

YARRAGADEE AQUIFER - PLANS FOR WATER EXTRACTION

Motion

MR D.T. REDMAN (Stirling) [3.34 pm]: I move -

That, regardless of the alternative water sources available to boost Perth's water supplies, this house calls on the state government to direct the Water Corporation to abandon plans to draw 45 gigalitres of water from the south west Yarragadee aquifer, given that local water needs are not being met and there are significant potential risks to the environment.

Essentially, there are two arguments on this issue coming out of the south west. First, the reasonable needs of the south west community and, second, the potential environmental impact of the removal of 45 gigalitres to Perth. It is interesting that a week or more ago a constituent of the member for Greenough who has a property in Nannup raised the issue that he has been chasing a licence to get groundwater from an allocated system. It is interesting that although the allocation he was seeking would not place too much demand on the relevant bore, he was knocked back by the Department of Water on the basis of the following point that was made in the Environmental Protection Authority's report on the issue of the Yarragadee proposal -

If the proposal is approved to proceed, the EPA therefore recommends that no further significant private allocations be made from the Yarragadee aquifer or from the Leederville and Lesueur Sandstone aquifers beneath the west Scott Coastal Plain until the DoW's South West Water Management Plan has been completed, including more rigorous environmental water provisions, and the actual impacts of the Water Corporation's wellfield have been monitored and assessed.

It concerns me that it is proposed to take 45 gigalitres from the south west of Perth - and the needs of the south west have been stated on a number of occasions - and one small application was disallowed on the basis of that potential proposal. It concerns me that things are so close to the line in the south west that local proposals have been stopped from going ahead. The people who have been talking up this proposal - the government, the Department of Water and the Water Corporation - say that there is plenty of water there; it is something in the vicinity of a million gigalitres.

I recall that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, spoke on the last motion that I moved last year on this matter, particularly the need to get some of that water, because of concerns you had with the Gngangara mound. Here we have a situation in which a local need has been denied on the basis of this proposal. It hardly gives us any confidence that the Water Corporation has correctly interpreted the studies and feedback from the assessments that indicate that there is plenty of water in the south west. It is a matter of great concern. Therefore, when it is said that once a proposal goes ahead and we need rigorous assessment from the Department of Water before any approvals are granted, it is not a given that when the proposal proceeds the local needs will be met. It is a huge concern.

I moved a motion in this house last year which did not get much more than an afterthought from the minister, which concerned me. A statement was made in the executive summary of the environmental review and management program that said by 2033, when the local needs will increase and we know what is happening along the west coast, it is possible a proportion of the 45 gigalitres will be retained and used in the south west and what remains will go to Perth. We are potentially spending over \$700 million to take water from the south west to Perth and by 2033 some of the water will be left in the south west. What sort of decision is that - \$700 million on something that will take only a fraction of the 45 gigalitres to Perth? That is hardly the basis on which to make good decisions in meeting both the local needs in the south west and the government's concern; that is, the needs of the people who live in the city.

It is interesting that this motion will give Country Labor members the opportunity to stand up and be counted. Obviously their constituents are raising issues with them about local needs and environmental issues. It has been reported in the press that the members concerned have met with the Premier and I am sure they were all hackles and claws going into that meeting, but I suspect that they have been tickled under the belly and they will be nice and quiet once the government makes its decision. They have made a few comments, but I am sure that the steam has gone from their bellies on that one. I hope that they will stand up and be counted on this. It is an opportunity for them to speak up and be put on the record in Parliament and to vote accordingly.

The other concern is the environment. That has not been more clearly identified than in these articles from *The West Australian* over the past two days. Eminent scientists have been prepared to put their names in print. It is not too often that we hear such people speak up about issues. They rarely get political but, because this is such a paramount concern, they are prepared to be recorded in the newspaper and be seen publicly to make statements

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and to raise issues. They should not be sold short on the concerns they are raising. Their statements reinforce their concerns about the issues. One said -

Furthermore, the environment is a legitimate consumer of water and its needs must be respected and provided for. In fact, it should be given a water allocation priority higher than that for keeping Perth's gardens and lawns green.

That is a very clear statement. One has only to read these articles to get a real feel for the concern the scientific community has on drawing 45 gegalitres from the aquifer.

I moved a motion on this issue last year because I was worried by some of the comments made by the Minister for Water Resources. I mentioned that in one area there was a potential five-metre drop in the watertable. Among other things, the minister said -

I do not know from where the member got the figures suggesting that there would be a five-metre drop in the watertable. They are not the figures I have been shown. The figures may have been for an earlier model.

The figures came straight from the Water Corporation's report; they have been quoted by the eminent scientists. There are significant environmental concerns. It worries me that the minister has not got a particularly good handle on some of the issues with the proposal that the government is putting up.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: I am not sure exactly what you are talking about by referring to five metres. Be careful not to misinterpret one of the tables that shows that where there is considerable depth there would be a five-metre change in water pressure, which is not a five-metre drop in the watertable. You may have some other figures but you could be confusing them with that. It is a five-metre drop in pressure, not a five-metre drop in the water levels.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The reference I make is to volume 1, chapter 5, page 5-8. It states that the watertable will drop up to five metres in the Milyeannup Brook and Poison Gully valleys.

The other concern raised by the eminent scientists is the issue of mitigation plans and the adaptive management process. If I understand what that means, it means that, potentially, we will use less later. We will take the 45 gegalitres now and use less later on if it has some impact on the area. It worries me that we would spend \$700 million today to get to the point where we would use less but not even meet the needs of Perth; that is, if the environmental issues show up, and the eminent scientists say that they are very likely to do so.

The other part of the adaptive management process is the mitigation process: if we have a problem here, we will get water from somewhere else and pump it to a certain point in order to fix it. Regarding that, the eminent scientists say -

Bizarrely, the corporation plans to draw additional water from the aquifer to supplement the flows in the Blackwood River and tributaries, including St John Brook, Milyeannup Brook and Poison Gully, "if unexpected and unacceptable impacts are likely to occur." It is almost certain that supplementation will not alleviate but instead exacerbate the environmental impacts.

That is the sort of statement that we are getting from eminent scientists about the plan that the Water Corporation has to mitigate the issues that are likely to show up.

I am also worried - this essentially comes back to the comments of the sustainability panel - that there are trigger points that will be put in place. As such, if certain things happen, the panel will change some of the things it is doing. That is a little bit like saying that, when people were clearing in the 1950s and 1960s, they should have said that they would wait to see whether there was any salinity and then use it as a trigger point to stop clearing. It took 40 years for salinity to show up. It will probably take 40 or 50 years to get rid of the issues. I have a concern about setting trigger points. From what I have read, some of the trigger points include trees dying - little things like that. It is worrying that we will use something like that as a trigger point and to make decisions under the adaptive management process. It will be a little bit late to fix the issues.

The hypocrisy of this government stands out. This situation is of very deep concern for people in the south west. People in the south west have licences and use an allocated system; we all understand that. They are now to be charged fees for having a licence. In certain conditions they will be required to have meters on their dams and bores, and they will have to pay for those meters. Yet we have the bizarre situation in which there are 150 000 bores in Perth that are not required to be metered and there is no requirement to pay any fees. Those bores are drawing something like 120 gegalitres from the groundwater supplies in Perth. I find it bizarre and the height of hypocrisy that the pressure is going on in the very area from which the Water Corporation wants to draw 45 gegalitres of water to send to Perth when 120 gegalitres is being taken from Perth groundwater supplies but it is totally unmonitored. There is no standard to work out what is happening to that water. I know that Madam

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Deputy Speaker (Mrs D.J. Guise) is very concerned about that. In addition, the member for Swan Hills raised this issue last week during a grievance.

This is an issue that Country Labor should stand up and be counted on. I know that Country Labor members have constituents who are very concerned about this. This issue has been raised with me on a number of fronts. I am sure it has been raised with the Leader of the Opposition and other members whose electorates have communities that are in the allocated systems. This is something that the government can take a balanced stance on rather than taking a hypocritical position, which is clearly shown in the divide between city and country.

I will close my comments to give the Leader of the National Party a chance to say a few words. The Nationals' position has been very consistent on this. Right from the outset, we have been against the proposal to pump 45 gegalitres of water to Perth. To our minds, regional needs are not being given the weight they deserve. That is clearly evident in that some of the proposals for drawing from bores have been knocked back. It is worrying that the driver for the government to look at this proposal is that it is not ready for desal 2. When I asked the minister a question about that late last year, he said that desal 2 was on the drawing board and that all the proposals and processes were going through for it to happen if the Yarragadee fell over. I am interested to hear the minister's comments on that because it is concerning that that may well be the driver for the government to look at the very cheap and easy option of taking water from the south west Yarragadee.

MR B.J. GRYLLS (Merredin - Leader of the National Party) [3.48 pm]: I will take the opportunity of the couple of minutes I have available to support the motion of the member for Stirling about the south west Yarragadee. This is a very important issue for the Parliament and the state. Many of us will have watched the program on the ABC on Sunday night about the goldfields pipeline scheme and the politics involved and the issues that arose at the time, which was around the turn of the last century. The scheme was of great importance to the state of Western Australia. This debate is very important and it is disappointing that the best we could get was a one-hour debate. This is a unique opportunity for all members of Parliament to make their points clear. It is particularly disappointing for me that, with the time allowed for the debate, members of the Labor Party from country areas will not have the time to put their arguments. We see a continual pattern in which the cabinet - the inner sanctum of government - comes up with its directions and everyone on the other side of the Parliament seems to fall into line. If ever there were a time to not fall into line, it is on this issue of the south west Yarragadee. I am not one to say that we do not need to find a new water source; I agree that we do. We should be planning for another 45-gigalitre water source in the state. It disappoints me that already 100 gigalitres of waste water are being issued from the waste water treatment plants at points along the coast in the metropolitan area. The water has already been treated to a degree.

This government claims credit for Western Australia being the first state in the commonwealth to take the lead in putting desalination into our water mix. As a supporter of desalination, my only concern with that project was the outfall into Cockburn Sound. I still have concerns about that but it could be easily mitigated by lengthening the outfall pipe into the shipping channel. If \$700 million is on the table for the next water source, why are we not doing the work to utilise that 100 gigalitres of waste water that is already in the system, and already in the metropolitan area? It is here, and all we need to do is look at processing that water and refining it. Western Australia has shown its ability to take the lead on water issues, so let us now take the lead on the recycling of water. There was a disgraceful outcome in Toowoomba in Queensland, which decided not to go down that path. There was a similar debate in the recent New South Wales election campaign. We can walk away from the Yarragadee proposal because of the questions that it raises and embrace water recycling. We can send a clear message to the community that water recycling is something that we have to get used to in our drying climate. It is all waiting to be researched. Instead, we are arguing with the people of the south west about taking their water. We have a new water source right on the doorstep of the metropolitan area, where the water is needed. This government will be forever remembered as the government that tapped the Yarragadee while ignoring waste water recycling.

DR J.M. WOOLLARD (Alfred Cove) [3.51 pm]: I support this motion asking the government to abandon its plans to draw 45 gigalitres of water from the south west Yarragadee aquifer. The government says that its plan is based on research done by the Water Corporation. Who exactly in the Water Corporation has done this research? Many people are saying that the people who did this research are the dinosaurs in the Water Corporation. The Environmental Protection Authority says that there are serious gaps in the scientific knowledge presented by the Water Corporation. There is a big question mark over the credentials of the scientists who have considered this project for the Water Corporation. We know from the studies by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation that rainfall has decreased in the past 30 years in the south west, and that climate change is upon us. We are all waiting anxiously to hear from the new Minister for Climate Change what the government's position is on that issue.

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Why are we planning to destroy one of Western Australia's major icons - the south west? Many people have said that it is a biodiversity hotspot, considering the wildlife and plants in the region. It contains many things of great natural beauty that people in the metropolitan area enjoy sharing when they visit the area. What will happen if the government taps the Yarragadee aquifer? We know that the watertable will be lowered by five metres, which will be a threat to animals, birds and wildflowers. We will see the extinction of some of those animals and plants. We know from the scientists who have considered this issue that the land is likely to become more acidic and there will be more algal blooms in the rivers.

I urge the government to listen to the call of not only the people of the south west but also many people in the metropolitan area who want to see the south west protected, just as you want to see your area protected, Madam Deputy Speaker, from the damage caused by the overdrawing of water from the Gngangara mound. You have seen for yourself the problems in the northern metropolitan area, and we do not want to cause even worse problems down south. It is important that this government listen to the community and act on what it is saying. If this government does not act on what is becoming a growing community concern, I am sure that its members will enjoy sitting on this side of the house in a few years. That will be the outcome, because this movement to save the Yarragadee will grow. The government must take heed, rather than spending \$700 million and saying that the project will be stopped if there is any environmental damage. That damage may not become apparent for 10 years. Because of climate change, the damage done as a result of tapping the Yarragadee may never be repaired. I asked the government to abandon plans to tap the south west Yarragadee aquifer.

DR S.C. THOMAS (Capel) [3.56 pm]: I do not usually take time to deal with history in these issues, but I will throw in a small amount of history for the edification of the Minister for Water Resources and my other parliamentary colleagues. I will read into the record a policy that was carried into the 2005 election. It states -

On the evidence currently available, the Coalition believes that the water from the Yarragadee should not be accessed to provide for the extra 45 gegalitres sought by the Water Corporation.

Dr J.M. Woollard: What is that document?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I will seek to table this document and have it lie on the table so that members can see what the coalition's approach was in 2005, and how it reflected its approach before that. Those looking for an outcome on the Yarragadee ask the government not to play politics with this issue by suggesting that the Liberal Party has, for some reason, changed its tune. Neither does it do the National Party any credit to take the same position, because it is not true. I seek to lay this paper on the table for the remainder of today's sitting. It is the Liberal-National coalition Western Australian policy package for 2005.

[The paper was tabled for the information of members.]

Dr S.C. THOMAS: That policy states that the coalition opposes this project. It is not a new policy for the Liberal Party, as compared with Country Labor, which I understand has just recently decided to oppose this policy. We should hear from the mentor for Country Labor - I believe that is the correct term - the member for Collie-Wellington. The member was not in the chamber when I last spoke, and I called him the brains trust of Country Labor. "Mentor" might be a more appropriate term. Will he stand and give us Country Labor's opinion in the current debate?

Mr J.C. Kobelke: I have encouraged him to do so, so don't you try to discourage him.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Will the member for Collie-Wellington stand and give us his position?

Mr M.P. Murray: I'm not telling.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: We would like to hear what the position of the member for Collie-Wellington is. I am only going by what I read in the newspaper, and the Minister for Water Resources will probably tell me that we cannot always trust what we read in newspapers. The newspaper says that Country Labor has opposed the Yarragadee project. There are two issues there. Let us first hear the mentor for Country Labor actually confirm or deny that in the house. Then let us hear the Minister for Water Resources respond by saying how he intends to treat that affirmation or denial.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: The members of Country Labor have represented the views of their constituents, and they have pointed out that many of their constituents are opposed to the project.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Will that change the outcome?

Mr J.C. Kobelke: It is an important factor that will be taken into account.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Will it change the outcome?

Mr J.C. Kobelke: There are a lot of factors to be taken into account; you'll have to wait till the end of the process to find out whether it is the one that oversees all the others.

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Dr S.C. THOMAS: How big a difference will it make? This is the opposition's concern, and the reason that it is an urgent motion that needs to be debated. Can this government be trusted? Can the state Labor Party be trusted with what will probably be the most important environmental decision this state has ever made or will make in the long-term future?

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Are you saying that 45 gigalitres of water could not be taken from the south west Yarragadee?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Forty-five gigalitres of water has already been allocated from the south west Yarragadee. I am saying that the government should not be trying to take an additional 45 gigalitres from the Yarragadee. The government's proposal is to extract this water on top of everything else and bring it to Perth. This will put the environment of the south west at risk. The government is proposing this in the face of the information that the minister has been given; he realises that that amount of water should not be taken. I am saying that there are alternatives.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: There are two different issues. Are you saying that the 45 gigalitres should not be taken for environmental reasons, or are you saying it can be taken, but don't take it to Perth?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I am saying that the government should not take the additional 45 gigalitres. In my view, whether the government takes it to Perth is irrelevant, but the government should not pursue the proposal to extract another 45 gigalitres of water from the Yarragadee.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: If you are saying that, then that water can't be taken because we would be strangling the south west.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Is the minister suggesting that the south west will absorb 45 gigalitres of water?

Mr J.C. Kobelke: I'm saying that we want to make sure there's enough water for the future of the south west. If you're saying environmental criteria mean we can't take it -

Dr S.C. THOMAS: QED. The Minister for Water Resources has just said that the government will take 45 gigalitres of water to Perth. He said that if it is not used in the south west, it will strangle the south west. Which is it? Will the government strangle the south west or not?

Mr J.C. Kobelke: I'm saying you need approval so that you make sure you've got water for future use in the south west.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The Minister for Water Resources has just told the house that if the Liberal Party shut this operation down and did not make extra water resources available for the south west, it would strangle the south west.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: No, I didn't say that. I said that if you're saying you can't take another 45 gigalitres of water out of the south west Yarragadee, then you will stop any development in the south west.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: We can perhaps take additional water, but the south west does not need 45 gigalitres at this stage.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: But in the future?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The government's proposal is to take an additional 45 gigalitres. The government will harvest this from its current allocation to within about five gigalitres of the Environmental Protection Authority's recommendation for the maximum take. The "South West Strangler" will, as a result of this proposal, strangle the environment, growth and potential of the south west. I hope the Minister for the Environment will give us some information. I am disappointed that he refused to answer any questions during question time. I hope he has spent some time in the interim being briefed on some of these impacts, because he has potentially to make the most important environmental decision that this or any Western Australian state government has probably ever faced, and the opposition wants to know if the train wheels are on or off. Are we to have an L-plate minister make the most important environmental decision, when he cannot tell the Legislative Assembly what will be the impacts of a dropping water table? The Minister for Water Resources could probably try to explain it to him; or will he make the decision for the Minister for the Environment and then let him know which way he should go? The decision should be made by somebody who actually has some knowledge of the process. The Minister for Water Resources might ignore the outcomes, but he at least seems to have some form of understanding of what impacts the dropping of water tables and the ingress of salt water might have on native species and on wetlands. What has his response been so far? We are waiting for the Minister for the Environment to give us his knowledge, because he is about to make this decision. Is he just a puppet of the Minister for Water Resources?

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Mr J.C. Kobelke: As he is in a position in which he is to make a determination, it would be quite improper for him to comment on the details that go into that decision. I thought the member for Capel might know that.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: It would not be improper at all; it would not be improper for him to demonstrate that he has some knowledge of the environmental impacts of the proposal that will be put before him.

Mr P.B. Watson: You don't understand the process.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The member for Albany makes a good point. Would any environment minister be in contempt of either Parliament or the law if he were to make any comment with regard to a project before approvals were in place?

Mr J.C. Kobelke: The issue is that it may leave the proposal open to challenges standing up in court through apprehended bias.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Have any of the government's ministers previously made comment on a proposal before a decision had been reached? The government had a very good Minister for the Environment - the member for Maylands, sitting up the back. She was not all that interested in promoting the Yarragadee option or a number of other environmental options that were put forward. When the member for Maylands was Minister for the Environment, did she make any comments about the Yarragadee proposal?

Dr J.M. Edwards: I can't remember!

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Dear, oh, dear! The Carmen Lawrence response! I expected better from the member for Maylands; I have great respect for her. This is a huge problem for the south west. The L-plate minister about to make this decision will potentially put the future of the south west at risk for the gain of this government.

Mr G.M. Castrilli: They don't even know the impacts.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The minister will very soon make an ultimate decision on this proposal and it will go ahead without the minister having understood the impacts or having a full appreciation of what will happen. It is the death of the precautionary principle. Maybe while the Minister for the Environment is being briefed on his environmental activities, the government might actually try to introduce him to the precautionary principle. It is written in the Environmental Protection Act; we might have to seek out a copy to send to the minister so that he might have some understanding of it. The Labor Party has put in place a suck-it-and-see proposal for developing the Yarragadee and it is the complete antithesis of the precautionary principle. This government does not understand the environment, it does not understand the precautionary principle, and it is willing to gamble with the environment, growth and health of the people of the south west of this state. It is a disgrace.

MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont - Deputy Premier) [4.05 pm]: I cannot agree with this motion. I can see several things wrong with it, purely in the way in which it has been drafted. The first thing that strikes me is the strange phrase in the first sentence that reads -

... regardless of the alternative water sources available ...

What an ignorant position for an opposition to put forward - the idea that regardless of what alternative approach will need to be adopted, we should simply rule out one possible choice. Politics is always about choice, and if we do not have one choice available to us, we need to make another choice. I think it is irrational for that phrase to be included in this motion.

The second thing wrong with the motion is that it refers to Perth's water supplies. The government is considering ways in which to boost supplies into the integrated water supply scheme, which supplies not only the Perth metropolitan area but also a very large part of the south west of Western Australia. We are talking about not only Perth's water supply but also Kalgoorlie, Northam and Moora's water supplies. The opposition's approach would deny the possibility of one particular source being used to boost water supplies in other country areas. I would like the National Party to explain to people in country areas outside the south west why it has taken an approach that might deny those people the water they need.

Another thing I have noticed about the motion is that there seems to be an internal contradiction. A fragment within the last couple of lines reads -

... local water needs are not being met ...

The motion later makes mention of potential risks to the environment. I think the opposition needs to say whether it thinks that 45 gegalitres can be taken from the south west Yarragadee, because I think it is trying to have its cake and eat it too. I think the opposition is arguing that we cannot take 45 gegalitres from the south west Yarragadee for the integrated water supply - for Moora, Kalgoorlie or Northam - but we can take 45 gegalitres for other purposes. I do not think the opposition can run the environmental argument and the local

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needs argument together. Either it is safe to take 45 gegalitres out of the Yarragadee or it is not safe. It does not become safer because it is being used for local needs rather than to meet needs in drier parts of the state such as Kalgoorlie or parts of the wheatbelt.

I want to assure the house that the government would not lightly make a decision on the Yarragadee project. Quite apart from environmental concerns, the cost of the Yarragadee project is in excess of \$700 million. A \$700 million decision is a pretty significant decision for any government to make. The government lives within a self-imposed debt-to-revenue ratio cap of 47 per cent. That limits the borrowings it can undertake. It limits even the borrowings in our government trading enterprises. We have massive demands for additional infrastructure in our electricity system and we already have massive demands for additional infrastructure expenditure in our water supply system. We would not allocate more than \$700 million of borrowing capacity for a project unless we were absolutely convinced that that project was needed. Purely on financial grounds, the government will think very carefully about whether to proceed with the Yarragadee project, or indeed with alternative water sources. Part of the judgement will be based on what level of risk we think we should run with our integrated water supply scheme. Current planning is based on there not being a greater than one in 200-year risk that a complete sprinkler ban will be imposed. There may be people, even members in this house, who think we could take a less conservative position than that. Some states work on a one in 50-year risk of a complete sprinkler ban rather than a one in 200-year risk. However, those states do not have the same hot dry summers and sandy soils that we have in Western Australia, so our risk profile arguably should be different. That is the sort of consideration that needs to be given when we think about spending \$700 million-plus of our borrowing capacity on a project like this.

Other financial implications must be thought about. An alternative water source for Yarragadee would be a second desalination plant. There are two issues with regard to a second desalination plant. One is that it could not come on in the same time frame as Yarragadee; the second is that the project would be more expensive and the water would be more expensive. I think it is worthwhile to think about what people's water bills would be. I can tell members that on the best advice available to me, a second desalination plant would make water bills on average \$40 to \$50 a year more expensive than they would be if the Yarragadee project proceeded. Members opposite have to acknowledge that if they persist with their irrational attitude that Yarragadee has to be ruled out, what they are advocating is either a greater risk of a complete sprinkler ban, or a \$50 tax on each household for more expensive water.

Mr P.D. Omodei: So it's the opposition's fault, is it?

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The Leader of the Opposition is not adding anything to the debate with his angry interjections.

I want to leave the financial implications aside because we are not going to make a decision on this matter purely on financial implications. We are not going to proceed with any water resource development that damages the environment. That is the bottom line. We have a rigorous process for environmental assessment of private sector projects and government projects. Members should have confidence in our Environmental Protection Authority and the rigour of its processes. I point out that the Environmental Protection Authority has already said that Yarragadee could go ahead, albeit under strict conditions. Our processes do not finish with the Environmental Protection Authority report. There is an opportunity for people in the community to appeal, and they have done so. The process is that the Appeals Convener examines all the appeals and prepares a report for the consideration of the Minister for the Environment. The Minister for the Environment makes a decision according to his statutory responsibilities. He does not make a political decision on these issues. The Minister for the Environment will properly assess the Environmental Protection Authority's report, the substance of the appeals and the Appeals Convener's report before making a decision. If environmental damage will flow from the development of the Yarragadee project, the government will not proceed. That is a matter that the Minister for the Environment will consider.

There have been a lot of calls from the opposition for the Minister for the Environment to speak in this debate. I find that hard to believe because I think this is the same opposition that demanded that the former Minister for the Environment not participate in the assessment of a proposal because she had made some comments about the proposal before the assessment process began. The opposition demanded that she step aside from the making of that decision because it said there was pre-existing bias on her part. Now the opposition wants the new Minister for the Environment to express a view, to provide evidence of pre-existing bias, and go ahead and make the decision. I do not think members opposite understand the process. I do not think they properly appreciate the rigour of our environmental protection legislation. I do not think they properly appreciate how people, apart from scientists who provide reports to the EPA, have an opportunity to engage in the process.

Mr Terry Redman; Mr Brendon Grylls; Dr Janet Woollard; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Alan Carpenter; Mr John Kobelke; Acting Speaker; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Paul Omodei

The government is considering this matter, in all its complexity, properly and seriously. We are not going to damage the environment and we are not going to rush into a very big financial decision unless we are absolutely confident that this is safe and is required.

MR A.J. CARPENTER (Willagee - Premier) [4.16 pm]: I reiterate all remarks made by the Deputy Premier. This issue will be dealt with properly and with propriety, and in the way people expect a government to deal with things. It will not be dealt with in an ad hoc, knee-jerk way that simply responds to politics. It will be done properly. We have to ensure we make the right decision on our long-term water supplies for the future, and we will do so.

I want to bring to the attention of those who have come such a long-distance today, but may have gone home now, that I mentioned in question time that people should look at the totality of our attitude towards these issues, not just the latest spin provided by a particular person to suit the political climate in which they find themselves. I refer members of the public to the parliamentary debate of 24 October 2002. The *Hansard* of that date indicates that the now Leader of the Opposition fulminated against the government over his non-invitation to a water symposium. Remember what I said about his maiden speech and his attitude towards logging of old-growth forests. I urge people to read the *Hansard*. He stated in part -

The clear message to successive Governments is that the inflow to our dams is limited and that provision should be made for the supply of more water. If we spent less time talking about trying to pipe water 4 000 kilometres at a cost of \$5 a kilolitre - \$5 a tonne - when the people in Carnarvon reckon they will go broke at 23c a tonne, maybe we would make some headway.

We know that there is a huge water supply in the Yarragadee aquifer under Perth. That is the area that should be concentrated on. I believe that the leadership of the Government has been severely lacking. The setting up of a summit was a con. Substantial information has been logged by the Water Corporation, the Water and Rivers Commission and the Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources for not just decades but more than a century. The information exists. The dam sites in the south west, and the amount of run-off, have all been surveyed. Many of these surveys were conducted 10, 15 or 20 years ago, or even more. In the early 1900s, dams in the south west were surveyed. The ground water is there. However, we must ascertain the most sensible and cost-efficient way of getting it out of the ground.

Members should read the totality of what the Leader of the Opposition said.

Mr P.D. Omodei: You should read it!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I have, and I just took the opportunity to read it again. If ever there was an indication of - I shall be generous - an inconsistency to suit the times, that is such an example. The Leader of the Opposition went on to advocate pumping more water out of the Gngangara mound. The *Hansard* continues -

The water in the Gngangara mound flows into the Indian Ocean. A series of bores could be installed throughout Tamala Park and along the coast. There needs to be far more. Ultimately, that water runs into the ocean. A lot more can be done.

If ever there was an example of inconsistency to suit the times, those quotes demonstrate it. I repeat: the government will make a decision on the basis of the best evidence and what it is in the best interests of the state in the long term. We will not seek to mislead the public or gild the lily. Further, we will not seek to take political opportunism to new heights because of the well-intended protest movement that this matter has generated. People can make their own judgements about the consistency - I will go so far as to say honesty - of those who are taking part in this debate in the political domain.

In question time I raised the issue of uranium and whether or not any members of the opposition - this goes to the issue of consistency and honesty - have ever advocated that WA should become a nuclear waste site. I refer to an ABC interview on 23 January 2002 in which the member for Cottesloe, then the Leader of the Opposition, stated -

... I think it's inevitable, at some stage, there will be uranium mining in Western Australia, and I think that as part of Australia, and, indeed, as part of the world community, any country which either produces or uses uranium in significant amounts, has a shared responsibility for the storage and ultimate disposal of the waste products.

When I put that proposition in question time, it was denied.

Mr C.J. Barnett: No, it wasn't.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Yes, it was. The interview continues -

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When we do become a producer of uranium, I think we need to think very carefully whether we undertake also to help with the storage of waste material, only in proportion to what is produced here.

Certain individuals in political life are prepared to say anything at any time to suit the audience. The trouble is that what politicians say in their political lives is recorded in *Hansard* or transcripts of interviews, which can be held up as historical records. I invite those who are interested in this debate to take note of the history of some of the people engaging in the debate and their consistency, or lack thereof, on a range of subjects. Those who are interested in this debate should make a judgement about whether they can believe this side of the house, which has pursued the preservation of environmental values in Western Australia like no other government before it in this state and nationally, or the opposition, whose record can be held up for everybody to see and read.

MR J.C. KOBELKE (Balcatta - Minister for Water Resources) [4.25 pm]: In the time available to me - the member for Collie-Wellington also wishes to speak - I will not be able to canvass all the issues that have been raised by those in favour of the motion. I will touch on some of the key issues as I see them.

First of all, being in government is about making choices. When it comes to water availability in a drying climate, there are few easy choices. Clearly, we have an expanding economy, and although we can seek to improve water efficiency - we are doing that - we will continue to experience increasing demands for water in our integrated water supply scheme. We must expand the integrated water supply scheme to serve more people in different parts of the state, particularly the south west. We have been successful in taking the average usage of water from almost 180 kilolitres a person a year in 2000 to 155 kilolitres a person a year. We are seeking to ensure that we use water efficiently and responsibly and that we reduce the demand.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs J. Hughes): Members, there is a lot of chatter in the chamber and I am having difficulty hearing the member on his feet. I ask members who wish to talk to either leave the chamber or keep their voices low.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: We have to find another major new source. The proposition that has undergone the most work is the south west Yarragadee, as it has been subject to some four years of intensive scientific work, public debate and engineering design. We are looking at a second desalination plant, a proposition that is not as well advanced as the Yarragadee proposal. A second plant will confront the same environmental approval issues, whether they relate to the sea water and the return water, which has a higher salt content; land issues; obtaining some other form of renewable energy; and where to site a wind farm. Different interest groups will oppose different ideas and suggestions. There will be opposition to whatever decision the government makes. We must weigh up the interests of the state with what is sustainable in terms of not impacting in a negative way on the environment. They are the decisions that we will make.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Do you agree that Dr Gallop lied about the desalination plant when he told the public of Western Australia that it would be powered by wind?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It is.

Mr C.J. Barnett: It's not; the contract is for base-load power.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It is powered by a wind farm. The member for Cottesloe has resorted to using unparliamentary language rather than entering into a rational debate on the issue.

The second point is the issue that the member for Capel is not willing to face up to; namely, separating the environmental consequences of taking this water from the issue of its equitable distribution to meet the needs in the south west and other parts of the state. Those are very different issues. Members opposite who have argued on the basis that 45 gegalitres cannot be removed from the south west Yarragadee because of the great environmental impact are being less than honest. They are telling people of the south west that they will not have enough water in the future. Currently, over 200 gegalitres of water can be allocated to the south west from the different aquifers.

Mr G. Snook: It's gone back up again.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I did not say the south west Yarragadee. The Department of Water currently has approval to issue over 200 gegalitres from the superficial, Leederville and the south west Yarragadee aquifers.

Mr G. Snook: Why have you put a hold on the issuing of licences?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It depends on the aquifer and the area applying for the licence. That is the total amount of water available. In some areas the actual availability of water is close to maximum demand. Proponents are seeking to get water in a given area. The government has to consider precautionary principles; good, sound management; and how much water can be allocated, which involve hard decisions. We are about looking at the

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interests of the whole of the state, including the south west. Those interests will be weighed up very carefully when a decision is made. A series of decisions have to be made. The Minister for the Environment must decide on the environmental sustainability of the proposal when considering whether it should be approved. If the minister approves the proposal, the Department of Water will have to decide how it will allocate the water and the government will have to decide how to fund the proposal.

A range of decisions have yet to be made and could go either way. Those decisions will be made to serve the interests of the people of Western Australia and the people of the south west. The south west is a part of the state that is growing. It has a growing demand for water. We need to ensure that that water is there to be used, but we also need to make sure that infrastructure is in place. People can often take a very simplistic view that if there is water in one place and there is a need for it somewhere else, it can simply be supplied to that area. It is far more complicated than that. The water must be fit for the purpose for which it is needed. In some cases, industry does not need potable water, and water that is not available for the drinking supply can be provided to industry. There is also the issue of how that water source is paid for and the cost of the water. If we put in place a system that is too expensive, people will not be able to afford it. We already have in place community service obligations to ensure that water is provided at equitable prices. Currently, the CSOs paid are in excess of \$300 million. That is money that comes as profit to the government from the Water Corporation. It is then returned as subsidies, whether they be pensioner subsidies or country subsidies. Well over \$200 million every year is taken from metropolitan water users and given to country water users so that they pay less for their water, because supplying country areas with water is more expensive. This is an integrated scheme run by the Water Corporation that looks after the interests of country users and people in the south west, and it will continue to do so. If this scheme goes ahead, the very construction of a trunk main from deep in the south west to Perth will be a boon to the south west as part of the infrastructure -

Mr P.D. Omodei: What is the name of the place that it's coming from?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Jarrahwood.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Why didn't you say that it was from Jarrahwood?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That is deep in the south west, is it not?

Mr P.D. Omodei: No, it's not deep in the south west.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It is not as deep as is the area where the Leader of the Opposition comes from. I have limited time.

That infrastructure will ensure that the interests of the people of the south west are looked after. Therefore, we are looking to the interests of all Western Australians. As I put to the member for Capel earlier, he needs to separate the environmental approvals, which are very important, from the distribution of that water. If he confuses the two, he will be selling the south west short, and this government certainly will not do that.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Wellington) [4.32 pm]: First, I make it very clear that I cannot support the motion in its current form. However, Country Labor has had plenty of representation from groups in the south west. We have taken those concerns to both the Premier and the Minister for Water Resources. We have had good meetings with them; in fact, one meeting went for more than an hour. An hour of the Premier's time was warranted so that we could come up with a position. We believe we must consider all aspects of water supplies in much greater depth before a decision is made. I think everyone in this place will agree with that position. The motion seems to refer to two separate issues. One is that local people will be able to drag as much water as they want from that area without any environmental restraint. That concerns me because I do not believe that should happen.

I believe that the motion has been thrown together for political gain. This is not the way that Country Labor believes we should go. We believe that we should work very hard on the issue of recycling water. That has started to happen, but the issue certainly has not been pushed hard enough. Another issue that has been referred to is alternate water supplies, such as desalination plants, the Wellington Dam and the Collie River East. Of course, the Griffin issue is quite different from the main body of the Wellington Dam. There are two or three issues that should be looked at.

Western Australians are probably the most wasteful water users of anyone anywhere in the world. When we drive down the street at different times of the day, we can see water running down the street. People are not overly concerned about what time of the day they wash their cars; they just throw the hose on the lawn or the verge. In other states, those actions attract an immediate on-the-spot fine. If people who live in the eastern states hose down their driveways, they are subject to a \$150 on-the-spot fine. People must wash their cars with a bucket; they cannot just wash their cars and then hose them off, as 99 per cent of us do. There are many and varied ways that we can reduce the demand on water sources.

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Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The cheapest way possible to reduce the demand on water sources is to address our rate of water usage. With a bit of education, the result can be instantaneous. Our AAA labelling system for shower heads, washing machines and taps has been a success. Why do we not build on that system, instead of, as the Treasurer said, spending \$600 million on a plant to provide water in this state? The obvious option for water usage is right in front of our face. Associated with that are the environmental issues with the Yarragadee. I do not think anyone can take a risk. This is not about risk; this is about absolute science and making sure that we get it right. We have strongly put forward our case to the Premier and the Minister for Water Resources. We do not want to rush a decision. We certainly do not need to rush it. What will happen if it is decided to take water from the Yarragadee, but the plan fails and we do not have a backup? We do not want any cheating. We do not want people to say that it will rain next week. We want the assessments to be done properly and fairly to make sure that we have a sustainable water supply for the future.

MR P.D. OMODEI (Warren-Blackwood - Leader of the Opposition) [4.36 pm]: Today we are talking about the single most important issue for people in the south west of Western Australia, yet the member for Collie-Wellington spoke about people washing their cars with a bucket. That is about the extent of the contribution of the member for Collie-Wellington. He should come to this side of the house and vote with us on this issue. Country Labor members can do a repetition of what members of the Labor Party did last week when people from the union movement were in the public gallery. The member for Yokine jumped across and voted with the government because he had no guts. This is a very important issue.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: He's got a lot more guts than you've got.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I will ask the minister one question. Has he received an application for a licence to build a 45-gigalitre dam on the Brunswick River?

Mr J.C. Kobelke: It does not come to me. The department might have.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: The minister does not know anything about an application from a private company to build a \$120 million dam on the Brunswick River.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: No.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I will pursue that matter further. I would have thought that the minister would check on that application. The important point about this issue is that it impacts on all the people in the south west.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs J. Hughes): I am sure that the Hansard reporter could not hear all those comments. Members need to please refrain from interjecting. The Leader of the Opposition is on his feet.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: The important point is that this issue impacts on every person who lives in the south west, whether they live in a town or whether they take water from the Scott River plain to produce milk for the metropolitan area. The Premier can read my speeches. Yes, I made speeches in 2002, 2003 and 2004. I responded to the speech that the Premier made last week. It would be instructive for everybody to read that speech, because I tabled a document that indicates that we will have a shortage of water by 2008. The Premier's government has not properly planned for water supply in Western Australia. That is what the problem is, and the minister knows that; he has been caught out.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order, members! Can members on both sides of the chamber who are not on their feet please refrain from making comments?

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I intend to make sure that the people of Western Australia know exactly what the situation is with the Labor Party and its water policy for Western Australia. The truth of the matter is that there is water under Perth. Where are we taking our water from now? Sixty per cent of that water comes from groundwater. Some of that water comes from the Yarragadee under Perth. Is that right?

Mr J.C. Kobelke: That is correct.

Mr P.D. OMODEI: That is correct, and the rest comes from the Gnangara mound. Is that correct?

Mr J.C. Kobelke: The Gnangara mound is the groundwater aquifer.

Extract from Hansard
[ASSEMBLY - Tuesday, 27 March 2007]
p712c-723a

Mr Terry Redman; Mr Brendon Grylls; Dr Janet Woollard; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Alan Carpenter; Mr John Kobelke; Acting Speaker; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Paul Omodei

Mr P.D. OMODEI: No, it is not. The Gnangara mound is a superficial aquifer. That is how much the minister knows about water in Western Australia. Talk about misleading. The Premier said that his government would not seek to mislead. Why was there more water in our dams last year? It was not because it rained more. The reason there was more water in our dams is that extra water was taken from underground.

The member for Capel made the point about the application of the precautionary principle. If a farmer applies for water that comes out of a bore in the south Yarragadee, the precautionary principle is automatically applied. However, the government will take water out of the south Yarragadee and it will suck it and wait to see what damage occurs. The Minister for Water Resources has been to that bore field that is 25 kilometres from Nannup. Does he know how far Poison Gully is from Nannup, which is where the biodiversity assessment plant will be located? It is 35 kilometres from the bore field. Two bores will be drilled near The Mythic Mazes - one 900 and one 400 metres deep. Have related discussions taken place with the local people? It is within 80 metres of St John Brook, which is the most important tourism attraction in the Nannup area.

The minister does not have a feather to fly with on this issue. There are several senior biodiversity people in WA - John Bradshaw, Stephen Hopper, Peter Davies, Ray Fong and Felicity Bradshaw. Why does the minister not take notice of what they say? Why does the minister not take notice of what was said today at the rally about the honey possum and other endangered species? The minister is pathetic.

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

Ayes (24)

Mr C.J. Barnett	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr J.E. McGrath	Mr M.W. Trenorden
Mr M.J. Birney	Mr B.J. Grylls	Mr P.D. Omodei	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr T.R. Buswell	Dr K.D. Hames	Mr D.T. Redman	Ms S.E. Walker
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Ms K. Hodson-Thomas	Mr A.J. Simpson	Mr G.A. Woodhams
Dr E. Constable	Dr G.G. Jacobs	Mr G. Snook	Dr J.M. Woollard
Mr M.J. Cowper	Mr R.F. Johnson	Dr S.C. Thomas	Mr T.R. Sprigg (<i>Teller</i>)

Noes (28)

Mr P.W. Andrews	Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mrs C.A. Martin	Mrs M.H. Roberts
Mr J.J.M. Bowler	Mr R.C. Kucera	Mr M.P. Murray	Mr T.G. Stephens
Mr A.J. Carpenter	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr A.P. O'Gorman	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr J.B. D'Orazio	Mr J.A. McGinty	Mr P. Papalia	Mr P.B. Watson
Dr J.M. Edwards	Mr M. McGowan	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr M.P. Whitely
Mrs D.J. Guise	Ms S.M. McHale	Ms J.A. Radisich	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr J.N. Hyde	Mr A.D. McRae	Mr E.S. Ripper	Mr S.R. Hill (<i>Teller</i>)

Question thus negatived.