

GASCOYNE WATER CO-OPERATIVE

**390. Mr K.J.J. MICHEL to the Minister for Water:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's strong commitment to supporting food production workers and businesses in Western Australia's horticultural industry. Can the minister outline what the new water supply agreement with the Gascoyne Water Co-operative will mean for growers in the region and how this will support sustainable growth of food production in the Gascoyne?

**Mr D.J. KELLY replied:**

I thank the member for the question and I thank him for his representation on many issues relating to regional WA, least of which is water, which is what today's question is about. The Gascoyne Water Co-op is obviously very important to the growers in the Carnarvon region. It transferred from government ownership to the private sector and became a private business in 2001. As part of that transfer, it negotiated a 10-year water supply agreement with the Water Corporation. Like most other businesses, that was based on the growers paying the true cost for the provision of that water. That agreement expired in 2013. Unfortunately, the previous government could not get its act together to negotiate a new water supply agreement for the co-op through the Water Corporation. From 2013, up until we came to government, growers faced a great deal of uncertainty. Obviously, for those people who are in the horticulture business, their water supply is the most important asset. The growers endured quite a difficult position in that they did not know what their future would be. They could not plan for the future. One of the things we wanted to do when we came to government was establish a new long-term agreement for the growers in the Carnarvon region so that they could plan and grow their businesses. I am pleased to advise the house that we have, in fact, signed a new five-year agreement with the Gascoyne Water Co-op for new water pricing, which will again establish cost reflectivity for water. It will be phased in over the next five years and includes a whole lot of other packages that will improve business for the Gascoyne Water Co-Operative. Additional land will be made available through the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and I want to congratulate the Minister for Agriculture and Food for the work that she has done on this agreement. There will also be improved infrastructure for the growers.

It really is a good deal for the growers in Carnarvon. I want to quote from one of the co-op's directors, Tom Day, who gave an interview on 9 August in which he described the new agreement as welcome and very positive, and said it gave certainty to the growers. He urged everybody to get behind the agreement and not muck it up. After a long period of uncertainty created by the previous government, they can now go forward with confidence.

Of course with the reference to not mucking it up, there are some people who have been agitating against the agreement.

**Mr D.T. Punch:** Who's that?

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** The member for North West Central, who prior to the election, having failed under the previous government to deal with this issue, was out there attacking members of the co-op who were negotiating in good faith with the government and undermining the process and making promises that he knew he would never have to keep because they were never going to win the election. He is still out there undermining the good work of the co-op to get this business back onto a secure footing.

We know the member for North West Central is good at undermining and attacking people, because we see what he does in his own team. We know how good he is. We know he is a fan of Barnaby Joyce. We know he does not like his own leader. We know he does not like his own deputy leader. He is a great force of destruction. While for me a new member for North West Central at the election would have been immensely welcome, in some ways I am glad to have the member for North West Central back in the Parliament, because we know he is not only a destructive force in the community, he is a destructive force on the opposition benches.