WATER — UPPER COLLIE — WATER MANAGEMENT

5266. Mr M.P. Murray to the Minister for Water:

(1) In reference to the Department of Water's October 2007 report, 'Managing water in the Upper Collie: a status report on surface and groundwater management', I ask:

(a) why was the commitment to "review the 2007 plan and update with a statutory water management plan, due in 2011" never completed;

(b) were plans outlined for the "statutory management plan to build on a variety of new projects" ever completed and what was achieved in this respect;

(c) what is the status of the "larger permanent diversion under stage two of the Collie Salinity Recovery Project";

(d) what progress has been made in respect of comments on page 41 that Verve Energy would "cease supplementing the pools until alternative safe water sources were found", have alternative safe water sources been found, and are these pools no longer being supplemented with unsafe water; and

(e) what is the status of the proposal outlined on page 28 to transfer mine dewater to Harris Reservoir?

(2) In reference to the recent reduction in environmental flows from Harris Dam, I ask:

(a) why have environmental flows been reduced; and

(b) has the water instead been transferred to local industries for their use?

(3) In reference to the removal of the gauging station at Bingham River, I ask:

(a) why has the gauging station been removed;

(b) are regular salinity readings being taken from the Bingham River; and

(c) is the Department aware that readings taken in February 2016 by private interests have revealed salinity levels in Bingham River of 9174–10140 TDS and if so, why is this not being addressed?

Ms M.J. Davies replied:

(1) (a) The Department of Water's Upper Collie water allocation plan (2009) replaced the Upper Collie water allocation plan for public comment (2007). It set the water management arrangements to be delivered through water licences, which are the regulatory instruments for water management under current legislation. The plan may be replaced with a statutory water allocation plan subject to changes under the State Government's proposed water reform legislation.

(b) The new projects referred to in the report were studies looking at community engagement, mine void management, ecological values, options to reduce salinity, options for a water utility, options to transfer water to Harris Dam, indigenous values and community values. These studies informed both the Upper and Lower Collie water allocation plans, and other management activities. The Upper Collie water allocation plan (2009) consolidated and supported the implementation of strategies to address competition for mine dewatering, variation in climate and groundwater recovery post mining. Implementation of the Upper Collie water allocation plan (2009) has delivered progress on groundwater recovery through reduced abstraction and dewatering, the Collie Basin groundwater model has been upgraded, and cumulative impact assessments have been used for new abstraction and for mine closure plans.

(c) The salinity diversion trial identified the issues that need to be considered for any future diversion projects.

(d) Supplementation of the Cardiff town pool has not occurred since 2007. The pool now reflects only natural flows.

(e) No mine dewater is transferred to the Harris Reservoir.

(2) (a) Environmental flows have not been reduced.

(b) Not applicable.

(3) (a) The gauging station was closed in 1999 because the project for which it was installed had concluded. Adequate data is available from another gauged site on the Bingham River and three other gauged sites in the catchment. All stations are assessed regularly against business needs.

(b) Yes.

(c) No, the Department is not aware of the readings referred to in the question. The Department of Water gauging station on the Bingham River showed no river flow from 11 February 2016. With no river flow, in the heat of summer the remaining pools of water can evaporate quickly, which can increase salinity and make readings unrepresentative.