

Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Brendon Grylls; Dr Geoff Gallop; Dr Judy Edwards; Dr Janet Woollard; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Jeremy Edwards

WATER SUPPLY, FUTURE SOLUTIONS

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mr Riebeling): Today I received a letter from the Leader of the National Party seeking to debate as a matter of public interest the following motion -

That this House call on the Government as a matter of urgency to establish a water summit to enable the Western Australian community to work with government to formulate solutions for the future water supply of Western Australia.

If sufficient members agree to this motion, I will allow it.

[At least five members rose in their places.]

The SPEAKER: The matter shall proceed on the usual basis.

MR TRENORDEN (Avon - Leader of the National Party) [2.55 pm]: I move the motion.

I bring this matter to the House because it is of vital interest. Members who have listened to the airwaves over the past few weeks would be aware of the interest in this issue. In rural and regional Western Australia this issue is right up there with all the other topics of interest. I was in Broome a few weeks ago, which is located north of the Speaker's electorate, and the issues of water supplies and planning are just as critical in the Kimberley region as they are to the metropolitan electorates or those in the deep south. There seems to be an attitude among some people that water supplies are not a problem for Western Australians; however, there is no question that they are a problem.

Before I get into the argument, I bring to the attention of House the speed at which the Government can work when faced with effective opposition. The National Party informed the Government that it would be bringing on this debate today and gave the Government some notice, as is the normal process. It is remarkable how quickly a matter of public interest has turned into a dorothy dixer from the other side and today, all of a sudden, forums have appeared out of the stratosphere.

Mr Kucera: That was rain that came down from the stratosphere.

Mr TRENORDEN: I thought rain came from a lower altitude than the stratosphere; however, I am pleased that it has rained. About an inch of rain has fallen in Northam and - I cannot speak for anyone else - I am pleased that my patch got a bit of rain.

The work the National Party has done on this issue has been recognised today and, in particular, the work that has been done by the member for Merredin, who is the National Party spokesman on water issues. We will be interested to know what format these forums will have. We agree with forums in principle, because when we called for a summit some weeks ago it was interesting how the public took to the idea. The old saying is that a week is a long time in politics. I could not let time go by without pointing out that just one week ago, on 9 April, the National Party asked the Premier about a water summit. His answer was that the people of Western Australia want action; not words. Now we have gone from action and not words to words and action, which we approve of. The National Party and Western Australians are not convinced that there has been enough planning in this process. If members do not want to take the National Party at its word, they should listen to talkback radio and read the letters to the editor in the newspapers for evidence that this argument is not finished in the minds of Western Australians. If Western Australians are not taken along with the argument about water, the process is planned to fail. People must go along with this argument. Only one week ago this Government said that there would be no such thing as a summit. We shall not have a summit but we shall have forums; but what is in a word? We shall see what format they have.

The dams are at 17 per cent capacity and all members know that even though we had a wonderful night of rain and more today, there has been no run-off; it is too early for that. I know because I live on the other side of the Mundaring catchment and drive through that area. It is good that the soil has been dampened and there is the possibility of future rains causing run-off. However, in terms of water storage, we are no better off now than we were the day before yesterday. More pressure will be put on our water resources when we take into account the population growth that will occur in this State. The Water Corporation's research indicates that by 2031 the State will require an extra 150 gegalitres of water; that is, the equivalent of four Serpentine dams. We will therefore require a substantial amount of water. I do not oppose the Government's announcement last week on aquifers but I question the planning that has gone into using them. I believe the announcement referred to seven gegalitres. We will require 150 gegalitres within 20 years. The change in Australia's weather patterns was outlined by both the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and the Water Corporation. Western Australia can expect a substantial downturn in rainfall that will require the aquifers to be recharged. Members pooh-poohed me when I said last week that we cannot take any more from those aquifers than a

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recharge will replace. The supply of water is an absolute basic requirement. The CSIRO and the Special Broadcasting Service news have said that even if population growth is stemmed in the next 50 years, we will still require double the water, energy and materials that mother Earth can supply. We must ensure water is used efficiently so that it can be conserved in the long term.

Last week the Government announced new bores would be drilled in an effort to find a solution to this problem, but it said that this was a short-term measure. At the end of this month the Water Corporation will put out for tender the construction of a desalination plant costing \$200 million. The National Party queried that decision. I want to give the member for Merredin time to speak on this matter. Although the National Party supports the forums announced by the Premier and will be interested to hear of their format, it believes the Premier will fail if he does not take Western Australians along with him.

MR GRYLLES (Merredin) [3.02 pm]: It is ironic that it rained on the day we brought this matter before the House. It is great to hear that some of the rain has made it to the agricultural areas. I am sure that the cropping of farms there will begin in earnest in the next couple of days. However, even given the rain, the facts are still very sobering. An average winter will yield a run-off of 160 million kilolitres into our dams. The current dam levels are at an all-time low and if the coming winter is an average one, there will be only 260 million kilolitres in a storage capacity of 650 million kilolitres. At the end of winter, that will amount to 40 per cent of our dam capacity and will not be enough to avert water restrictions next summer. That is the reason this issue is a matter of public importance.

I support the motion moved by the Leader of the National Party. When the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Power Act passed the commonwealth Parliament in 1949, it ended more than 60 years of proposals and speculation about the development of water resources in Australia's highest land mass. It was a moment of triumph for the Western Australian-born Nelson Lemmon, Minister for Works in the post-war Government of the Labor Prime Minister, Ben Chifley. Mr Lemmon must take much of the credit for turning a popular vision into reality. He ensured that the Snowy scheme was set up politically to achieve its full potential for the nation, providing water for industrial development and the energy to sustain that industry. Nelson Lemmon stared down the petty sectional interests among the bickering States about who would control the scheme and the myriad critics who claimed that a project of such extraordinary vision, of vastly challenging engineering and of immense cost would never come to fruition. My note of what he said at the time reads -

I'm a doer . . . I'm not a great theory man. I'm a practical fella.

My note of what he said at the time to his wife Ada reads -

I think we've got something worth looking at!

After 60 years of argument, claims and counter-claims, the Snowy scheme today provides energy for millions of households in eastern Australia and water that yields billions of dollars in jobs and export income.

During the past six months, there has been debate about the best way to harness and manage the State's water supplies. The lack of rainfall in the past few seasons has brought this issue sharply into focus. As has already been explained, our catchment supplies are at an all-time low, and water restrictions apply, in not only Perth but also the south west. Moreover, as was stated two weeks ago in *The Sunday Times*, irrigation channels in Harvey are dry. In last Friday's *The West Australian*, political editor Anne Burns wrote about the stand-off between the Water Corporation and the Waters and Rivers Commission over ground water access. It was claimed that if the matter could be resolved, the surface water drought could be alleviated. We must fully investigate the aquifer resource, and establish the sustainability of the reserves that are available. If we do not solve the water shortage problem today, water shortages will continue to be a problem during the next 50 to 100 years. The National Party would like the two government departments that are at odds over this crisis to work together on the issue.

Last Thursday, some members may have heard a radio interview with the head of the Water Corporation, Jim Gill. He stated that if it rains, Western Australia will not have a problem. He is exactly right. If it rains, Mr Gill will not have a problem, because he is charged only with supplying water to the city. However, it is incumbent upon the Government to ensure that a water shortage problem does not arise year in, year out. This problem will not go away next year.

There have been many claims and counterclaims during debate on this problem. The vision of Charles Yelverton O'Connor, an engineer of world stature who brought water from Mundaring to the goldfields, and subsequently to many rural communities, endured the same petty wrath. As we all know, bitter public wrangling about the complexity and cost of his far-sightedness caused him to ride his horse into the sea near Fremantle and take his own life. However, for the ensuing 100 years, the State has been the abiding beneficiary of his vision and intelligence. Anyone who has been listening to talkback radio, or who has read the letters section in *The West Australian* and many country newspapers during the past few weeks, will be aware of the public's support

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for a fresh examination of all the water options that are available to the State. Clearly, the public is telling this House that it wants solutions to the water supply problem.

Hon Ernie Bridge - a former Labor minister who was responsible for water resources, and whose vision it was to turn the rivers of the Kimberley to the State's advantage - must understand the C Y O'Connor experience only too well. On 6 March 2002, an article appeared in *The West Australian* titled "Kimberley pipeline a pipe dream". In that article, Dr Gill again dismisses Ernie Bridge's vision as a dream. The Water Corporation authorised a newspaper advertisement in which the public was invited to attend planning seminars to find out what the corporation was doing to shore up the State's water resources. The advertisement stated that the public was entitled to learn the facts about piping water from the Kimberley. It went on to debunk the Kimberley option, claiming that it would cost between \$10 billion and \$15 billion to build, and would yield water that would cost consumers at least \$4 a kilolitre. I am not aware of a comprehensive study undertaken by the Water Corporation into the Kimberley water option since 1992. In the ensuing 10 years there have been important and sweeping changes to engineering ideas, technology and materials. Surely these changes demand a re-examination of the Kimberley option, among the mix of water harvesting options that are available to Western Australia.

I have put this proposal to the House today, and once it reaches the public sector I know that there are some who will scoff at my suggestion. I must also sustain the accusation that my party was part of the previous Government, which, in 1993, abandoned the last attempt to finalise the study on the Kimberley option. However, before I too become a target of the anti-Kimberley faction, I ask the members of this House and the community to consider why the State brought to reality the vision of the Dampier to Perth/Bunbury natural gas pipeline. I ask members to consider the startling parallels between the concept of transporting gas over a vast distance and the reasons we did this, and the idea of exploiting a tremendous surface water supply that could be harnessed for everybody's benefit. In November 1997, my parliamentary colleague the member for Cottesloe and then Minister for Energy stated that the access to gas -

... provided a long term secure supply of an environmentally friendly source of energy. It also contributed in a fundamental way to the development of Western Australia's vast gas reserves ... Today we are benefiting from this project through exports, jobs and royalties.

In 1979, the State Government borrowed \$1 billion at a time when interest rates were historically high to build the 1 500-kilometre pipeline from Dampier to Perth. The member for Cottesloe also told the House -

The borrowings and ... commitments involved considerable risk and represented a substantial investment by the State.

... the private sector was not prepared to raise the risk capital and secure debt funding for such a massive infrastructure project. It required foresight and leadership by the Government of the day.

The gas pipeline ultimately cost the taxpayers \$1.4 billion. However, in 1998, it was sold to Epic Energy for \$2.4 billion. This public infrastructure project was sold to the private sector for a profit. We must examine that situation when we study the water options for this State.

In short, Western Australia was forced and encouraged to act on this gas pipeline project because it faced diminishing energy supplies near the communities where demand was greatest. Vast reserves of alternative supplies were available, but were at least twice the distance away. The State used new technology to harness these supplies despite the considerable costs and engineering complications involved, and it had the vision to harness those reserves for industrial and consumer users across the State. In building the pipeline, the supplies were brought to the areas of greatest demand. Today, Western Australia should be forced and encouraged to secure the water needs of the State for the same reasons. For these reasons, we should not totally ignore the Kimberley option out of hand. Currently, we face diminishing traditional supplies in the south west, where the demand is greatest. We have the opportunity to harness vast alternative supplies, albeit at significant distance from the point of greatest demand, and we could use new technology to harness these supplies despite the complexity of the engineering and logistics that would be required. That is where the parallels between gas and water end.

We do not have the vision to harness these water resources. We are showing very little foresight and leadership, let alone public investment, in turning a very significant problem into an extraordinary opportunity. We have instead buried ourselves in a debate whereby claim and counterclaim, the demarcation disputes of petty bureaucracy, and self-justification and misinformation are shadowing and blocking the way ahead. A paper published in December 2001 by the Water Corporation titled "Planning for Perth's Water Needs" says that the corporation has invested \$523 million in water resource development that has boosted Perth's water supply capacity by 76 per cent from 1993 to 2002. I may be accused of firing a cheap shot, but an extended capacity to house water is of little significance to the State when those supplies remain empty. It seems that for the

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foreseeable future, those supplies will remain under capacity. To alleviate this problem, we must have a wet winter. However, if that does not happen, our problems will be much bigger next year.

Late last year, the Dumbleyung Shire Council in the State's south west was debating whether to spend \$12 000 of its limited resources to put in place water tanks so that the farmers of the Dumbleyung area could collect water for their stock. In a State as wealthy as ours in 2002, it seems amazing that the Dumbleyung Shire Council should be considering using 100-year-old technology when the Water Corporation has stated that it is improving the State's water capacity so much. This small country community is spending its money on building water tanks so that the people who line up to fill their tanks will not have to queue all day. We must properly plan for the future water needs of all Western Australians. If we allow this very important debate to be run by the bean counters, decades from now the people of Dumbleyung will still use a single-stand pipe. Members who debate this issue should go out of their way to embrace the diverse views of the entire Western Australian community. It was heartening to hear today that the Government will put forums in place, so that the people of Western Australia can have their say in this important debate. I will work hard to shape this debate on the maxim that all people in Western Australia, no matter where they live, should have access to fresh water at the turn of a tap. Only when we approach the challenge before us in this way will we develop a lasting water management strategy for this State.

Many countries are grappling with water management and supply issues. The advancement of technology has allowed nations to turn salt water into fresh water in the Middle East, to plan ways to fund and pipe water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, and to tackle the extraordinary complexity of piping water undersea from Alaska to California, as well as from the island of Sabah to the Malaysian peninsula. Western Australia is not the only place in the world that is grappling with new technologies and pipeline technologies to solve its water crisis. It is happening all over the world, and we could use that experience in other parts of the world to further this debate. Why should we not explore the challenges that confront us with the same breadth of ideas?

While this Government has agreed to fund a pilot study of seawater desalination at Kwinana for industrial and consumer use, why should we not fund a wider program to trial ground water desalination across the wheatbelt? Why could private or community companies not harness and pump desalinated ground water into the existing pipeline grid in the agricultural area and the goldfields? In the wheatbelt, water is piped from the coast to our small towns, and one of the greatest problems is that we must then pump the water from under the ground after it has been poured onto it. It would be absolutely ludicrous to continue to do this when the resource is already under the ground.

Why could we not harness the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's outstanding resources and scientific knowledge to trial ground water extraction and deep underground pumping, which could deliver for Western Australia not only fresh water but also ground-heated energy? What supplies can the Officer Basin in the Great Victoria Desert offer? Why should the kids of Aboriginal communities in the north west not be able to play football on grounds covered in grass rather than iron ore? Why should people, wherever they live, not be able to grow the plants and have the style of garden they desire? We must examine the array of options before us and develop a far-sighted plan for Western Australia.

It strikes me that the approach to water management in past decades, across Governments of both political persuasions, has been akin to using a bandaid on a wound that needs deep stitching. Today, because of the crisis afflicting Perth's water supplies, we have the opportunity to develop a plan, but do we have the foresight and the will to pursue such a vision? When we examine the options with a serious commitment of personnel, time and financial resources, we should embrace the project in a way that encompasses the economic and social needs of the entire State, not just the south west. It greatly worries my National Party colleagues that the debate on water at the moment is focused singularly on supplying water to the metropolitan area. What about the rest of the State that is being left behind in this debate? We must definitely change this approach.

In 1991, the Chase Manhattan Bank completed a report commissioned by the former Water Authority of Western Australia on the financing options for the construction and operation of water pipelines from the Kimberley to Perth. In its study, the bank examined earlier reports by Binnie and Partners for the Kimberley Regional Development Advisory Committee, and by the Infrastructure Development Corporation. Many reports have already been done on this issue. This last report in 1991 concluded that both the Binnie and IDC studies were designed to test whether, in broad terms, the construction of the Kimberley pipelines was technically feasible. Both studies argued that it was, but that major and expensive studies would be required to detail the conclusions.

Because of the amount of money involved in this issue, we must encourage private enterprise to become involved. However, private enterprise will want to be involved only if it knows that its work will lead to some role in supplying water to the State. Private enterprise cannot be expected to put up money for feasibility studies

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if it is not then allowed to play some part in supplying the water to the State and making money out of that further down the track.

The National Party's motion calls for an in-depth examination of all options to guarantee Western Australia's water supply. A summit would be the forerunner to that examination. In my view, and in the opinion of Ernie Bridge and other Western Australians, it is not the only benefit - that of a secure water supply - that harnessing the Kimberley waters by whatever means would bring to Perth and the south west. Other collateral benefits would include regional development opportunities and indigenous community development and health benefits. Until a definite examination is made of the Kimberley option and all other opportunities, we are unable to make informed comparisons and we will never know.

The last comprehensive study of an intrastate water supply system drawing on Kimberley water - analysing its costs and direct and collateral benefits - was abandoned in 1993 following a change of Government. In 1989, two studies showed substantial variation in the likely cost of water from the Kimberley. One by the Water Corporation estimated the cost of delivered water at \$10.50 a kilolitre. Another by the Kimberley Regional Development Commission put the cost at \$4.70 a kilolitre. The Infrastructure Development Corporation put the cost at \$3.45 a kilolitre. The Lend Lease consortium, comprising French and Australian companies and using a \$2 billion canal system, estimated the cost at only 95c a kilolitre. We need to end claim and counterclaim with a fair, open and accountable study of all options for a water supply for Perth. That will end the public debate run through newspapers and talkback radio that calls for the Kimberley option to be pursued. The four estimated costs need to be examined and the real figure must be put to the community.

A decade ago various government-commissioned studies reported that the south west would be the source of water for Western Australia in the long term. Ten years later we have a supply crisis. I support the motion moved by the member for Avon that the Government urgently convene a water summit to begin this process in earnest.

DR GALLOP (Victoria Park - Premier) [3.21 pm]: The Government joins with the National Party in recognising the importance of water to the future of Western Australia. We acknowledge the contribution its members are making to this debate. It is obvious that, in calling for a summit, the Leader of the National Party has clearly not acknowledged the enormous effort made by the Government to address this vitally important issue and the work it will continue to undertake as it develops its comprehensive water strategy. Calling for a summit implies that nothing is happening and that the Government is working from a blank sheet of paper. That is clearly not the case. The Government recognises the seriousness of the water crisis and is moving to address the problem. I will outline the initiatives the Government is taking. The motion focuses on a summit and does not adequately take into account what the Government is already doing. People want a comprehensive strategy to deal with this issue.

Let us look at the current water supply situation in Western Australia. I remind the House of the seriousness of the water supply situation facing Perth and why a comprehensive water strategy is necessary. The south west of Western Australia has had a 50 per cent decrease in run-off over the past 30 years, and 2001 was the second-driest year on record in terms of inflow to dams. The total inflow to the integrated water supply storage dams in the winter of 2001 was only 30 million kilolitres, or 30 gegalitres. That was 18 per cent of the average for the past 25 years and only nine per cent of the long-term average. With dams at critically low levels, we need a winter rainfall far above average to make up for last year's dry winter, and we cannot assume that will occur. We must be mindful of what scientists are saying about the longer-term climate forecasts and the possible impact on water supplies. The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's latest predictions on the impact of climate change suggest that the south west of Western Australia will experience a decrease in rainfall of up to 20 per cent by 2030 and up to 60 per cent by 2070. That is the greatest predicted rainfall reduction in Australia. We know there is a 50 per cent likelihood that there will be another El Nino event this year, which will lead to below average rainfall. The Bureau of Meteorology currently predicts a 35 to 45 per cent probability of achieving medium rainfall for the period March to May 2002. We have had a very dry period, and the predictions for this winter will not allow us to be complacent in any sense.

Any analysis of the water situation needs to start with consumption. It is interesting to note how the demand for water in Perth is changing. The projected total water demand for Perth in 2001-02 was 298 gegalitres. Since 1994, there has been a dramatic increase in water demand of 74 gegalitres. Comparative data indicates that the average consumption of water per capita has increased from 98 kilolitres a year in 1981-82 to 120 kilolitres a year. Although the average in-house use has remained the same at 57 kilolitres a year, external use for gardens, swimming pools etc has increased by 22 kilolitres a year.

Mr Omodei interjected.

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Dr GALLOP: Australia is one of the least efficient nations in its use of water, and Perth is one of the least efficient cities in its use of water. We have not only the challenge of the long-term change in rainfall, but also the increasing demand for water. The focus must be on consumption as well as the supply of water.

We have indicated that one of the problems with this issue is the previous Government's strategies. All this information clearly demonstrates that the Western Australian community has a serious problem on its hands, and the Government is committed to acting decisively in both the short and long term. The previous Government failed to address this issue properly because it raised the expectations of the people that it would drought-proof Perth. However, it put the focus on dams and pipelines. Of course that creates an increase in the capacity to collect water, but, as we found when the rainfall decreased, it proved to be an inadequate philosophy and strategy.

Mr House: It is still important.

Dr GALLOP: I remind the Parliament of what I have said: the previous Premier indicated in a front-page headline in *The West Australian* that he was going to drought-proof Perth by building more dams. We have had a drought and we have a crisis. The conclusion we can reach from that is that the previous Government did not drought-proof Perth and did not have the strategies available to deal with the issue properly.

Mr Trenorden: Do you think he may have got some advice from the Water Corporation before he said that?

Dr GALLOP: At the end of the day, the Government is held to account on these issues. The Government and the Premier of the day made it clear that their strategy would drought-proof Perth. It was an inadequate strategy and it has been exposed.

Mr Trenorden: Exactly the same people are talking to you.

Dr GALLOP: There is a difference: when people talk to us, we listen to what they say and we respond and work out a position. That is what is happening in Western Australia today. We want both the short and the long-term strategy. The motion moved by the Leader of the National Party is missing an assessment of what the Government has done already. We have taken very prompt action to deal with this issue. I mention four of the initiatives we have taken since being elected. Water restrictions were introduced in September 2002, limiting the scheme water used on gardens to two days a week.

Mr Johnson: Did you say September 2002?

Dr GALLOP: We might ask why the previous Government did not do it.

Mr Johnson: I think you got the date wrong. You said 2002.

Dr GALLOP: Water restrictions were introduced in September 2001. That was an initiative of the current Government.

Mr Johnson: I am helping you.

Dr GALLOP: Occasionally we make little mistakes. We introduced daytime sprinkler bans on 21 December 2001 for garden bores throughout the State. Last week, Cabinet agreed to spend \$37 million to commission three new bores in the Yarragadee aquifer. Once those bores are down, they will be there forever. We will examine the capacity of that water supply to produce water for the people of Perth over many years.

Mr Trenorden interjected.

Dr GALLOP: Finally - the member for Avon will be interested in this - water trading discussions have been held between the Water Corporation, the Water and Rivers Commission and the South West Irrigation cooperative to explore the possibility of trading water to release unused allocations that could be suitable for Perth's water supplies.

Mr Omodei: Your minister does not like those issues.

Dr GALLOP: We are examining those issues. The Government has a lot of tough issues to consider, and the member would know what they are. It is good that this matter is on the table and the Government is looking at it. The Government is clearly committed to ensuring that its decisions will be made with appropriate consideration for any environmental impacts. That is where there was a real difference between this side of the House and the other side last week. This Government made it clear that it would look at the environmental impact and would monitor what was being done.

Mr Omodei interjected.

Dr GALLOP: The member said last week that we should be using the available ground water, despite what was said by the Water and Rivers Commission.

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Mr Omodei: Did I?

Dr GALLOP: Well, that was said on the member's side. The member for Greenough said that. That is certainly an unacceptable approach to water. This Government is not being complacent. Given the possibility that we may receive very low rainfall this winter, the Government is actively undertaking contingency planning, including considering additional source development, as well as the option of a desalination plant.

I will comment now on the Kimberley water supply. By way of observation, I know Ernie Bridge very well and I support a lot of his initiatives. The most important initiative he has undertaken in recent years, which this Government strongly supports, is the work he is doing involving the training of indigenous people. I have been briefed on that issue by Ernie Bridge in my office and also out in the suburbs where he is running those programs. However, I do not agree with him on the Kimberley water supply issue.

Mr Omodei: Do you mean the Ord?

Dr GALLOP: No; the Kimberley pipeline. I make this observation particularly for the member for Merredin. I ask the member to draw a comparison between the circumstances that surrounded the goldfields pipeline controversy and those surrounding the Kimberley pipeline controversy. In respect of the goldfields pipeline controversy, a group of politicians was attacking an engineer; in the Kimberley pipeline proposal, engineers are attacking a politician. I ask the member to reflect upon that issue, because it makes for quite a different scenario.

Mr Omodei: The Kimberley pipeline proposal has been around for about 50 years, a long time before Ernie Bridge came along.

Dr GALLOP: Of course it has, but the member knows that the money involved in the Kimberley pipeline project rules it out as a feasible option for the people of Western Australia when compared with the alternatives. The Government has looked at that issue closely.

I will now move to demand management. The Government is committed to sustainability and that means taking a long-term view of the current situation and developing a comprehensive response that addresses sustainable supply options, as well as water use, efficiency and demand management. Australia is currently one of the least efficient water-using nations in the world and Perth has very high water use in comparison with other capital cities. This is clearly not sustainable and the Government wants to work to reverse that alarming trend with a keen focus on what we can do to use water more efficiently. The Government is currently working on a state water conservation strategy that will explore a range of options for promoting water use efficiency and managing demand. The Department of Health is also revising its guidelines for grey water use that will allow Perth residents to reuse the water they use in the laundry, shower etc in the garden, thus minimising the water they require. In February the Department of Health said it would relax its interpretation of the current regulations for grey water; it is now reviewing those issues and in the not too distant future the Government will be in a position to announce its policies.

Mr Johnson: What other cities was Perth compared with? Was it compared with London?

Dr GALLOP: I do not have the details in front of me, but I am happy to provide them.

Dr Edwards: Perth's per capita consumption is higher than Sydney's, for example.

Dr GALLOP: The difference between the previous Government and my Government is that we are taking the long-term view and we are thinking strategically about these issues while being prepared to make the tough decisions.

I announced to the House today that I will chair a ministerial task force on water to coordinate the Government's efforts in planning and managing Western Australia's water future in the short and long term, considering both supply options and demand management. The task force includes the Treasurer, the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and the Minister for Government Enterprises and will meet regularly over the coming months to ensure a coordinated and integrated approach to this critical issue. This approach reflects the holistic view that the Government is bringing to this issue. There is no doubt that the Government needs to coordinate conservation, supply, pricing and health.

I also announced to the House today that we will hold a series of forums involving the community in July and August, because that half of our water strategy - demand management - cannot succeed without consultation and cooperation with the community. These forums will be conducted in the metropolitan area and in regional centres, and will be co-hosted by the Water and Rivers Commission and the Water Corporation. The forums will provide an opportunity for the community to have a say on how it thinks water supply and water demand should be managed from a community perspective. It will give the community an opportunity to put ideas to government. The output from those exercises will contribute to a symposium in October that will bring this

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information together and assist the Government to chart a way forward into the longer term. This symposium will involve experts in the fields of water supply, climate change, hydrology, salinity and demand management and will help us to refine our water strategy. We have taken the necessary steps to address a short-term problem following the inadequate planning of the previous Government; we have started to deal with the longer-term issues -

Mr Trenorden: Country residents have sometimes had to go 10 or 20 kilometres to cart water to their houses so they can have a drink and a bath. All the Premier has talked about is Perth. There is more than Perth in this State.

Dr GALLOP: Of course there is. Water supply for country communities is of great interest and concern to the Government. The Government has invested a lot of money in that area and I will say something further about that issue in the future. At the moment we have a major crisis here in Perth.

Mr Trenorden: There is a major crisis in the bush, too. People do not have water!

Dr GALLOP: Okay. As I said to the member, I will be addressing that issue, but at the moment the specific issue that must be addressed is the water supply in the Perth metropolitan area. We have provided a short-term response to the problem, we have started to outline our strategy for the future and the long term, including having the forums and the symposium. This Government has provided a very comprehensive approach dealing not only with the supply side of the equation but also with the demand side. It is the Government's responsibility to lay down a clear sense of direction on this issue, and that is what it will be doing over the next 12 months. The Government is responding appropriately to the urgency of the current water challenge facing Perth, following the development of its comprehensive water strategy to ensure that Perth becomes one of the most water-efficient cities in the world.

By way of summary, I applaud the initiative of the National Party for raising this issue and the contributions its members are making to the debate. However, to put forward a motion that says that as a matter of urgency the solution to this issue is to establish a water summit misses the mark. No doubt consultation with the community should be part of the solution. The motion also implies that the Government has not been doing anything about this issue. We reject that.

Mr Ainsworth: We are supporting what you have done in general, although we question some of your quick reactions, such as sinking bores.

Dr GALLOP: That is good. Why does the member say "quick reactions"?

Mr Ainsworth: You need to look at all of the options and involve the community in that process.

Dr GALLOP: We are going to.

Mr Ainsworth: We are not criticising what you have done in general; we think you may be a little misguided in some areas. That is by the way. What we are saying is that we will join with you and involve the community in finding the right answers.

Dr GALLOP: That is not a problem; it will happen. However, does the member know what was quick about the decision on the bores?

Mr Ainsworth: It was very quick.

Dr GALLOP: Is the member aware that one of the bores is already down?

Mr Ainsworth: Yes, we are aware of that. Is the Premier saying that was not quick?

Dr GALLOP: It had to be sunk, did it not? It was sunk last year.

Mr Ainsworth: The Government had a problem and it dealt with it quickly, because it needed to. The Government had to make those decisions, but on top of those decisions are others in the longer term which the Premier has outlined in his speech. We believe the community and the experts need to be involved in a summit forum, which will produce a plan with which everyone agrees.

Dr GALLOP: The Government will have community-based forums throughout the State, not a single big forum. Then a symposium, involving the experts, will be held at the end. That is a much better way to go forward than what the National Party is proposing.

DR EDWARDS (Maylands - Minister for the Environment and Heritage) [3.41 pm]: I will begin by reviewing the serious situation facing the Government, which provides some context for this debate. Until the mid 1970s about 360 gigalitres of water each year was running off into the dams. Last year there was only 30 gigalitres of run-off. That is a huge change, but it is part of a scenario of constantly reducing run-off over the past 25 years.

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From the late 1970s the run-off was about 180 gegalitres a year. Last year it was really low. At the same time, water consumption and demand has been increasing. The per capita usage in the Perth metropolitan area is higher than that of Sydney. Although it is unfair to compare different rainfall sites, this shows that we are living beyond our means in our demand for water. In response to those signals, last September the Government implemented stage 4 water restrictions. In December, after consultation, particularly with industry people, the Government took another step and instituted daytime sprinkler bans. At the moment, the Government is working on the licence conditions with the licence holders to make sure that their use of water is sustainable.

The Government is working on a number of different fronts to make sure that people are aware of the problem and that they are using the water to which they have access in a sustainable manner. Part of this program has been advertisements, which use the same woman the previous Government used, to convey the message to the community that this is a problem about which something needs to be done. In addition, the Water and Rivers Commission and the Water Corporation have held at least three public seminars, which have been attended by hundreds of people. In January this year the Water and Rivers Commission set out a contract to initiate a draft water conservation strategy. That is now well down the track, and the first draft is being refined by the Water and Rivers Commission. In this strategy, the Government is looking at setting per capita targets, and ways of achieving them. It examines the efficiency of water use in irrigated agriculture, and the need to adopt in-house conservation measures in a much broader way than hitherto. The Government is on target to save 45 gegalitres of water, which shows that when people put their minds to it their consumption can be cut and water can be used sensibly. The Premier will be invited to launch the water conservation strategy in June. This will feed into the public forums at which there will be opportunities for people to put forward their ideas, as has happened this afternoon.

Some months ago I opened a dam in Kalannie. On the same day, I was taken to a paddock about 10 minutes drive away, and shown by a man who had done a lot of work in the area that right under that paddock was as much fresh water as was held in the dam I had just opened. The trick is to work out how to get that water - in this case it happens to be of reasonable quality - into a system in which it can be used. All those options will be investigated by the Government down the track. Many desalination companies come to see me to roll out the promises of what they can do for the Government. One of the challenges I have thrown back to them is to go into the wheatbelt, examine the salinity problem and the salt water, and to work out what they can do to help Western Australia, quickly, cheaply and energy-efficiently. All these options can be put on the table and looked at, but in small-scale, sustainable ways.

Mr Trenorden: Have you been to Merredin?

Dr EDWARDS: I have been to Merredin, and I have seen what is happening there. It is a great project.

Mr Trenorden: It just needs more resources. If it can work in Merredin, it will work anywhere.

Dr EDWARDS: I have made a point of visiting Merredin. I think I am about to receive a report evaluating some of the work being done there.

One of the other great opportunities that will be examined in the state water conservation strategy, is better use of stormwater - I saw a lot of stormwater today running out in the courtyard - and waste water. Two initiatives are planned involving waste water. On 6 March this year, the Water and Rivers Commission, in conjunction with the CSIRO, held a forum on waste water. As a result of that, a number of recommendations came forward and it is now proposed that, as part of the state water conservation strategy, there will be a state reclamation component. Issues such as pricing and equity between self-supply of ground water and the use of waste water are being examined. The environmental impact of waste water has been a problem until now, but further work has been done to clarify that. It will also be necessary to alter community perceptions about the re-use of waste water. The Water Corporation has signed up to the \$18.2 million WaterLink project, which will divert five gegalitres of waste water from the ocean, where it currently goes, into use by industry. In fact, industry is happy with this because the processes used will result in more uniform quality of water than normally come through the tap. That suits industry's processes better.

A lot of work is going on in government to address this situation. I am particularly excited about the state water conservation strategy, which will be finalised shortly and then fed into the forums so that the community can have the opportunity to play its part. A whole host of other initiatives are being considered on both the supply side and the demand side.

Mr Waldron: There could be more advertisements now that it is raining, along the lines of those about the cooler weather, in which people could turn off their automatic reticulation.

Dr EDWARDS: I will find out about that. I was thinking about it this morning when it rained.

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The Government is investigating water trading, and accelerated removal of the pines at Gngara to protect that resource. It has also been discussing with the horticulturalists in the electorate of Wanneroo, how they use water more sustainably, to make sure they are not drawing too much from the area. At the same time, it has not shied away from water quality protection measures. A whole raft of work is being done in the Water and Rivers Commission, and the Water Corporation, overseen by the Office of Water Regulation, which makes sure that water quality is considered as well. Although the Government endorses what the National Party is saying, broader work needs to be done and that will be the focus of the Government.

DR WOOLLARD (Alfred Cove) [3.48 pm]: I support this motion. It is true that consumption levels are increasing, as has been stated today. More water is being used, and research conducted by the CSIRO shows that rainfall is decreasing. The debate shows that there is general agreement in this Chamber that something needs to be done to formulate solutions for the State's water supply. The National Party has suggested a summit, and the Premier has said that the Government's plan is to hold community forums and then a symposium. He is doing it the other way around. The National Party is probably very concerned that many people in the regional areas now have to travel long distances to get their water supply. They want to know that something will be happening now rather than later in the year.

I was pleased to hear the Premier say that the task force will also consider the environmental impact and that the WaterLink project will ensure about five per cent of the wastewater produced will be used by industry and households. I do not know whether the community believes that five per cent is enough. Concerns have been raised at Collie that the water the Muja Power Station operator has in long-term storage is seeping and causing contamination. The water from the Collie Power Station being piped to the ocean is also causing concern. Apparently it is having a detrimental effect on fishing and crabbing.

I commend the National Party for moving this motion. This issue affects both metropolitan and regional areas. I support the motion.

MR MURRAY (Collie) [3.51 pm]: I do not agree that we should hold a summit on this issue. A great deal of work is being done, and it would be a backward step to hold a major summit. Burying the issue in red tape is not the way to go. My electorate has two of the biggest dams in the State - the Harris Dam and the Wellington Dam. The water in the Wellington Dam is too saline to drink, but extensive work is being done to bring it back into the drinking water supply network very quickly. That includes the work being done by land conservation district committees in the Darkan area. The farmers in that area are working very hard to improve the quality of water on their properties by using drainage, channelling, trees and engineering solutions. Their aim is to lower the watertable to allow the salt that has already risen to the top to be flushed out and, in time, to re-establish the freshwater flow in the Collie River. Although the water in the Wellington Dam is good enough for pasture irrigation, the salt content in the first flush - which happens after rainfall like we have had today - increases to about 4 000 parts per million, so it cannot be used. In that situation, the floodgates are automatically opened and the water runs out to sea. What a terrible waste. I have never seen the Wellington Dam in such a sad state.

It is pleasing to see mining companies working with communities to alleviate the water supply problem. They do extensive ground water dewatering to lower the watertable and they are now passing on that technology to farmers. They have tended not to work with local communities, but they are now working with farmers to improve the environment. The Muja pit, which is 1.5 times larger than the Wellington Dam, could be used as a storage basin and the water could be used at a later date by industry. It could even be upgraded to freshwater.

Mr Barnett interjected.

Mr MURRAY: It is a wonder that we still have a coalmine given the Leader of the Opposition's activities.

We are working very hard in the south west. The water from the Collie River goes to the great southern, and I am sure the communities that get it appreciate that supply. The water in the Harris Dam is pumped backwards into the Stirling Dam and from there into the Perth water system.

Several members interjected.

Mr MURRAY: It has been accepted down our way. Some of the water is being used in the Worsley refinery, which will ensure that 800 people retain their jobs. This is not only about drinking water; it is also about jobs. If we were to refuse to provide that water, the refinery would be closed. If that is the way the Leader of the National Party wants it, he will suffer a backlash -

Several members interjected.

Mr MURRAY: The mining companies, the Water and Rivers Commission and farming groups are all working together, and I am sure they will achieve a desirable result. We do not need a summit. We should move forward, and, if we do so, we will achieve our aims.

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MR EDWARDS (Greenough) [3.56 pm]: I do not agree that we should have a summit. The Government has the information and technology required for its departments and agencies to make appropriate decisions about water resources and supply. It appears that the Government has grasped the nettle and is now addressing this issue. The Liberal-led coalition Government kick-started a strategy in the 1990s by providing the planning and infrastructure required to ensure a stable water supply. This Government is trying to jump on the bandwagon and to be the white knight on this issue. It should take a leadership role by bringing the relevant agencies and departments together.

Water supply and demand has been recorded since the 1940s. By the 1980s, the consumption rate was steadily increasing. At that time, we had surplus supply, and, because of that, the Labor Government of the day decided to reduce the level of capital works. In the 1990s, when it became clear that we were facing a water shortage, the coalition Government undertook the appropriate planning and infrastructure works necessary to ensure a stable supply. A water supply strategy was released in June 1995 covering supply in the medium term, the long term and the very long term. The historical records, planning and infrastructure exist. During the previous Government's term in office, the Water Corporation invested \$224 million to increase Perth's ground water supplies. In addition, work was done to ensure country supplies. The Mingenew to Wongundy pipeline is a good example of the previous Government's initiatives in this area. There were three or four projects of that kind around the State. This Government should play a role in making those things happen.

The Premier made the point that only the dam supply was addressed in the drought proofing of Perth. That is not true; ground water supply was also investigated in great detail and an integrated ground water system was established in the metropolitan area. Obviously, the environmental issues were also addressed with the recharging of the aquifer. The resources are in place and the relevant departments and agencies have the historical records and information they need. They should be using that information.

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

Ayes (20)

Mr Ainsworth	Mrs Edwardes	Mr Johnson	Mr Trenorden
Mr Barnett	Mr Edwards	Mr McNee	Mr Waldron
Mr Birney	Mr Grylls	Mr Marshall	Ms Sue Walker
Mr Board	Ms Hodson-Thomas	Mr Omodei	Dr Woollard
Dr Constable	Mr House	Mr Sweetman	Mr Bradshaw (<i>Teller</i>)

Noes (26)

Mr Andrews	Mr Hill	Mr McGowan	Mrs Roberts
Mr Brown	Mr Hyde	Mr Marlborough	Mr Templeman
Mr Carpenter	Mr Kobelke	Mrs Martin	Mr Watson
Mr Dean	Mr Kucera	Mr Murray	Mr Whitely
Mr D'Orazio	Mr Logan	Mr O'Gorman	Ms Quirk (<i>Teller</i>)
Dr Edwards	Ms MacTiernan	Mr Quigley	
Dr Gallop	Mr McGinty	Mr Ripper	

Pairs

Mr Day	Mr McRae
Mr Masters	Mr Bowler
Mr Barron-Sullivan	Ms Radisich

Question thus negatived.