

WATER CORPORATION — SERVICE CHARGES

331. Mr V.A. CATANIA to the Minister for Water:

I refer to the fixed water service charge faced by businesses in the regions shut off to visitors for toilets not being used, with examples of costs being billed in the period in, for example, Carnarvon at \$3 551 for 30 toilets, Geraldton at \$6 794 for 64 toilets and Shark Bay at \$2 832 for 27 toilets. When will the minister remove the toilet tax that is crippling regional businesses?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

I thank the member—I was going to say for “Claremont”, but I will say “north west coastal”—for the question. Before I answer his question, I might take this opportunity to thank the staff at the Water Corporation, Aqwest and Busselton Water for the efforts they have put in during the COVID-19 crisis. Those three water utilities are part of the army of unsung heroes in the state who have ensured that essential services continued during this crisis. I know they put a lot of work into ensuring continuity of supply, so I want to take this opportunity to thank them. It is my first opportunity to thank them for the work that they do.

In respect of the member for North West Central’s question, I made the comment that the member for Warren–Blackwood has a habit of writing to me and complaining about things and policies that he had in place when he was in government. The member for North West Central’s question and his complaint are another good example of the Nationals WA doing just that. He has been raising a campaign, if we can call it that, about the way the state charges for wastewater. The way we currently charge for wastewater is exactly the way that the state has done it for many years, including when the Leader of the Nationals WA and the member for Warren–Blackwood were Ministers for Water. For eight and a half years the National Party charged for wastewater services for business customers on the basis of the number of fixtures. The National Party, when in government, thought this was a perfectly reasonable way to charge for wastewater.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the National Party!

Mr D.J. KELLY: Now that the National Party is in opposition, all of a sudden it is a policy —

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the National Party, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Now that the National Party is in opposition, it thinks it is a policy that needs to change.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for North West Central, you will have the opportunity for a supplementary question.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I will give the member for North West Central an example, because either he is being disingenuous or he just does not understand how the policy works. The state government has just upgraded the Water Corporation wastewater treatment plant in Margaret River. It cost \$19 million to do that so the economy in Margaret River, largely tourism and the like, can continue to grow and so that when accommodation providers expand their businesses, the wastewater system is able to accommodate it. Of course, the wastewater system has to accommodate that level of peak flow. We cannot increase the size —

Mr V.A. Catania: Don’t you charge for the water in and out?

The SPEAKER: Member for North West Central.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The member for North West Central has no idea. Does he expect us to charge the little coffee shops or the little businesses in Margaret River that have one or two fixtures to pay for the \$19 million expansion of the Margaret River wastewater treatment plant, or should a greater share —

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warren–Blackwood.

Mr V.A. Catania: What about on consumption?

The SPEAKER: Member for North West Central, I gave you a couple of opportunities. I call you to order for the first time. Members, I am sure the minister is going to get to the point.

Mr D.J. KELLY: It is completely hypocritical of the member for North West Central to criticise and call for a change to a structure of payment for wastewater charges for business that for many years, including when the National Party had two ministers —

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for North West Central, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The Leader of the Nationals WA interjected a little earlier and asked whether we were going to do some different things for people as a result of COVID-19. I previously said that is an issue we are looking at in the same way that we have done a range of things.

Ms M.J. Davies: They're going out of business.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The Leader of the Nationals WA says that it is not happening quick enough.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals WA, I call you to order for the second time. It is question time, not question and answer at the same time.

Mr D.J. KELLY: When the Leader of the Nationals WA was sitting on the throne as Minister for Water, she was perfectly happy to administer this so-called toilet tax and when people wrote to her and complained to her about it, she sat on the throne and wrote back that it was a perfectly reasonable thing to do.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister, through the Chair.

Mr D.J. KELLY: She wrote back to all those people who complained and said that it was a perfectly reasonable way to charge for those services.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members will get a supplementary in a moment. Minister, I am sure you are getting near the end.

Mr D.J. KELLY: We are currently looking at what we can do about the COVID-19 circumstances and when we make a decision, we will announce it.