

COLLIE CATCHMENT AREA, SALINITY AND WATER QUALITY

601. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Premier:

Will the Premier please advise the House of the impact that the Commonwealth's decision not to recognise the Wellington Dam recovery project will have on salinity and water quality in the Collie catchment area?

Dr G.I. GALLOP replied:

I thank the member for Collie for that question. As members will be aware, the Commonwealth has delivered a massive blow to rural and regional Western Australia through its decision not to recognise \$50 million worth of bids that the State has submitted for funding under the national action plan. One of the projects rejected by the Prime Minister is the \$15 million Wellington Dam recovery project - an ambitious plan to improve the quality of water in the Collie River and to return a saline water supply to drinking water quality. Perhaps the Prime Minister needs reminding that the national action plan is a plan for salinity and water quality. The Wellington Dam project offers a unique opportunity to be the first major restoration of a river in Australia from the effects of salinity. It is a wonderful project. No river in Australia has been restored to this degree, and we could do it in a relatively short time frame.

The Collie River is renowned for the social and recreational values that are enjoyed by a large number of rural and city people. Freshening the water in the catchment will also have a number of positive effects on environmental values, including fish and crustacean breeding, and could have a positive effect on the Leschenault Inlet. I thought the Prime Minister would have leapt at the opportunity to be part of a showcase project to repair an important river system. This would be a practical, on-the-ground response to the salinity and water quality issues in Australia today. However, there has been no support from the Commonwealth, from the Liberals or from the National Party for what we are doing in Western Australia. Moreover, the Prime Minister's decision puts in jeopardy an ambitious plan to supply into the integrated scheme up to 15 gigalitres of water from the Wellington Dam, which is currently affected by salinity, by shandyng it with fresh water from Stirling Dam to produce water of a drinkable quality.

Wellington Dam is Western Australia's largest dam, with a capacity of 185 gigalitres. The yield, when full, is approximately 100 gigalitres. Sixty-eight gigalitres of this are allocated to the Harvey irrigators, but some 32 gigalitres are unallocated and could be used for important projects in the south west or for the integrated water supply scheme in Western Australia.

In contrast with Wilson Tuckey's statements that the Wellington Dam recovery project will benefit only the state agencies, in particular the Water Corporation, Harvey Water, the cooperative that supplies the irrigators, believes that the primary beneficiaries of the project will be the farming community of Darkan-Williams and the irrigators of the Collie district. The Prime Minister has questioned the regional support for this project. However, in addition to comments from the chair of the regional natural resource management groups, Mrs Barbara Morrell, and the Harvey irrigators in support of this project, the Collie project is already contained in the South West Catchments Council's draft regional strategy.

Here we have it. Western Australia already has runs on the board with solutions to combat salinity. We come up with practical projects that will help solve the salinity and water quality problems in Western Australia. What help do we get from the Commonwealth? None at all. That is where it stands on this major issue in Western Australia. Where does the State Opposition stand - right behind the Commonwealth Government in denying the people of Western Australia access to the national action plan money.