

WELLINGTON DAM

Grievance

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Wellington - Parliamentary Secretary) [9.25 am]: I rise to grieve to the Minister for Water Resources on the issue of the Wellington Dam. I am glad to see that a report has been tabled but some of the issues I would like explained revolve around future uses of that dam, some of which are quite dear to the hearts of Collie people. One of those is recreation. My question to the minister is: in future will recreational pursuits be allowed on that dam? If they are reduced to some degree, what would be the cost to the Collie community, and has an economic impact study been done to assess whether that will impact on the Collie community? In my view, if there is any reduction in recreational pursuits on that dam, it will impact quite significantly on the businesses in Collie. That is only one small part of it. It is my understanding that the dam will be upgraded for safety reasons and in the order of \$20 million will be spent in the near future, which bodes well for the dam and the water body because it means it will have a future. We all understand that water is one of the major topics in the political arena at the moment.

In saying that, I want to raise other aspects relating to the dam and the water body itself. Will water be allocated in future to make sure that fledgling industries such as vegetable growing and those sorts of high density-type industries that will spring up along the coastal plain will be catered for? People are starting to go for smaller plots, such as 10 acres, rather than the broad farm-type dairy industry. Will water allocations be made for that? Another matter on everyone's lips is that there have been a lot of advertisements in the paper from Agritech. Has that been analysed to the nth degree? The proposal has been around for a long time and I think due consideration must be given to it. I ask the minister whether that has been done. There are many populist theories along that line and I think the community should be made aware of the pitfalls or the positives of that proposal.

Another matter we have talked about is that the Water Corporation and Griffin Coal are working very hard on diverting salt on the upper reaches of the Collie River. I have been out to have a look at that and certainly to me it looks like a reasonable proposal. Should it go the full distance and the water then be stored in the Harris River dam, which is not that far as the crow flies? It would make a great storage dam if we were able to have desalination on the top end and then shoot the water across. The trunk lines are already hooked up to the integrated system. There is an opportunity there, although it may involve private money and private work. If that is not possible, will some consideration be given to this water not being desalinated to the nth degree but used for industry, where the quality or standards are not as stringent as for potable water? We know that in future the water will be required in the Collie area for industry. It is my belief that in the future the "not in my backyard" syndrome that applies on the coastal strip will force more industries inland and water will be needed for those industries. I ask the minister whether that will be considered. Another matter of great importance over probably the past 20 years is that in the backwaters of the catchment, right out to Darkan and on the east branch, there has been much planting. There have been trials of down-the-hole air pumps that are pumping water out at quite a fast rate. This study examined issues such as tree planting and mechanical means of drainage, to see what impact they have had already. I beg to differ with some of the gossip and minor beliefs that this is not working, because the number of blue gum and other native trees planted in that area surely must have made some difference. They have certainly made a difference to the run-off, and if that is the case, they have surely made some difference to the salinity as well.

Another issue involves the town of Collie, which is on the banks of the Collie River. At Allanson Park, water run-off is through a non-sewered area. What impact will that have if that water is to be used in the future? I think that is a major concern. Although we have not experienced many wet winters, about 10 years or so ago, Allanson Park had a problem. When it became extremely wet, its reverse system used for sewerage could not dissipate or get rid of grey water, so it was running down into the creek. I wonder whether that was looked at as well as irrigation. It must be remembered that if it does not rain, we do not have water in the dams. That is the case this year. There is still no run-off in that area, which is of concern. We cannot put our eggs in one basket. Will there be any attempt in the future to look at whether excess rainwater can be stored in any of those dams or maybe even passed through the proposed desalination plant at Binningup? Some of the fresh rainwater that goes over the top of the Wellington Dam could be stored in the Harris Dam, because the pipelines are in place, although the pumps have been taken out. It must be remembered that if there is no rain, there is no water. Although the Wellington Dam will have limited use, I wonder what that use will be.

MR J.C. KOBELKE (Balcatta - Minister for Water Resources) [9.32 am]: I thank the member for Collie-Wellington for his grievance and also for his very strong advocacy for his area and understanding of some of the complexities that involve water in the Collie-Wellington basin. The member has clearly stated the importance of the Wellington Dam. To make sure that we could move forward in this area, recognising the dam as the largest reservoir in our south west, I commissioned the report entitled "Water source options in the Collie-Wellington

Basin”, which I tabled today. I cannot in a few minutes give justice to it, but I do need to thank Ross Kelly who chaired the committee, Verity Allan, Simon Holthouse, Paul Frewer and David Smith for their work in putting together this report.

Mr T. Buswell: Who was the second to last person?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Paul Frewer.

This report brings together some of the information that was put forward by government agencies, proponents and people with local knowledge to make sure that we have a starting point with some of the numbers and how we could do things in this area. Although the report is not definitive in saying what the next step is, it gives us a basis for discussing with all the key stakeholders what might be the next steps in the process of making maximum use of the basin’s water. People are well aware that the water currently in the Wellington Dam has had a high salt content, which is of limited value even to agriculture for irrigation. The diversion that is taking place has resulted in an improvement in salinity.

I will just touch on the recommendations in the report, which I think is one way of encapsulating some of the matters raised by the member for Collie-Wellington. The first recommendation states in part -

The work carried out in this pre-feasibility study should be extended and refined in order to establish a definitive water resource development plan for the Collie-Wellington Basin.

That is certainly something that we need to do and this will be one of the key building blocks to do that.

The second recommendation states -

The volume of water diverted from the Collie River East diversion should be increased to 14 GL.

That is, 14 gigalitres each year. Again, this is something that we are seeking to do. The report points out that there are issues in doing that because the current Chicken Creek mine void has only limited capacity. Therefore, we need to examine the environmental impact of having water with higher saline content in that void and to make sure that it does not seep into groundwater. Those projects are in place. They need to be continued and we have the money to continue them.

The third recommendation is -

The feasibility of using groundwater generated by mine dewatering as a source of drinking water should be subjected to further investigation.

That has been on the agenda, but this report gives some of the numbers around that so we can look at what is viable for carrying that water to the Harris Dam or using it, as we currently do, for the power generation industry. The report has some diagrams showing how water can be swapped between different uses. The member for Collie-Wellington quite rightly pointed out that water can be used in areas that fit the purpose. Therefore, the water quality needed for industry is very different from that needed for potable water. There is certainly an industry demand here and it is potentially increasing with the growth of industry in the member’s area. Perhaps we need to see whether we need such a high level of treatment, if that water is for industry rather than for potable use.

The fourth recommendation states -

The future demand for fit for purpose water for industry and agriculture in the Greater Bunbury area needs to be determined.

That is taking up what the member suggested, because if there was major growth down at Kemerton, there currently is not a water supply for that. If that was for industry use, it would not need the same level of quality as potable water. The cost of that water will be a major factor in deciding whether industry can go ahead, if water is a major component of a particular industry.

The fifth recommendation is -

Managed recreation within the Wellington Dam catchment should continue; -

I am sure that the member for Collie-Wellington will welcome that, but it does go on to state -

however more stringent control is needed over this.

The member will take a key role in making sure that the interests of the local community and people who come from far and wide to use the dam for recreation are properly considered when we look at how we can make sure that those controls are in place so that we can manage continuing recreation on Wellington Dam.

Recommendation seven states -

Government should encourage the private sector to become involved in the future development of the water resources of the Collie-Wellington Basin.

I am quite happy to look at doing that. In recommendation eight, the report takes it a bit further and states in part -

Participation by the private sector in certain aspects of water supply within the Collie Wellington Basin needs to be accommodated within the integrated plans prepared for the region . . .

Quite clearly, there is a potential role for private sector involvement. Private sector industry will use a good deal of that water, as will irrigators. The issue is how we actually work out the big picture, so that we can take certain parts of it and put them out to tender, so that the private sector might become involved. Those people who believe that the private sector can solve the problem need to read this report to understand the complexity of the situation and to ensure that we get the best value out of it. We do not want to put in place a process that means we end up using half the water in the basin because we make the wrong choice and allocate water to the wrong users, and find that it is very low value or has a very high cost, and therefore that excludes the use of other water. It is really a matter of getting the whole picture so we can look at the parts. Agritech has been spending a lot of money on advertising. However, it does not have a plan for the whole basin; it has one process, which may be a part of the solution that needs to fit into the overall plan if we are to get good value. I hope that, in the very near future, we will see that work based on this report gives us a picture of how private sector involvement can take place, so that it builds the whole project and use of water in the whole catchment. Then we can ask for expressions of interest for involvement of the private sector in doing part of that. I know there are private sector entities that are very keen to get involved. We need to make sure that we give them clear guidance so they do not waste money by working on projects and providing the detail that we would need for a part of the project that may not proceed immediately. I thank the member for his grievance.