

WATER LICENCES

869. MR S.J. PRICE to the Minister for Water:

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the consultation process currently underway on the potential for cost recovery for water licences and permit applications?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house whether he is aware of anyone who is deliberately misleading the community on this issue?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

(1)–(2) I thank the member for Forrestfield for the question.

The SPEAKER: Just hold on for a second. You cannot ask in your question if a member of Parliament deliberately misled Parliament. The question is okay. It is just the answer. You cannot say someone has misled Parliament.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Just hold on a moment. I am getting advice from the Clerk—I am sure she is much brighter than the rest. No worries; go ahead.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I thank the member for the question. Members may recall that in the budget, we made a decision to ask water licence holders in the mining sector and the public water supply sector to pay a water licence fee for the first time, to recover the cost of administering that licensing system. We also said that we would begin a consultation with other sectors of industry who also access water licences to determine whether it is appropriate that some sort of cost recovery also apply in those sectors. I have to say we have been having some very good meetings around the state with a variety of different sections of industry on this issue. I went to one myself in Margaret River last week, convened mainly with the wine industry, to talk about this issue. It was a constructive discussion. People wanted information. They wanted to know how it would affect their industry. They have been quite good sessions.

I have to say, though, that the consultation in the community has not been assisted by the shadow Minister for Water, the member for Cottesloe, because of some of the misleading information that he has been peddling out there. I want to refer to an article that appeared in the *Eastern Suburbs Reporter* on 16 October, in which the shadow Minister for Water said, and I quote —

Opposition water spokesman David Honey said the proposed fees were unfair and would cost producers nearly \$6700 for each dam used for irrigation.

“A small farmer with multiple small dams will be slugged \$6700 per dam,” he said.

“A farm with six dams will be hit with a new \$40,000 tax.

The shadow minister wants to paint a picture of all these small farmers being slugged \$6 000 for every dam that they have. I want to point out to the member for Cottesloe that 96 per cent of dams in Western Australia do not require a licence. That will not change. Of those four per cent of dams that currently do require a licence, over 90 per cent of the holders of those licences only hold a single licence. So, 90 per cent of people could not possibly be charged for more than one licence. I had a look. We searched the whole state. There are 13 000 licence holders out there.

Mrs L.M. Harvey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Scarborough!

Mr D.J. KELLY: We cannot find more than 10 licence holders who have more than four licences for surface water. The presentation that the member for Cottesloe gives to people that this will be a huge new impost on people for every dam on their farm is just incorrect. So I would ask the member for Cottesloe: do not deliberately mislead the community in what you are putting out there.

Withdrawal of Remark

The SPEAKER: Minister, you cannot say “deliberately” mislead. It is not parliamentary. You can only say “mislead”.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Are you asking me to withdraw the statement, Mr Speaker?

The SPEAKER: No. I am just saying that you cannot say it. Just withdraw it.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I withdraw that.

The SPEAKER: Thank you.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr D.J. KELLY: I would ask the member for Cottesloe: simply do not put that sort of misinformation out there in the community. Maybe it was an honest mistake. I have explained it to the member once. I do not want to hear him say it again.

Can I also refer to an interview that the member for Cottesloe did on radio 6PR on 23 October when he talked about the increases that he claims we have made to water charges. He said, and I quote —

... they've on average they've increased water prices to the average household by about \$400 over the last two years ...

The actual increase in water charges over the last two years has been \$74, not \$400. Even when we add in wastewater and drainage, over the last two years we get to \$184, not \$400 as the member alleged in that radio interview.

In that same interview—this is someone of my favourites, because we had been talking that day about the need to save water—the member for Cottesloe said, and I quote —

... the desalination plants I've also been told have the capacity to increase their production by at least 50 per cent simply with improvements that the Water Corp have made over the years ... learning how to run these facilities better.

I can tell the member that those facilities already run at more than 100 per cent capacity. The Perth desal plant produces 45 gigs; at best, they can get another couple of gigs out of it, as they regularly do.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr D.J. KELLY: For some seawater desal plants with a 100-gigs design capacity, they already get a couple of gigs extra. So for the member to say on radio, “We don’t need to save water; we can just increase capacity in our desal plants by 50 per cent”, is, again, completely incorrect.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cottesloe!

Mr D.J. KELLY: We have had a very good conversation with the community about these issues.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Member for Dawesville, if you would stop interjecting, I will get through this answer quicker.

The SPEAKER: Member for Dawesville, you might want to be Speaker, but you are not. I call you to order.

Mr D.J. KELLY: We are having a very constructive conversation with the community around the need for water saving and the possibility of people making a contribution to their water licences. I would simply ask members opposite to be constructive in this discussion and we will get a sustainable system into the future.