SALINITY, DEEP DRAINAGE TASK FORCE'S INVESTIGATIONS

687. Dr CONSTABLE to the Minister for Primary Industry:

(1) Did the Deep Drainage Taskforce investigate other saline water discharge sites such as the Hunter River Salinity Scheme, with a view to applying similar technology to Western Australia's salinity problem?

(2) If no to (1), why not and if yes to (1), why was a similar strategy not adopted?

(3) Were modern investigatory technologies such as aerial electromagnetic surveys studied by the taskforce?

(4) If no to (3), why not and if yes to (3), why were such technologies not adopted as part of the taskforce strategy?

(5) Was the use of modern control technologies such as electronic salinity sensors, ultrasonic flow and depth gauges to help fight salinity investigated by the taskforce?

(6) If no to (5), why not and if yes to (5), why were these technologies not embraced as part of the taskforces strategy?

Mr HOUSE replied:

(1) The Hunter River Salinity Scheme was not specifically investigated. However, the Taskforce did consider the Coorong drainage scheme in South Australia.

(2) The Hunter River Salinity Credits Scheme has been designed to manage discharge of saline water from mines into the Hunter River. A limit has been placed on total saline water discharge (which is reduced annually) and individual mines allocated a proportion that they are allowed to discharge. The are only allowed to discharge water under strictly controlled conditions that minimise environmental harm. For example, discharging in periods of high flow in the river. The mines are able to trade in salinity credits, providing an incentive to find alternative ways to manage their saline water. The scheme is suitable where a point source of pollution can be identified, measured and controlled. It has an application in industrial situations but not in agricultural situations where there are diffuse sources of saline water, which cannot be identified, measured or controlled readily.

(3) The Taskforce was aware of, familiar with and supported the use of techniques such as electromagnetic surveys.

(4) The purpose of the Taskforce was to develop a protocol that "Coordinates deep drainage (including underground pumping of saline water and relief wells) practices within catchment areas to maximise the benefits in treating salinity and waterlogging whilst taking into account the possible negative impacts of fresh or saline water disposal". The Salinity Council and government agencies, such as Agriculture WA have been actively involved in trialing a range of such techniques which are collectively known as airborne geophysics.

(5) No.

(6) The Taskforce's role was not to look at the technology used to evaluate drain effectiveness. Electronic salinity sensors and ultrasonic depth and flow gauges are used to monitor the flow and water quality in drains. A variety of flow and quality measurement sensors are being used in drainage studies in WA. Agriculture WA and the Water & Rivers Commission have recently installed a series of such sensors in drains in the Dumbleyung area.