainfall has left our dams at their lowest levels in a generation and the community has faced the tightest water restrictions in 30 years; and, if so, why?

Dr GALLOP replied:

- (1)-(3) In all these issues, the Water and Rivers Commission and the Water Corporation work together. It is the responsibility of the Water and Rivers Commission to make sure that water supplies in Western Australia are protected and used in an environmentally responsible way. All the decisions made by the Water Corporation on these issues must pass that test. The announcement made today survived that test. I responded to that point in my answer to the question asked by the member for Merredin. The second issue raised in the member for Greenough's question was that the previous Government had increased the capacity to access ground water. However, that can be only part of the equation. If there is a drought, it does not matter how large the capacity is, because there will still be a problem. That is what has happened in Western Australia in the past two years. The previous Government put all its eggs into the dam basket.

Mr Barnett: No it didn't.

Dr GALLOP: It did.

Mr Barnett: We put \$220 million into ground water.

Dr GALLOP: We have a crisis this year.

Mr Barnett interjected.

Dr GALLOP: Where has the Leader of the Opposition been this summer? Has he not noticed the problem?

Mr Barnett: Where have you been?

Dr GALLOP: The Government has been planning for the future.

Mr Barnett: You don't understand what is going on.

Dr GALLOP: The Government does understand what is going on. The previous Government said to the people of Western Australia that it was drought-proofing this State by providing a larger dam capacity. That strategy failed, just like the Leader of the Opposition's strategy for the people of Geraldton - Oakajee - failed. How much money went into the Oakajee project, and what did we get out of it? We have not got one cent of value out of that project.