

WELLINGTON DAM

746. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Water Resources:

Further to my discussion with the minister on the recovery program for Wellington Dam, what process has been established to help progress the best use by irrigators, industry and consumers of the water resources in the Collie basin?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

I thank the member for his question and for sharing with me his local knowledge of the real potential for utilising water from the Collie basin. Together we visited the east Collie diversion to look at the process of reducing salinity in Wellington Dam. The member has made very clear that a fantastic resource exists there that should be utilised to benefit the people of Collie and the wider area of the south west of Western Australia. Wellington Dam holds some 185 billion litres of water; unfortunately, the water has a reasonably high salt content. To put it in context, the total amount of water used in the integrated water scheme is less than 300 billion litres a year. It is a huge amount of water. To utilise that water we must take account of the water coming down through the rivers and going into mine voids and mine dewatering. That water is also of good quality and is therefore very valuable. We do not want to focus on a gain from only one part of the system and not maximise the benefit of the resource right throughout the Collie basin. Although a lot of work has been done and proposals have come from government agencies and private enterprise on how they can do something to recover useful water from the Collie basin, we need to develop some form of planning and assessment so that the government can engage proponents with particular projects to try to bring some of that water into production at the earliest possible date. As a result of the urging by the member for Collie-Wellington and with his support, I have established a steering committee to be chaired by Mr Ross Kelly, who has been chairing the Water Reform Implementation Committee. This five-person committee will seek submissions from government agencies, key stakeholders in the area and private proponents and assess the priorities for bringing forward projects that will make sure the water from Wellington Dam in the Collie basin is used to maximum effect and for the purposes for which it is most suitable. It may be that some of the water with slightly higher salinity levels can be used in that state. Other water may require desalination or some remediation process before it is suitable for a higher level of use. It is a very valuable resource and I look forward to receiving the report on the work of this committee by Christmas. That will provide us with the basic information on which parts of that very valuable water resource we can proceed with and, in a timely way, get maximum value from it.