ESCALATING SALINE PROBLEMS

Motion

HON FRANK HOUGH (Agricultural) [2.00 pm]: I move -

> That the House consider the viability of potable water in Western Australia and the channel systems to address and reduce the escalating saline problem.

When I moved my previous motion there was a lot of debate, but a number of ex-school teachers in the Chamber may have found it difficult to understand. The word "viability" means capable of living, developing and germinating under favourable conditions; or capable of success and continuing effectiveness. I probably could have used the word "drainage" instead of referring to channel systems, but drainage of saline water from agricultural areas in Western Australia is better described as channelling.

I do not have to tell members that water is our most precious resource, and salinity is our greatest curse. Saline water belongs in the ocean, not in agricultural areas and not in our lakes or rivers. This afternoon I hope to examine the potable water situation and the Labor Party's approach to water in our drinking system. It must have been a real culture shock when the Labor Party came into power on 11 February 2001 and took over the reins of government. I notice that water was not one of Labor's policies, even though this State has been through two of the driest seasons on record, particularly over the past three or four years. When the Labor Party came into power in 2001, the water problems were already prevalent. The Government's first decision to prevent water shortages was to cane the general public and introduce sprinkler restrictions. That was an easy and weak alternative. A year ago I made a speech referring to new buildings being constructed in residential areas of Western Australia and asked why it was not mandatory for each household to have a 5 000 or 10 000 litre tank subsidised by the Government. Why is there no recycling of water from sealed car parks in shopping centres or their grey water? Good potable drinking water is used to flush toilets, for heavens sake! Instead of belting the community around the ears, the Government should introduce a system that it can do something with. I should not be standing here telling the Government what to do; it should be looking to the future. Water is our most precious resource and no-one is prepared to take the bull by the horns. If a desalination plant were constructed near the ocean or in the hills, or bores were put down, successive Governments would be frightened that the next Government would get the accolades, so not a great deal is done about the problem.

Our water system could be described in motor vehicle terms. For example, the water system may be like an old 1972 Datsun 120Y, painted fanta orange, with a smoking motor, bald tyres, leaky exhaust and no brakes. Every time a bald tyre blows out it is replaced with another second-hand tyre; when the exhaust falls off it is replaced; and some heavy oil is put in the smoking motor. However, we still go out and buy new suits and shoes and have nights out on the town and spend money at the casino. Look at it another way: this old, smoking bus - the Water Corporation - is roaring along and is being patched together, going from crisis to crisis, and there never seems to be an ultimate fix. Now the Government is talking about sprinkler restrictions. Why is the grey water coming out of our showers and hand basins not going onto the gardens? We should be looking at that important area.

Before dealing with the Wellington Dam area and the Blackwood catchment, I refer to the Auditor General's second public sector performance report 2003, which revealed that cuts in the state ground and surface water monitoring programs have meant that the Water and Rivers Commission does not have the information to determine the sustainable level of groundwater and surface water for use around the State. The report indicates that investment in the State's water investigation program has declined from $2 million per annum in 1990 to about $300 000 in 2002. Only three new ground water monitoring bores have been drilled since 1996.

On 12 February this year I issued a press release arguing that a policy of water restrictions and high fees for metropolitan users was totally misguided. The data obtained from the Water and Rivers Commission report headed "Western Australia Water Assessment 2000" shows that households used only 13 per cent of the State's total water, yet had been targeted for water misuse and must live within the restrictions placed on them by the Government.

In April this year the Opposition pointed out the discrepancy between the Government and the Water Corporation's rhetoric on the water crisis. While the Government talked about the necessity to pump 45 gigalitres from the Yarragadee aquifer, on its web site the Water Corporation stated that there was around 2 400 gigalitres of unallocated, sustainable ground and surface water that could be accessed. That information came from a press release issued by the Liberal Party on 12 April 2003 - I should remember that date as it is my birthday, although that has nothing to do with the press release.

When I look at what the Government will do and its policy on water, I get a little concerned. The Deputy President (Hon Jon Ford) has probably read the Labor Party's water policies many times. They are very interesting. Labor's water policies do not really have any prescriptions for the water crisis that we are in. For a

moment the water policies of the Labor Party seemed like a green manifesto for world domination rather than recognition of the water problem. There was a lot of talk about sustainability, ecological integrity, biodiversity, green jobs and green industries, climate change and conservation. I do not know whether that part of the policy was provided to appease its partners in crime - the Greens (WA). Apart from the rhetoric, there has been a 50 per cent decline in the run-off from rainfall into catchments over the past 30 years. We have come to expect Labor's brilliant strategy for dealing with the crisis to require ongoing research, development, monitoring and impact studies.

One thing I hate about party politics and parties generally are meetings. I love to go out and do things. I hate going to meetings. Since I have been a member of Parliament I have attended so many meetings that it is incredible, particularly on water and salinity issues. The first salinity meeting I went to was three years ago. I went to another meeting the other day and they were still talking about the same things. Nothing has been done. Everyone knows what the problem is, but everyone just waffles on about what we need to do. On 2 March 2002 Dr Jim Gill held a water forum in the parliamentary dining room at 7.30 am. During that forum he said that there was enough underground water in Western Australia to last until 2030, if I recall correctly. I rang his office the other day to confirm when the meeting was held, but he could not remember the meeting. When I looked it up in my diary I found that it was on 2 March 2002.

Water will become more valuable than gold if we are not careful and do not do something about this problem today. This is something that must be addressed, but is not being addressed. Placing restrictions on the use of sprinklers is not taking the bull by the horns. It is a weak option. According to the statistics, water sprinklers account for 13 per cent of water use. Labor policies talk about important elements of biodiversity that occupy habitats that are being or are planned to be exploited for water. I read that again and was not quite sure what it was getting at, but that is part of Labor Party policy. One of the things that the Labor Party and the Water Corporation have come up with is the drilling of the south west Yarragadee. Dr Jim Gill believes that desalination can be done on Perth's doorstep and will inevitably become a part of the water future. In an article in *The West Australian* of 9 October 2002 he states -

> "Desalination has now become the benchmark against which the corporation assesses source development options,"

Desalinisation is already occurring in Western Australia. For example, on Rottnest Island 220 kilolitres of water was being desalinated a day in a plant that was established in 1995. There were a couple of bores. The capacity of that plant was upgraded to 500 kilolitres a day in February 2002. Saline water is pumped up from the shallow bores on either side of the desalination plant. The water is then filtered to remove sand and fine material. It enters a driving pump, which increases water pressure to approximately 6 000 kilopascal. That is the pressure required for the process of reverse osmosis to occur. Salt water is passed through membranes, which reject 99 per cent of the salt molecules. Fresh water passes through the membranes on the other side and is collected and pumped back to the township. This system is working successfully on Rottnest Island and has been upgraded. A desalination plant capable of producing 3.6 megalitres of water a day will be built on the Burrup Peninsula. By world standards, that is a large plant. The plant is being built and will be owned and operated by the Water Corporation under a commercial agreement negotiated with Burrup Fertilisers Pty Ltd. The Water Corporation will tip in about $20 million to build the mechanical vapour compression plant within the Burrup Fertilisers complex.

I will continue with Labor's new direction policies. I had to be fair because I thought there might be a magic formula in the Labor Party policy book, which the ministers were perhaps not reading, and to which I could possibly have alerted them in order to address the problem with water. However, as I went through the document, these are the things that came to my attention. The WA Labor Party's new direction policies, which were presented to the people of this State at the election on 10 February 2001, contain nothing but a water crisis. This next point is very interesting. In two lines the Labor Party acknowledged that there was a water crisis in Western Australia. That was when it was elected. For people who like music, the policy document contains 14 pages on contemporary music. It also contains 13 pages on rebuilding the arts. The Labor Party has really looked into the arts, and I congratulate it for that. However, I do not know whether that will water Australia very much. For people who like music, there are 14 full pages of rhetoric on contemporary music. Water went missing. At the time of the election there was talk about the water crisis, but it was only minimal and it was put on the backburner. Everyone ignored it. Labor policy on land conservation, water and salinity runs to only 204 words and has nothing to say about land conservation, water supplies or salinity, other than that Labor realises that all four are very important issues. It is good that it is acknowledged - it is like acknowledging that there is a problem in Iraq. If something is acknowledged, members opposite are in government and -

Hon Jim Scott interjected.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: Well, 204 words do not form any great policy. The Greens (WA) policy on water resources runs to 171 words, so the Greens are a little behind and perhaps they should read the Labor Party policy.

Hon Jim Scott: I've pages and pages of stuff on the subject. Do you know how to use the web?

Hon FRANK HOUGH: Most certainly. The state Liberal Party relies mainly on the policies devised by its national body. The Liberal Party has a document called "Our Future Action Plan - A Better Environment", which refers to urban water quality relating to health, urban waterways and the coastal environment, but it has no prescription for the water crisis as experienced in Western Australia. I suggest that with the oncoming election, the State Liberal Party should address that subject.

If one looks at the water situation faced from the very start, the first major project was in 1895 - the century before last - with C.Y. O'Connor's pipeline. Mundaring Weir was built in 1903, the Wellington Dam was built in 1931 - I will address that shortly - and the Harvey Dam was built in 1914. The most any Government has done to boost the water supply was to expand existing dams or build new dams. The Harris Dam was built in 1989 to replace the Wellington Dam reservoir as a source of the great southern towns' water supply. Under the $475 million Stirling-Harvey redevelopment grant, the Stirling Dam is being redeveloped to boost the water supplies to the south east, Perth and the goldfields. Meanwhile, Harvey has been expanded to meet the needs of irrigation. We have a water crisis, yet the only real option with the water crisis is to drill 45 bores into the south west Yarragadee to draw 45 gigalitres or to put water restrictions on sprinklers in the city. No major projects have been planned. It is difficult to know why the Government has not costed out and done a feasibility study on alternatives. A main alternative, as we are surrounded by the biggest water supply in the world, is the ocean. I cannot understand why that has not been done. The Government can spend over $2 billion on a railroad, yet the water we consume that is the lifeline of any civilisation is left in a quandary.

Hon Kim Chance: What makes you think it's not been done? It is a strange thing to say given the coverage.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: It may be strange, minister, but we have hunted everywhere and I have been through the forward planning.

Hon Kim Chance: Have you asked the Water Corporation, the commission and others about it? There was extensive press coverage of the work done on desalination. I'm amazed you've not seen it.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: I appreciate, minister, that extensive work has been done on channelling and salinity. We keep doing it, but all the work goes nowhere - it goes from forum to forum.

Hon Kim Chance: I thought you said there was no costing of the proposals.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: There was one costing north of Joondalup of about $880 million. I read about that. It turned into a dead duck - it has gone.

Hon Kim Chance: I may not have heard you accurately.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: Okay.

I quote now the Water and Rivers Commission document headed "A fresh future for water" -

> For years, people have talked about various ways to restore the water in Wellington Reservoir to drinking quality. The State Salinity Strategy released in 1996 gave the Water and Rivers Commission a salinity target - 500 milligrams per litre (mg/L) by 2015 - and set out options for the management of salinity.

The salt level in the Wellington Dam at that stage - I may stand corrected - was around 1 000 parts per million because Harvey irrigators were complaining that they did not want the water to increase over 1 000 parts per million because problems arose with agriculture with less yield through higher levels of salinity. The report goes on -

> Why fresh water is important.

It is a good point. Continuing -

> The Wellington Dam has created the single largest reservoir in the region and is considered to be a viable water source for Perth.

The commission said that, but it is not using it as a water source for Perth. It states further -

> When the dam was built in 1933, the water was fresh with the salinity of the Collie River about 280 mg/L total dissolved solid (TDS).

The Collie River east - the one we were more involved with - has a flow of 14.5 gigalitres per annum with a salt flow of 49.5 tonnes. Examining a little further the Wellington Dam - I still refer to the "A fresh future for water" document - it was predicted in 1995 that the mean inflow volume into Wellington would be 145 gigalitres per annum, of which 68 gigalitres per annum is contracted to Harvey Water. That still leaves about 70 or 80 gigalitres in the dam. The Water Corporation refers to our dams as half empty with the water problem in this State. It is a marketing ploy. It helps it considerably to use that terminology. Nothing is half empty when selling to the public, as things are aways half full. It may not sound right, but people panic when they are told something is half empty. When they are referred to as being half empty, it sounds like they are on the way down, and they are on the up when they are referred to as being half full. I give a hint to the minister: when referring to dams, he should not refer to them as half empty.

Three weeks ago I raised the issue of Wellington Dam and reverse osmosis with existing scour water, and readings done through the group of people I was involved with. At the scour level, the salinity readings were about 1 450 parts per million. We sent a group of people to do some sampling for us yesterday, and the reading was 1 540 parts per million at the irrigation channel at Simpson Road, Dardanup. These figures are available in a print-out. I suggest to the Government that if the Harvey irrigation people knew - they rely on the Water Corporation to do readings for them - that water pumped through their pipes had salinity levels at 1 540 parts per million, they would be reasonably cross. The salinity seems to have increased in the past four weeks. The rains may have increased the flow. The samples were originally taken in October.

I do not know whether members know where the main gate valve is at the Wellington Dam, but it is at the main spigot dam at the bottom, from which water is spewing at the moment. The reading for samples taken from this source was 1 440 parts per million in October and increased to 1 530 parts per million yesterday. The side valve at Wellington Dam is higher up. A cross-reference on the dam to determine the average would show the dam running at 1 440 parts per million. At Potter's Gorge, the reading was 1 620 parts per million. We tested rock ponds in four locations, because of the rain the day before. They read at 150 parts per million, which is about normal for water straight out of the ground, so the figures were reasonably accurate. In October the east branch of the Collie River, 20 kilometres east of Collie, tested at in excess of 10 000 parts per million, which is very frightening indeed.

During the presentation I did about a month ago, I quoted a company, the Aquatech consortium, that was prepared to put in a reverse osmosis plant, at no cost to the Government, at Roelands at the base of the Darling Scarp, with an initial production of 45 gigalitres. The water would be treated by reverse osmosis and would then flow up to the Harvey Dam. The process would treat water with concentrations of up to 1 500 parts per million, reducing the level to 50 parts per million, which would in fact probably be too clean. It would have to be mixed with other water because it would be so clean that all the bases would be taken out of it. The Wellington Dam would go through reverse osmosis. One of the most expensive parts of reverse osmosis is the cost of the power to force volumes of water through a panel system to separate the salt and produce fresh water. This plant, however, is proposed for a location where there is a natural flow with a 170-metre drop. The economics of dropping 450 000 tonnes of water through this plant would not require power plants to send the water through. On 10 September, *The West Australian* compared this process with the cost of desalination. Drawing 450 000 gigalitres from the Yarragadee would incur an up-front capital cost of $370 million, with an annual running cost of $10 million. This would work out at about 85c per kilolitre. The consortium involved with turning the Wellington Dam back into a viable option for producing fresh water says that it can desalinate the water from Wellington Dam for about 60c per kilolitre, which is 33 per cent cheaper. I heard Dr Jim Gill say on the radio the other day that there would be no up-front capital costs, but the real cost of pulling it out of the ground was 85c per kilolitre. The company planning the desalination plant was factoring the cost at 60c per kilolitre, at 45 gigalitres per annum.

Hon Kim Chance: Is that the cost delivered to the consumer?

Hon FRANK HOUGH: To Harvey weir.

Hon Kim Chance: That is the pipehead price then.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: Yes; to the dam. They will not get into the situation of providing water through the taps.

Hon Kim Chance: You are comparing a delivered price with a pipehead price. The price quoted by the Water Corporation was the price delivered to the consumer. Delivery to the consumer is the greatest cost.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: I will read out a reply by Keith Cadee, as quoted in an article in *The West Australian* by Peter Trott. It reads -

> But corporation technical services manager Keith Cadee said the release of saline water this year was only 12GL to 15GL which would not justify having a desalination plant.

> He said the dam's capacity was 186GL but the amount available varied from year to year, depending on the season.
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> . . .
>
> Mr Cadee said that the corporation expected to get an allocation of 12GL from Wellington to mix with other less saline water for pumping into the integrated scheme. But 20 years of work in the catchment, including government buy-back of 6000ha for planting trees, was showing results of reducing salinity in the catchment.

It is actually showing results of restraining, rather than reducing, salinity. A Water Corporation media release dated 11 July 2003 states -

> The annual scouring of Wellington Dam has begun as part of a management program to achieve the best quality water supply to farmers for the next irrigation season.
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> A large valve at the base of the dam wall was opened this morning (Friday, July 11) to discharge about 450,000 kilolitres of high salinity water each day. The scouring will continue for at least one month but will depend on the salinity inflow.
>
> The scouring produces a huge jet of water that extends for up to 30 metres and provides an attraction for sightseers.
>
> Water Corporation South West Regional Business Manager, Mr Chris Elliott, said that while the level of the dam was quite low as a result of the drought, there was still sufficient storage to allow effective scouring.
>
> "This year's scouring will be managed particularly carefully due to the scarcity of water in the supply system and the current consideration being given to the re-integration of Wellington Dam into the South West scheme as a drought relief option," said Mr Elliott.
>
> He said the scouring was needed to reduce high levels of salinity in the dam caused by inflows from developed areas of the catchment between Collie and Darkan.
>
> Mr Elliott said the decision to scour had been approved by Harvey Water and the Water and Rivers Commission, and would be constantly monitored, along with inflows to the dam.
>
> "We are closely watching salinity levels, and plan to get them down to an acceptable level before water is released for the irrigation scheme, probably in October," he said.
>
> Wellington Dam was this week holding about 63.7 million kilolitres, and was more than one third full, slightly less than at the same time last year.

I have received a letter from a gentleman headed "Lies, Dammed Lies and Statistics", which states -

> The Water Corporation in the article "State's Water Supply still too low." 19 Nov 2003, is trying to defend the indefensible and the comments by Technical Services Manager, Keith Cadee, are the very reason why we have a continuing water crisis in Perth.
>
> In trying to dismiss a far more viable option to provide alternative water to Perth (desalination of saline Wellington Dam water) he suggests that only 12-15 GL was scoured from the bottom of the dam, thereby suggesting insufficient volume for the desalination plant. The Water Corporation by its press release dated the 11th July 2003 confirmed "A large valve at the base of the dam wall was opened this morning to discharge about 450,000 kilolitres (tonnes) of saline water each day. The scouring will continue for at least one month but will depend on the salinity inflow. "Had the valve been opened for a month the 12-15 GL range would have been correct, however the scouring had taken place over 12 weeks with an approximate discharge of 35 GL. The press release went on, "Water Corporation South West Business Manager, Mr Chris Elliott, said that while the level of the dam was quite low as a result of the drought, there was still sufficient storage to allow effective scouring."
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> Mr Cadee suggests the Corporation wanted drought tolerant resources like the Yarragadee, someone should make him aware that ground water aquifers need recharging by rainfall in the same way that dams require inflow and drought conditions affect them both.

When drought conditions prevail and water is not running into dams, those conditions have the same effect on the below-ground water. Underground water is not produced from some other source. If it is not raining, there is no water to run anywhere. The letter continues -

> The comment that 20 years of work in the catchment was showing results in reducing salinity in the catchment in these circumstances, was the most ridiculous comment I have read. The salinity conditions in the catchment, the Collie river and the dam are amongst the worst recorded.

That letter was written to me by some people who tested the water in the dam. I refer to the comments under the heading "Ground water salinity and sustainability" in the Australian Bureau of Statistics *Year Book Australia 2002* which read -

> Ground water is a vital water resource in Australia. Groundwater underlies 60% of Australia (5,226,440 square kilometres). Around 70% of Australia's readily accessible ground water resources are suitable for human consumption and crop irrigation . . . Ground water flows can substantially contribute to the risk of areas developing salinity. The time it takes for agricultural development to contribute to salinity problems is also influenced by ground water flows . . .

That comment is quite pertinent. Australia is different from other parts of the world. An article in *The Australian* of 10 November written by Bob Carr, the New South Wales Premier, reads -

> In the face of all this, Australia is - amazingly - one of the world's biggest water users. Two-thirds of the earth's population use less than 60 litres of water a day. The average Aussie uses more than double that in their morning shower.

I am not making a defamatory statement when I refer to the old cliché, "Show a pom a glass of water and he'll run like hell". In England, unlike in Australia, people do not need to bathe daily. The Australian population's propensity to bathe daily is the reason Australians use double the amount of water that people in Europe use.

Hon Peter Foss: The Leader of the House has come into the Chamber to admonish you for making nasty remarks about the English.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: I was not being nasty.

Hon Peter Foss: You said they don't wash.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: I said they get frightened when water is thrown around.

Hon Kim Chance: You could say that Frank, but I couldn't possibly say it.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: We must remember that, when the Europeans settled this country, they came from places where there were large rivers that flowed very strongly. They did not have variations in seasonal conditions and temperatures from as high as 45 degrees to as low as three degrees. In places like America and Canada where there are high mountain ranges, the melting snow fall-off runs into the rivers in large volumes. The Europeans who settled this country were not used to our conditions. Rivers in Australia are relatively short by world standards and they run dry. The earlier settlers had a mentality based on large, sustained river systems. I am not suggesting that the whole community should change its habits, but they were used to continual supplies of water and considerably different conditions. Obviously, in their countries of origin, people did not have to bathe as frequently as they do in Australia, where some people have two or three showers a day, which is probably quite unnecessary. Our culture evolved from European settlers.

We are slowly trying to reverse the ecological trends by, among other things, planting trees. We are trying to put back into the land what we were forced to take out of it. We cannot blame the farmers for salinity problems. To get the deeds to the ranch in the old days -

Hon Peter Foss: The ranch?

Hon FRANK HOUGH: I was using American terminology. People did not get the deeds to their land until it was 100 per cent cleared.

Hon Peter Foss: It was a crown grant.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: We know in hindsight that that was a bad policy. We are now trying to repair the damage. One of the methods used to remedy the salinity problem is the creation of channels to allow salt water to run out to sea. We need to study the Blackwood River and trace the Collie River to find where the salt is coming from, why it has surfaced and how to get rid of it. Salt water belongs in the ocean, not in the middle of our lakes in the agricultural regions. The Department of Agriculture has instigated many projects in an effort to address salinity. The Beacon River channel project is one. Other very successful projects have been developed by people like John Nicolleti in Westonia and John Hall in Narembeen. These projects involve channelling water out of salt-affected land to, hopefully, end up in the ocean where it belongs. I have asked questions of the minister and the Government about these issues. Another very viable channelling project has been developed from the Blackwood River, through Collie and out to the ocean. These projects should be taken on board. I asked the minister the other day about the Doodlakine project. I had another good look at it and saw that no

allowance had been made for channelling, but I stand corrected if that has been done. I am sure the Leader of the House will recall that I told him we should set up a project to prove that the system could work. The contour of the earth or existing river line is not followed; it is established much further up - possibly 200 metres up an embankment. The channels will flow naturally to the ocean.

Hon Jim Scott interjected.

Hon FRANK HOUGH: I do not like the word "drainage". "Channelling" is a better word.

There is an area in Narembeen that has not been cropped since 1956. There is also one in Westonia that has not been cropped since 1960. Channelling has been run there. The dimensions are two metres deep by a few metres across. That basically breaks the crust of the earth and produces a natural flow. In some parts of the wheatbelt, at depths of only 1.5 metres, there is some of the saltiest water that a person will ever experience. The channelling project was completed and, within three months, the level of salty water dropped by 750 centimetres, which is three-quarters of a metre. Since then, the paddocks have been cropped. They had not been cropped for 30 years. The yields this year are almost as good as the yields from a normal crop considering that the area has had dreadful problems with saline water.

About six months ago, I told the minister that I thought the Labor Party should have earmarked a system to be developed somewhere in Western Australia. We do not need any more forums on this issue; we know exactly what is the problem. We do not need any more people getting involved and putting their snouts in the trough trying to get a quid. We should proceed with channelling. Several people have half done it in several areas and have been successful. My suggestion to the Government is that it select an area up to 150 kilometres long through various farms and, with assistance, set up a channelling project and make it a working model. In three years, if it is working as it is in Narembeen, Westonia and other places, it should prove itself. The Leader of the House, if he decides to speak on this, may ask about minerals leaching from the soil and being flushed into the lakes system. We should address one thing at a time. That can be addressed downstream after we develop channels and reclaim land, which will result in a reduction in salt levels. We should have 100 kilometres or so of land through the Blackwood or Narembeen that we can monitor. The results will be there in a few years. If we do it tomorrow or the day after, and if it is working in two years, it could be the resurrection or salvation of the Labor Party. Its members will be able to say that they have put something back into agricultural areas and that it is rural thinking. However, if we keep having forums with people's snouts in the trough discussing this issue, we will not go anywhere. Every meeting I attend has people for and against channelling and drainage. People in favour of it put up very good cases and models with which most people agree. Those against - the greens - believe that the reclamation and salvation of rural Western Australia can only be achieved by planting trees. That sounds fantastic, but in Corrigin, where I was the other day, out of 80 000 trees that were planted, 60 000 are dead. There are only 20 000 left. It does not take long to realise that when a tree root hits saline water, the tree dies. The town has pictures of the dead trees. I think the funeral of the remaining 20 000 will be at the end of next year because they will eventually tap into the saline water! It is all right to plant trees. As most people who use channelling agree, if the banks are lined with trees it has been proved conclusively that they will grow. I have witnessed that; I am not saying this because someone told me so. The success rate of channelling is unbelievable.

This brings me back to Wellington Dam. It is being contaminated by downflow. There is a project to install a desalination plant near Roelands. It will produce 45 gigalitres per annum and requires only additional panelling to increase to 60 gigalitres per annum. The water would be pumped to Harvey and the scour could be connected to the pipeline from the Collie power station that runs to the ocean. As such, the scour could go into an existing system. It is not a matter of rebuilding systems in the south west of the State. It is a credible project that will involve the State's largest and most precious dam, which is now saline. The levels of impurity are frightening. The tests the other day provided dreadful results. The scour level is 1 540 ppm at the base and 1 440 ppm in the middle. When the Harvey irrigation group finds out that its water is almost 1 600 ppm, imagine how upset people will be. They are relying on that water.

The project will be good for Western Australia. It requires a Government to grab it and run with it. It will use water already there. People say there is not enough water, but there is. There is a minimum of 70 gigalitres left over after 68 gigalitres are sold. We should assume that it will rain every year. Even if it does not, there will not be problems with a continuous flow of water into the Wellington Dam. We have to address the problem of the amount of available drinking water. In my opinion, it is a priority. There are no infrastructure or ongoing costs involved, just the factored cost of approximately 60c a kilolitre versus 80c to 90c a kilolitre.

People are talking about $370 million in infrastructure costs and $10 million in ongoing costs to continue the current system. As an alternative, I am surprised that the Government has not agreed to allow the consortium to proceed with channelling. Channelling systems have proved that they will return land to us in agricultural

Western Australia. Salinity is the worst thing that has happened there; it is a cancer of the earth, but it can be cured. We are not prepared to take the bull by the horns and take the obvious step of putting up a pilot scheme that will extend 100 kilometres through a dozen or more farms. At least a pilot scheme would prove that channelling out of rural Western Australia is effective. The amount of land reclaimed would be huge. If that worked, it would mean the rebirth of good rural land in Western Australia and the death of salinity. I cannot understand why no-one is prepared to take the bull by the horns. The Labor Party is petrified of the Greens (WA), their rhetoric and the rubbish that comes out downstream. The Greens wear their Halloween costumes and frighten the Labor Party with suggestions of what will happen downstream. The Labor Party should tell the Greens to fall into line, keep their mouths shut and do what it is they are good at doing - I do not know what it is the Greens are good at doing. I encourage the Labor Party to give this matter a lot more thought. I cannot understand why it has not jumped on the bandwagon, because the project is credible. Colin Nichol, Peter Coyne and John Hall have all proved that channelling is credible and workable. I find it incredible the Government has not taken the project into the next phase, rather than continue down the same phase of planting trees and having more forums.

In conclusion, I ask the Labor Party, as the Government, to take into consideration the very simple cost-effective project of converting scour or saline water - 1 450 parts per million - out of the Wellington Dam through a reverse osmosis plant to produce clean and clear water - 50 parts per million - which will probably be the cleanest water in Australia. That water could be mixed with our current water. That would offer Western Australians their godly right to their most precious resource, which is good clean water. I also urge the Government to do more than agree that channelling is a good project. It must take the steps to nurture and encourage that process. As stated by farmers and promoters, channelling can and will work in rural regional Western Australia.

HON NORMAN MOORE (Mining and Pastoral - Leader of the Opposition) [3.07 pm]: I will make a few comments on the motion moved by Hon Frank Hough. I do not quite understand the motion. The member's verbal skills are in excess of his literary skills. The motion refers to the viability of potable water. I would have thought that potable water is viable in the context that it is the water we can consume. However, I think the member was referring to the viability of potable water coming from the proposals put forward to address salinity problems and what might come out of those proposals.

I have taken a detailed interest in the water situation over the past couple of years. For almost the entire term it has been in office, we have been assailed by the current Government that we have a water crisis in Western Australia. Hon Frank Hough seems to concur that there is a water crisis and has suggested a solution. I will put the "water crisis" into context because, in my view, we do not have a water crisis of the magnitude that has been suggested by the Government.

I refer to the document "Securing our water future, A State Water Strategy for Western Australia", which was released in February 2003 as a result of the Government's water seminar. It contains some interesting information. Page 5 includes a map of Western Australia and shows the status of our surface water resources. The section of Western Australia called the south western drainage division reveals that 1 608 gigalitres of sustainable yield is available from surface water resources. The same graph reveals that we currently use 362 gigalitres. The difference between the sustainable yield and the current use is about 1 200 gigalitres. Because most of the debate refers to the south west, I will not talk about the other areas, but the amount of surface water in the Kimberley and the Timor Sea area is 3 159 gigalitres, which obviously includes the major rivers in the Kimberley.

Hon Kim Chance: Is the 1 608 in the south west?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: There is a south west drainage division. One of the problems with this argument is that people talk about different regions and parts of the State in different contexts. Page 6 refers to ground water resources but the regions are different, so it is difficult to compare apples with apples. Page 6 shows the ground water resources, sustainable yield and current use. Under the vertical graph showing sustainable yield, there are two different shades of blue. Regrettably, the publication does not describe the difference been the light and dark blue. I have made the assumption that the dark blue refers to the sustainable yield of potable water and the light blue refers to the sustainable yield of non-potable water. I have made that assumption because of the geology and location of the different regions. The Perth ground water division, which is essentially the Perth coastal plain and all those areas west of the Darling Scarp, reveals that we have 1 937 gigalitres of ground water, of which 1 909 is described as potable, and we are consuming 749 gigalitres. The two figures important in the context of the south west of Western Australia are the 1 600 gigalitres of surface water available, of which we use 362 gigalitres, and the 1 909 gigalitres of potable ground water, of which we use 749 gigalitres. There is a significant difference between the amount we are currently using and the sustainable yield. When I read the term "sustainable yield", I thought that it must mean the water that we can use in a sustainable way. We are using a

lot less than the sustainable yield, so one would assume that the sustainable yield is there to be used in a sustainable way, with "sustainable" meaning that it is being replenished. When I made that assumption, I was staggered to read on page 6 of this document that -

> While the 2000 assessment indicated that only about 20 per cent of the State's groundwater was being used, in the heavily populated Perth Basin, the community is using 39 per cent of the available groundwater resulting in some areas now being close to the sustainable limit.

It then refers to some sub areas in which no further allocation will be made. Obviously, sustainability relates not to the total region but to particular parts of the region. That says to me that if a particular part or a sub part of a region has reached its sustainable yield, then we can go to another sub part of a region that has not reached that point and put down some more bores, and, presumably, that is sustainable. I read that sort of thing and I am also told by the Minister for Government Enterprises and the Minister for the Environment that no more water can come out of the ground water under Perth because it will damage the environment. Yet, there is a difference between the sustainable yield and the amounts that are being taken out. I am confused. Therefore, just last week, I asked the Minister for Government Enterprises whether it is the Water Corporation's understanding that the sustainable yield is the amount that can be extracted without causing degradation to the environment? The answer was yes, there is a significant difference from the capacity of the aquifers to deliver ground water in a sustainable way to the amount we are actually using. We are told by the Water Corporation that sustainable yield means water that can be extracted without causing damage to the environment. How is it then that we cannot get more water when there is plenty there? Yesterday I raised that issue again.

A year ago, I was told that the amount of water we could take from the Perth integrated water supply scheme for underground water - bearing in mind that we must consider these areas as though they are different regions - was 240 gigalitres. However, on the basis of how it can be moved around the reticulated system, the realistic figure is 185 gigalitres per year using the current in-store capacity. The Government then spent $37 million to extract another 21 gigalitres, which one would think would take us to 206 gigalitres. However, I was told on the same day that the extraction figure had gone down to 180 gigalitres. Therefore, the $37 million delivered us five gigalitres less. When I hear those figures and I consider the material put out by the Government, particularly this glossy brochure entitled "A State Water Strategy for Western Australia", which shows us that the underground aquifers are not being used to anywhere near their total capacity and that there is significant excess capacity for surface water, I begin to wonder why on earth we have this so-called water crisis. Under the heading of "New supplies and total water cycle management" and the subheading of "The integrated water supply scheme" on page 38, the document states -

> The need for future water supply sources will largely depend on the attitudes and behaviours of the groups that drive the demand for scheme water. A successful reduction in per capita consumption in the Integrated Water Supply Scheme to the now established target of 155 kL per year, and a return to rainfall pattern similar to the last 28 years would defer the need for additional new water sources until 2016.

To paraphrase that, if everyone stops using water at the level of 180 kilolitres per person - I think that was the figure that we had reached - and we get down to the figure the Government has arbitrarily set by way of a pricing structure of 155 kilolitres per person, and we have a reasonable amount of rain, then we do not need any more additional capacity until 2016. Yet, we have a water crisis. The document then goes on to say -

> However, a return to pre-restriction demands or continued extremely low rainfall in 2003 may trigger the need for a new major water source to be available by the end of 2005.

I do not know what the Government's attitude now is and whether it is prepared to spend the money necessary for a new major water source by the end of 2005. It then states -

> It is now essential that Western Australia position itself to be able to quickly respond to a range of future scenarios. In Perth and the south west of Western Australia significant investments have already been made in response to observed rainfall reductions. The Government has invested $523 million to boost capacity of the Integrated Water Supply by more than 70% since 1995. This accelerated source development program was completed in 2002 with the opening of the Stirling Harvey project.

I raise that in the context of the attitude and the planning of the Water Corporation as opposed to the Water and Rivers Commission. The Water Corporation, when we were in government, invested $0.5 billion in capacity, which boosted the capacity in the integrated water supply scheme by more than 70 per cent from 1995 - a significant capital investment by our Government. As the then Premier Richard Court announced, we wanted to drought proof Perth so a lot of money was spent. I am not defending the Water Corporation but it has actually done some very good planning. In the Water Corporation's projections for 30 years, its plan takes into account reduced rainfall and very dry rainfall years. It has planned, quite sensibly, a capital program of investment to make sure the water we need is available. Even though $523 million has been invested since 1995, when this

Government came in to office it told us that because we had had two dry years, we had a crisis on our hands. It is beginning to dawn on me that the problem is not with the Water Corporation or the Minister for Government Enterprises, but, in fact, the Water and Rivers Commission. Because I was thinking about other things as a minister, I did not know much about the Water and Rivers Commission, even though I was part of the Government that bought it in.

A couple of years ago I went to Kununurra and asked questions about the Ord Dam and why Ord stage 2 was not going ahead. Someone said to me that one of the reasons for its not going ahead was that there was not enough water. One would reckon that a lack of water in Kununurra would never be a problem, just like a lack of land would never be a problem. However, the two biggest problems in Kununurra today, as you would know, Mr Deputy President (Hon Jon Ford), are insufficient water and land. I asked why there was not enough water and was told that the Water and Rivers Commission had determined that 50 per cent of the capacity of the Ord Dam had to be made available to maintain the man-made natural environment.

Hon Kim Chance: An artificial environment.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Exactly right. I am glad the minister understands this. This is how absolutely ludicrous the whole situation has become. We will now maintain all that greenery down the side of the Ord River that was never there, year in year out, prior to the building of the dam! Because of that man-made vegetation, 50 per cent of water in that dam is not available for agricultural use, which is why the dam was built in the first place. I regret to say that that thinking on not only the Ord River scheme but also the Perth metropolitan coastal plain continues. This document on page 50 - the Premier has put his smiling face on the front of the document - refers to providing water for the environment and states -

- Ensure that water dependent ecosystems (eg conservation category wetlands) are protected through the allocation process, while allowing ongoing sustainable use and development of water resources to meet current and future needs.
- Utilise the Precautionary Principle to guide decisions where scientific knowledge of ecosystem requirements is limited.
- Establish a strategy to manage instances where EWPs have been set and are unable to be met in the short term due to historical decisions and allocations to existing users. This will be completed in consultation with stakeholders.

In layman's terms that means enough water must be left to maintain the natural environment. That is why I said yesterday that the Water and Rivers Commission will make certain not one tree on the Perth coastal plain dies because of lack of water in the wetlands, but it does not matter what happens to the gardens of the citizens of Perth or those who are part of the integrated water supply scheme. The Water and Rivers Commission has taken the precautionary principle to its absolute total logical extreme.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: Illogical.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Quite right. The Water Corporation has properly planned for Perth's water requirements and the water requirements of the south west of Western Australia - and the rest of Western Australia where it is involved - but it has now been told that it cannot use the water supply capacity that has been put in by the citizens of Western Australia through payment of taxes. I understand 41 bores in Perth have been turned off, and they have been turned off following a decision of the Water and Rivers Commission. As I said yesterday, nobody knows what on earth the Minister for Government Enterprises' job is. I wish he was the Minister for Water Resources so we could blame him, instead of having a Minister for Government Enterprises.

Hon Kim Chance interjected.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Water resources is not contained in the title of any minister in the Government of Western Australia.

Hon Murray Criddle: That is the trouble with transport, too.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: That is right. If a Martian arrived in Western Australia and wanted to know who to talk to about water, he would look up the ministry but would not know who to talk to.

Hon Kim Chance: The Minister for Water Resources.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: There is no Minister for Water Resources. The leader should have a look at his Cabinet list. It is called the Minister for Government Enterprises.

Hon Kim Chance: No. The Minister for Water Resources is the Minister for the Environment.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: The Minister for the Environment is called the Minister for the Environment; she is not the Minister for Water Resources - certainly not in her title.

Hon Kim Chance: Her department is what used to be the department of environment protection and water something.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I suggest the Leader of the House find out what his Government is doing, because the Martian arriving in Perth would not be able to find anybody to talk to. He might think the Minister for Government Enterprises deals with water and go to Hon Nick Griffiths, who would tell him not to talk to him about how much water we are allowed to have, and that he should talk to the Minister for the Environment. The Martian would ask what that has to do with the price of water.

Hon Kim Chance: Water is part of the environment.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Of course is it; so is everything else - transport, mining, electricity and energy all affect the environment. If we were to use the logic of the Leader of the House, we would give the minister everything. It is not appropriate to go to the Minister for the Environment, but that is the problem. If we created the problem by setting up the Water and Rivers Commission, I apologise, because we now have a problem with an agency that controls the supply of water in Western Australia which in my view -

Hon John Fischer: We accept your apology, if you promise to abandon it after 2005.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I will be working with my colleagues to arrive at solution to this problem. Whether it is to get rid of the Water and Rivers Commission I do not know, but I am working on the problem. The Water and Rivers Commission is in the grip of the Greens. Most people are in the grip of the grape.

As I exposed yesterday, in this extraordinary situation the Government is spending $37 million of the State's dollars to get extra ground water and, after the spending of that money, we find we have five gigalitres less than when we started. The Government should not spend any more of the State's money on water resources, otherwise we will finish up with none.

Hon Kim Chance: I am sure there is a very good reason for it.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I am sure there is.

Hon Kim Chance: I think you will find that a number of bores were shut down because of the impact they were having on the environment.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: In addition to the 41 bores. They were shut down when I was told there were 185.

Hon Kim Chance: Possibly. I follow the maths.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: When I asked the question in 2002 and received the answer that there were 185 gigalitres, 41 bores were already closed down. Have more bores been closed down?

Based upon the Government's own document, there is a significant amount of water in Western Australia. It is a matter of using it appropriately, gaining access to it where it is available and moving it from place to place if need be. It is fundamental to the State's water strategy to move water from place to place. Some people say we should move water from the Ord River down to Perth. We cannot do that because there is not sufficient water for people in that area for a start, and the costs would be extraordinary anyway. However, we can move it around the south west. We move it from Mundaring to Kalgoorlie and Merredin and all sorts of places, but interestingly we do not move it from Mundaring to Toodyay - or the part of Toodyay in which I have a property. I do not have scheme water and it costs me thousands of dollars trying to keep my three blades of grass alive. Lots of people who live in the hills just out of Perth do not have scheme water. More water should be made available to people who do not have it; and I am not saying to those who do have water that they should use less.

Hon Frank Hough raised matters about what should happen in respect of the Wellington Dam and the draining of saline-affected country of the wheatbelt. Those issues must be addressed. I do not know what the answers are about Wellington Dam. Harvey Water presented me with a proposal to divert the water of the east Collie River, which seems to be the most saline part of the Collie River system, into the disused underground caverns left by the coalmining industry. Diverting that extra salty water into those underground caverns would reduce the amount of salinity going into the Wellington Dam. I do not know whether that or the proposal put forward by Hon Frank Hough are good ideas, but the strategy of planting trees and trying to do something about the salinity problems in the catchment of the Collie River are not working quickly enough, if they are working at all. We should be seriously looking at an engineering solution to that problem. Whether that solution will solve the problem of Beacon and all those places in the northern wheatbelt and fill my Avon River with salt, I do not know. That may not be a good solution, because my place is right on the Avon River and it is very salty now.

Hon Paddy Embry: You will have to mix a bit more whisky with the water.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: One can actually walk on the water in the Avon River, and one does not need to be God. A previous Labor Party decision banned the shooting of ducks. During summer, ducks sit on permanent ponds in the Avon River and they are full of mud, dirt and duck stuff, and they can be walked on. It is foul.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: That is a good word.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Yes. I do not know whether those solutions will work. Somebody should make sure that the Government understands whether they will or not. The Government should come up with some potential solutions. Because the Water Corporation cannot seem to get anywhere with the Water and Rivers Commission concerning the traditional sources of water - that is, dams and underground water - it has headed down the path of saying it will pump water from the south west Yarragadee. I have an open mind on that, to the extent that I am waiting on the $6 million study to tell us what effect it will have. A lot of the interim information worries me significantly, but I will wait for that research to be done and see whether it is viable. The other alternative is to desalinate sea water. I do not have a problem with that, but it is a fairly expensive way of getting us water, when the existing and traditional sources may provide water for a significantly less amount of money. The Water Corporation wants to desalinate because the Water and Rivers Commission does not own the ocean, and it can keep pumping water out of the ocean and the Water and Rivers Commission cannot touch it. Then, of course, the Department of Environmental Protection will come along and ask the Water Corporation what it will do with the salt and all that sort of stuff. The DEP will say that it is in charge of the ocean, not the Water and Rivers Commission, and so will stop the Water Corporation from doing it. That is another story. The Water Corporation considers that to be a reasonably easy solution to their problem of being able to get water without having these quite serious constraints placed on what it wants to do.

Hon Frank Hough raised some very good issues in his motion. They are issues that the Government must address. They are issues that we will look at after the next election when we are making the decisions on these things. We will look at whether there is an engineering solution for Wellington Dam in particular. The provision of that water to irrigators and other consumers would make a significant difference, bearing in mind that the document put out by the Government outlines on page 8 that irrigated agriculture uses 48 per cent of the State's water while householders use only 13 per cent. If there were some way to ensure that irrigated agriculture had access to more water via Wellington Dam, it may make more water available to householders, and, therefore, the two-day water restrictions on householders could be removed. Some people might say that it is an honourable thing to support the two-day water restrictions. If people can have access to water on three days instead of two, why should they not? My view is that two days is not enough. A large number of people have said that to me. For what it is worth, a television poll showed that 60 per cent of people wanted three days on which to water their gardens. Under that system not much more water would be used and it would give people a chance to keep their gardens growing. I thank Hon Frank Hough for raising this matter. I suggest that the Government should take a lot of notice of the comments he has made on Wellington Dam.

HON JIM SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [3.31 pm]: I am pleased that Hon Norman Moore is not in government at the moment because some of the ideas he proposed concern me very much. The issues he raised are based on a premise of traditional water supplies, which have changed.

Hon Norman Moore: Water has not changed at all. Plants still need the same sort of stuff to grow.

Hon JIM SCOTT: Due to climate change, we have 45 per cent less water to play with. That does not seem to have got through to Hon Norman Moore.

Hon Norman Moore: Is that 45 per cent less rain or less run-off into the dams?

Hon JIM SCOTT: Run-off in catchments.

Hon Norman Moore: You should get your facts right because it is quite a different thing.

Hon JIM SCOTT: I did say that.

Hon Norman Moore: If you also look at the clearing regime in the catchments, you will see that that has made a significant difference. Read the document that the Government put out.

Hon JIM SCOTT: If Hon Norman Moore had his way, he would make sure that the planet was devoid of trees and would think that that was a solution.

Hon Norman Moore: You would have us all believe that we will die tomorrow and feel good about it.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon JIM SCOTT: Thank goodness a few scientists and other people actually know a bit more than Hon Norman Moore! We may be able to keep him well away from the Water and Rivers Commission or from being in charge of water in Western Australia, because if he did do those things, it would be an absolute disaster. The real issues that we are seeing are not being dealt with. We are wasting huge amounts of water. I agree with Hon Norman

Moore in one respect: the focus is on the wrong area - the householders. The work of Jörg Imberger points that out pretty well. The vast amount of water is not being used by householders. Basically, a trickle of our useable water is being used by householders. A vast amount more water is being used for irrigation and industrial purposes than by households. Some of the programs being looked at in the eastern States of putting irrigation water in pipes rather than channels and so on would make a much bigger difference than fiddling around with the amount of water used by households.

Under Hon Norman Moore's Government, developments occurred in places like Atwell. Such developments are continuing today. I was there last summer watching the millions of gallons of water being pumped straight into the ocean from the Jandakot mound, so that people could build platforms to put buildings on the water mound. It is an absolute disgrace. That level of water loss is being totally ignored. Considering that a number of very large pumps on the bore line of the water mound were pumping out water non-stop night and day in order to lower the water table of the Jandakot water mound, I imagine that the amount wasted from that area would have been massive. We should be protecting our existing water supplies much better than we are today.

One of the issues raised by Hon Frank Hough was that we should be doing a lot more to use the grey water in our community. It is an absolute waste that water use in the laundry, the loo and the bathroom each represents about 20 per cent of total household water consumption. Some of that water could be recycled back through one of the other facilities. For instance, water from the laundry or bathroom could go into the loo or be used in the garden. I cannot see why we are not moving much more quickly to ensure that that happens. It would immediately reduce household water use by 50 per cent. That is without having to build any more dams or anything else. It is a very simple way to get a very major change in water consumption.

Some very poor legislation in the past, even in the recent past, has handed over the control of much of our water to irrigators and others. We have made a terrible mistake in that regard. We needed to be far tougher on the arrangements that were made for that water. There was little return to the State.

Hon Norman Moore seems to want to get rid of every tree out of Western Australia as he thinks that that is the problem.

Hon Norman Moore: What a dopey thing to say. You really are very thick at times, Jim. Did I say that?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon JIM SCOTT: Hon Norman Moore certainly talked about getting rid of trees from catchments, indicating that that was a wonderful thing. Hon Norman Moore said that when he had looked at the calculation for the sustainable use of water, his idea was that we should not worry about the ecosystem because, if we needed the water, we should darn well take it and blow the trees. They die without water. Guess what happens?

Hon Norman Moore: I know; lots of things die without water.

Hon JIM SCOTT: Guess what happens then? The effect in Western Australia has been pointed out by a scientist by the name of Saunders, who has done a huge amount of work in the wheatbelt and south west. He has found that within the totally cleared areas of the wheatbelt there has been a much more significant drop in the total rainfall received than there has been in the areas that remain vegetated.

Hon Kim Chance: It is only true of some of the wheatbelt. The northern wheatbelt is actually experiencing positive climate change, not negative change.

Hon JIM SCOTT: We are talking about the overall clearing situation. Saunders did some work in the mid 1990s. I remember the article in the paper with the picture of the cloudbank along the rabbit-proof fence, with the rainfall occurring on the so-called drier side of the rabbit-proof fence. Anyway, the data set shows that the drop in rainfall has not been as pronounced in the heavily wooded areas as the case in cleared areas. One need be careful about over-clearing for that reason, as well as salinity reasons. Also, if too much area is cleared, more radiation is allowed to hit the surface of the earth causing more warming and more CO_2 release. Therefore, we have more climate change and less rainfall. We need to think more holistically rather than in narrow bands -

Hon Norman Moore: You should read what I said rather than make your own version. I suggested that there is more water than we were told because it is sustainable according to the definitions used by the Water Corporation. Sustainable is your word, mate.

Hon JIM SCOTT: The water authorities are being slightly misdirected in some ways. However, at least they are being responsible and acknowledging that we need to get a grip on, and recognise where we are going, with climate change. The recharge for underground water also depends on rainfall.

Hon Norman Moore: It's vastly in excess of what is being consumed right now.

Hon JIM SCOTT: Some of those resources have taken thousands of years to get to where they are now. We cannot allow the rapid use of those resources and pretend it is sustainable.

I now turn to the salinity issue. I note that Hon Frank Hough made many comments about how drainage will solve all problems of salinity: "These terrible Greens only wanted to grow trees." We want an integrated solution. We have been involved with salinity and the State Salinity Council for a very long time - much longer than the member.

Hon Frank Hough: You've done a wonderful job! Nothing.

Hon Paddy Embry: You like to cut some stuff down.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Jon Ford): Order! There are certain rules for debate listed in the standing orders, and there are ways in which members are to refer to each other in this place. I would appreciate it if members stuck to those rules.

Hon JIM SCOTT: Thank you, Mr Deputy President.

Thinking that drainage is suitable for every occasion, or even most occasions, is wrong. Considerable research is needed into what sort of geological formation is involved.

Hon Frank Hough: Did the honourable member listen to what I said?

Hon JIM SCOTT: The member boomed up certain projects in the eastern wheatbelt saying that they led to wonderful improvements. However, the member failed to point out that when the drainage ran onto an A-class reserve, it wiped out the A-class reserve at a rapid rate. That caused an ecological disaster in the area. The same will happen if this were applied with the river system. I do not think the member will find that people in Northam and other places will be happy to take hyper-saline and highly acidic water into the Avon River and wipe out ecosystems throughout that area. If we were to build our own drainage system, the amount needed to drain the salinity out of our south west area would be equal to the capacity of all the river systems. That would be massive drainage.

Hon Paddy Embry: Have you researched all of this?

Hon JIM SCOTT: No. Other people have, and I have just read their research.

Hon Paddy Embry: So, you're quoting it.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! The member might be better if he referred his arguments to the Chair.

Hon JIM SCOTT: Thank you, Mr Deputy President. Frankly, I am not worried about the interjections of members opposite because they always show up that they are Johnnies-come-lately to the salinity problem. Since Graham Campbell discovered salinity one day -

Hon Murray Criddle: It's the one issue you blokes have not addressed.

Hon John Fischer: Because they can't get any cheap publicity for it.

Hon JIM SCOTT: Rubbish! When the National Party and One Nation come out with a workable policy on it, we will listen to them. Until they do, and they forget their complaining -

Hon Murray Criddle: When you haven't got a policy, you shouldn't start on other people with one.

Hon JIM SCOTT: We have a policy. We put out a large discussion paper and we have a policy. The State Salinity Council agreed with the Greens' approach and did not agree with the National Party's approach. Unfortunately, members opposite do not have backing for their position, whereas we do for ours.

Hon Frank Hough: "I'm right and everybody else is wrong"!

Hon JIM SCOTT: No. I did not write it, but it was done in consultation with a lot of people. I will not read it out. I have it in front of me on my laptop, but it might contain too many big words for the member. I am not about to do that. Hon Frank Hough referred to the 170 words of the Greens (WA) policy, but he does not understand that we break it up into different areas that need to be addressed.

The reality is that salinity has been a feature of this State for a long time. People must understand that salinity cannot just be drained away because there is a constant pull of salt right across the country. The closer to the coast, the heavier is the salt draw.

Hon Paddy Embry: That's why we drain.

Hon JIM SCOTT: Some of it can be drained. It has built up over a long time. Undoubtedly, the low rainfalls will have an increasing impact on that salt build-up. The solution is not simply moving that problem to some other area of land. It is not so easy; it requires a much more integrated approach. Also, it needs genuine funding and proper research. The reality is that both of those areas have been lacking for many years. A body of research is starting to build up now, but much more could be done in that area. The previous Government made

very big promises about salinity and talked about a multimillion dollar project it was going to launch. However, it forgot to put any funding aside for it.

Hon Norman Moore: That's not true at all!

Hon JIM SCOTT: The previous Government was going to get funding from the federal Government, but it never did.

Hon Norman Moore: We put in $20 million and the federal Government did not count it as a contribution. Your memory is always selective.

Hon JIM SCOTT: My memory is correct. The previous Government did not get the funding from the federal Government. The statement was made that it would get that funding, but it never did.

Hon Norman Moore: We put in our own resources. That's the argument of the current Government: the federal Government did not count what we spent as part of the contribution.

Hon JIM SCOTT: Vastly more money is needed. A problem with the federal Government is that it sees the Murray Valley as the Garden of Eden and the birth of all life. More importantly, it is seen to have a bigger population base than Western Australia's and many seats in federal Parliament. Unfortunately, they do not consider where the greatest need is - right here in Western Australia. There is no doubt that the Murray River needs a lot of work, but then so does Western Australia. The extent of the problem in Western Australia is probably greater than anywhere else in Australia at this point, although some other States have been remiss as well. Rather than taking a single-minded approach, we should gain a full understanding of the range of issues affecting both the levels of our water supply and the salinity problem. Each has an impact on the other. As we lose our dams and rivers to salinity we will have less water for all purposes. Many people who live alongside large and small rivers are getting water for their cattle and sheep from those rivers. They are important for that purpose as well as for the vegetation and microclimate.

We should first of all make sure that the right research is being done and that the funding for it is in place, then there must be funding to effect the solution. This must be done in an integrated way, involving all the best measures, including looking at changes to our cropping system, which is happening more and more these days. It is not fair to say that nothing is being done, because some things are being done; it is just not enough. There are quite a few Landcare and catchment groups and other local initiatives, and some work is being done by government. The biggest problem in the past has always been the lack of integration between the efforts of all those people. More than anything, that needs to change to make sure that a focused effort gets all these government and non-government agencies working together on these issues, rather than wasting resources or fighting over whether drainage is the right solution or not. We need to find out what the best solution is for each particular area and use it. We should not be simply transferring our problem onto someone else's property. While I agree that both salinity and our water supply are crucial issues, we need a list of solutions, not a piecemeal, single-minded approach.

HON JOHN FISCHER (Mining and Pastoral) [3.54 pm]: Previous speakers have confined their comments on potable water to the southern region of our State. While I acknowledge the seriousness of the ongoing problems the Government has had in these areas and the metropolitan area, my concerns are more about the problems being experienced in the engine room of the State. For the purpose of this debate, I refer to Kununurra in particular. For the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition, I shall interpret the viability of potable water as the availability, cost and sustainability of an adequate supply.

Hon Norman Moore: If you had put it in those terms it would have been easier to understand.

Hon JOHN FISCHER: As long as we realise exactly how we are interpreting it.

The people of Kununurra are at the end of their tether in trying to get any sense out of the Water and Rivers Commission about the bore field serving the town. I certainly agree with the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition about Kununurra and its problems with housing and water. He has represented that area for a long time and I know he has a great concern about it. I will add some comments to his. It is very difficult for people in Kununurra to get any sense out of the Water and Rivers Commission on several issues, but in particular the bore fields serving the area, as well as the Ord River and the Lake Kununurra waterways. The Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley is being forced to deal with no fewer than five ministers on these issues.

Hon Murray Criddle: That is half the Cabinet.

Hon JOHN FISCHER: It is virtually half the Cabinet. They are all having their say, but no conclusive results are coming out at the other end. The problem is, what happens when four ministers agree to a proposal and one does not? I do not know whether there is a conflict resolution process for ministers to follow in these circumstances.

Hon Kim Chance: What is the question you are trying to get answered?

Hon JOHN FISCHER: I will get to it; it relates to the bore fields. One minister seems to hold sway in relation to the bore field. Central to the issue is that there is a critical shortage of housing, and land for housing, in Kununurra. The shire has gone to great lengths with relevant government agencies to identify possible housing sites around Kununurra. One such site is where the bore field is situated. While most relevant government agencies agree that under different circumstances the bore site would be appropriate, the delay in commencing the development is the inability of the Water and Rivers Commission to identify other water sources. To facilitate the town's expansion into the existing bore field site and to overcome the problem of the town's water requirements, the shire has asked on many occasions for alternative bore sites to be identified. The shire has specifically asked whether new bore field sites can be identified and made available within five years. I am advised that the Water and Rivers Commission has replied that there are no economical alternatives. I will go into that reply in a little more depth later, in relation to questions I have asked in the House.

From the advice given to me by the shire, local residents and the local Press, it would seem that the Water and Rivers Commission has taken a head-in-the-sand attitude to this issue. To compound the problem, the commission has asked the Minister for the Environment to issue an interim report on a proposed Kununurra water reserve drinking water source protection plan. Primarily, this plan proposes an increase in the size of the Kununurra water reserve boundary. There is no doubt in the minds of many residents that this is a deliberate strategy to forestall any development in the area. They also believe that it will be to the ultimate harm of Kununurra and of the region. Some shire councillors are particularly disgusted with the release of the plan, not having been consulted in the preparatory stage. Although consulted at the draft stage, they seem to have been totally ignored.

Statement by Deputy President

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Jon Ford): Order! I draw the member's attention to Standing Order No 100 "Irrelevancy in debate", which reads -

> The President or the Chairman of Committees may call the attention of the Council or the Committee, as the case may be, to continued irrelevance or tedious repetition on the part of any Member, and may direct such Member to discontinue his speech

I find that the present debate has slipped some way from the motion moved by Hon Frank Hough, which is about potable water in Western Australia and the escalating saline problem. I ask that the member keep his comments relevant to the topic.

Motion Resumed

Hon JOHN FISCHER: I am not sure of the process now. The motion is that the House consider the viability of potable water in Western Australia. I was referring to a report on a proposed Kununurra water reserve drinking water source protection plan. Surely that is directly related to the viability of potable water in Western Australia.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I was drawing to the member's attention that some of his comments that referred to housing were not relevant.

Hon JOHN FISCHER: They were directly related to housing. The viability of the bore field in Kununurra is extremely relevant to the fact that the shire is trying to have the bore field removed so that housing can be constructed in that area. As I said, when consulted on the draft stage of the drinking water source protection plan, many of the people involved were upset that their input had been totally ignored. That has happened when the Government has been telling us that a lot of development will occur in the Ord River valley in the next decade. I suggest that, unless there is a whole-of-Government approach to the housing issue in Kununurra, these developments will stagnate.

The issue of companies moving into the town has caused a serious debate. Recently, the *Kimberley Echo* ran a front-page article titled "It's time to fight" which reads in part -

> The Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley is headed for a confrontation with the State Government over future development of Kununurra.
>
> The Water and Rivers Commission, which has taken to calling itself the Department of Environment, has hurriedly put together an interim report on the Kununurra Water Reserve Drinking Water Source Protection Plan.
>
> The interim report recommends the establishment of a Priority 1 (P1) area that far exceeds the 500-metre recommended area surrounding a bore field.
>
> The area contains an old rubbish dump, a drum dump, bits and pieces of old cars, mounds of broken bottles, hectares of feral leucaena and sorghum, a caravan park, and borders on the Victoria Highway.

One of the residents of Kununurra is a gentleman who wants to establish an area to provision houseboats from the site, which is right next door to the priority 1 area surrounding the bore field on Lake Kununurra. He had applied for a lease for a small section of the area. The article continues -

> An independent hydrological study concluded the houseboat operation would have no detrimental impact on the bore field.

It states further -

> The interim report does concede that should an alternative drinking water source be identified, approved by government 'this interim report will be reviewed with the objectives of helping reduce the shortage of land for developing of Kununurra.'

Unfortunately, the delay in establishing the location for a second water source in Kununurra is affecting the entire development of the town. In some ways, when reading the Government's recently released report on the water reserve drinking water source protection plan, I get a little bit mystified by the information that has been provided by the Government. A *Kimberley Echo* editorial referred to a letter from Tony Laws of the Department of the Environment to the "Letters to the Editor" column this week. The editorial reads -

> Of course, sitting in his Perth office, he knows how things should be done in Kununurra a lot better than the locals and has all the information at his fingertips.
>
> In fact so much so that can he read a factual front page story in the Kimberley Echo and brand it 'inaccurate and misleading'.
>
> Just to inform him of the true situation, let us play a game of questions and answers and we will answer the questions I feel sure Mr Laws couldn't.

These questions are extremely relevant to the area that has been set aside for the bore field. The editorial continues -

> Question: Where does the runoff of the main industrial area in Kununurra go?
>
> Answer: A 10-metre wide by 3.5-metre wide channel that goes under the Victoria Highway near the intersection with Ivanhoe Road.
>
> Question: Where does it go after that?
>
> Answer: The 'Borrow Pits', once the town's dump at a time when cotton was being sprayed with numerous chemicals more than 50 times a year.
>
> Question: Could there be drums of chemicals rotting away in this site?
>
> Answer: Yes.
>
> Question: Is this old dump in the priority one section of the catchment area for the Kununurra Bore Field that supplies the town's drinking water?
>
> Answer: Yes.
>
> Question: Is there a channel connecting these pits to Lake Kununurra?
>
> Answer: Yes, and during the wet season water from the pits flows out into the lake.

Many questions have been asked and should be answered by the Water and Rivers Commission because it seems that the area it has indicated that it will put aside to protect the reserve is not quite as clear of contamination as might be required.

Hon Kim Chance: I seem to recall that the Water Corporation has answered those questions and that those answers were also published in the *Kimberley Echo*, perhaps in a later publication. I can recall reading the Water Corporation's story about precisely that matter in the Kimberley area.

Hon JOHN FISCHER: A letter was published in the *Kimberley Echo* on 23 October from Tony Laws of the Department of the Environment.

Hon Kim Chance: That might be it.

Hon JOHN FISCHER: It reads in part -

> Your front-page article on the Kununurra Water Reserve (Kimberley Echo, October 23) was inaccurate and misleading.

Hon Kim Chance: I believe that is the letter I referred to.

Hon JOHN FISCHER: The questions were not completely answered because the editorial was written in response to Tony Laws' letter. A lot of questions still need to be answered.

Hon Kim Chance: Perhaps for members' interest you might like to table both versions.

Hon JOHN FISCHER: I most certainly will. I seek leave to table the documents.

Leave granted. [See papers No 1709.]

Hon JOHN FISCHER: The questions I was reading were from an editorial in *The Kimberley Echo* dated 25 September 2003. Another question was -

> Is Mr Laws aware that traces of dieldrin have been found in the drinking water that he describes as 'safe and well protected'?

I do not think the implication was that the water is dangerously contaminated but rather to its availability due to the expansion of housing on the bore field. As the town grows, there will be a necessity to move the bore field. The residents of Kununurra have a right to expect some action to be taken as quickly as possible.

The Minister for the Environment issued a media statement announcing the release of the proposed Kununurra water reserve and drinking water source protection plan. She stated that the town's water supply is drawn from shallow bore gravel beds south of the Victoria Highway and along Lake Kununurra. The water moves directly from the lake with the gravel acting as a coarse filter. The water flows quickly from the lake to the bores and any contamination within the lake or reserve could rapidly make its way into Kununurra's drinking water.

In response to question without notice 1172, which I asked, the Water Corporation advised -

> It is possible to draw potable water from the Ord River at Lake Kununurra but not without a loss of public amenity; however, when compared to an orderly expansion of the existing source, such an approach is not economical.

In answer to the same question, the Water Corporation also advised -

> The existing site is not the only available site. The bore field has existed at its current location since 1960 and is the most appropriate site for a safe and secure water supply as other identified alternative sites involve an increased risk to public health or, in the case of Lake Kununurra or Lake Argyle, the imposition of unacceptable controls on recreational access.

I am sure that the people of Kununurra appreciate the problems in that area. The statements suggest that all recreational, tourism and agricultural activities on Lake Kununurra should cease immediately because, as the minister said, any contamination in the lake or reserve could rapidly make its way into Kununurra's drinking water.

I believe the Government needs to get its act together on this and work for the common good of the town of Kununurra and the region so that any implementation of a new bore field can be carried out as quickly as possible. I have previously challenged the minister in this House to explain the benefits supplied by the Water and Rivers Commission. Quite frankly, if there are no benefits it should be disbanded and we should have just one department. The State would save a lot of money and it would stop a lot of the problems that face local shires. I reiterate what I said initially: shires find themselves dealing with up to five ministers on some projects. When there is acceptance from one minister or department, it always turns out that the Department of Environmental Protection has overriding control. That is holding back a lot of development in regional Western Australia.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to sessional orders.

Sitting suspended from 4.15 to 4.30 pm