

DESALINATION PLANT, UPDATE

7. Mr A.P. O'GORMAN to the Minister for Water Resources:

Will the Premier provide to the house an update on the progress of the desalination plant project in Kwinana?

Dr G.I. GALLOP replied:

The whole question of water and water conservation has been a major priority for my government since it was first elected in February 2001. In the short term, the government has initiated a range of measures, including the highly successful householder rebate program and the addition of new water sources through traditional means. In the longer term, two major inquiries are under way. One is investigating the feasibility of using the south west Yarragadee aquifer and the other is examining the potential of transporting water from the Kimberley. Both of these studies will be completed later this year. I commend Professor Reg Appleyard and his committee for the consultation process they are carrying out at the moment in the Kimberley. I will not comment on whether the opposition did any consultation when it announced its canal project during the election campaign. The answer to that question is that there was none.

Western Australia needs new sources of water that are independent of rainfall. There is no question that if there is to be a diversity of supply, one of those supply sources needs to be independent of rainfall, and that is why desalination is being pursued. In July last year I announced plans to proceed with a major seawater desalination plant in Kwinana. It will be a major source for the integrated water system that supplies water to not only Perth and Mandurah but also the goldfields and the agricultural regions. When completed, the new facility will provide an addition 45 gegalitres, or 17 per cent of the total supply, annually. The threat of a drying climate is now apparent and new and diverse sources of supply are needed. Desalination is vital to the future of Western Australia.

This is an issue not just of water supply but of the amenity of our city. With great pride I can report to this Parliament and to the people of Western Australia that, because of the consultation process the government engaged in with the landscaping and nursery industries in this state, the level of restriction required to save water while preserving our gardens was established. We are proud of the nature of our city and its amenity, and we have achieved the right level of restrictions, unlike the eastern States, where total sprinkler bans have undermined the amenity of the cities. To keep it that way, the desalination plant is needed. It is due for completion in 2006-07, and it will significantly reduce the risk of total sprinkler bans. I am pleased to advise the house that the two consortia bidding for the project have completed their work, and their proposals are being assessed by the Water Corporation. In the second week of April, the board of the Water Corporation will recommend the preferred supplier to the government. We will then be in a position to approve the contract and have it awarded by the middle of April. Construction can then begin, and the successful tenderer will have 18 months to build the project.

This issue is crucial for the future of Western Australia. We have involved the public, through the householder rebates, and the irrigation industry has also been involved. Further announcements will be made soon about the way in which our water can be better conserved, with a better balance between the aquifers, dams and, in the future, desalination. The government is working with the Harvey district to bring about reforms that will help the community as well as the Harvey irrigators. To have a guaranteed water future, diversity is essential, as is a water supply independent of rainfall. That is why desalination is so important. That is why other states are now putting desalination on their agendas. The government has not only put desalination on the agenda, it is also doing it. The government took up this issue back in 2001-02, when the then Leader of the Opposition said that there was no water crisis in Western Australia. The government is leading the way on this issue. The desalination plant will be built, and will provide water security for the people of Western Australia.