

SELECT COMMITTEE INTO WATER SERVICES - ESTABLISHMENT

Motion

HON NORMAN MOORE (Mining and Pastoral - Leader of the Opposition) [2.33 pm]: I move -

- (1) A select committee is appointed to inquire into and report on the issues confronting Western Australia that arise from, or relate to, the present and future supply, retention, and maintenance of water services throughout the State.
- (2) The committee has power to send for persons, papers and records.
- (3) Standing Orders Nos 322, 323, 330 and 331 apply to the proceedings of the committee and any contrary or inconsistent provision of chapter XXIII is modified accordingly.
- (4) The committee may present interim reports without a requirement for leave and is to report finally not later than 3 June 2003.

This is the second time I have put this motion on the Notice Paper. I put it on the Notice Paper in the first year of the current Government's term but it did not see the light of day as a number of motions were not dealt with that year. Following prorogation, I gave notice again on 13 August 2002 for the formation of a committee to look at water services in Western Australia. The date for reporting, 3 June 2003, will need to be extended in the event that the House agrees to the formation of the committee because of the magnitude of the task I envisage.

The proposal came to my mind initially when the Government made a decision to put in place water restrictions in the Perth metropolitan area and for users of the goldfields water scheme. The decision to restrict the amount of water that residents can use has always been something that should be very carefully assessed. We live in a dry part of the world. Our climate encourages, and sometimes demands, the ability to have a reasonable home garden. Our society is keen to have water provided to enable it to have recreational facilities, including attractive parks and gardens that are well watered and maintained. Despite that, we have been told in recent times that it is not nice, indeed quite naughty, to want to use water. Anyone who uses above a certain amount of water is a "water guzzler", according to the Premier. People who use their sprinklers more than the regulated amount of time are said to be committing some sort of dastardly crime and should be dobbed in by their neighbours. Through the Government's propaganda campaign over the past year, we have been led to believe that we have a very serious water shortage in the metropolitan area and that we will have to live with it forever. Indeed, the Government has decided - arbitrarily, I suspect - that from now on the amount of water that can be consumed by each individual will be 155 kilolitres a year. That amount was the average used in 1955 or thereabouts. I do not know why the Government has chosen that figure but I suspect the minister will be able to tell me in due course. In order to achieve that, it will be necessary for permanent restrictions to remain in place or for people to conserve water in other ways.

I have been asking questions for a very long time about the current state of the metropolitan area's water supplies. I have read a great deal of information about it. I have reached the conclusion that we have plenty of water in the Perth metropolitan area. It is a matter of whether the Government wishes to spend the money necessary to access the water and whether it is prepared to say to some of the extreme green elements that it is prepared to put up with one dead tree in order for underground water to be accessed. I am not suggesting for one moment that there should be mass denigration of the environment in order to provide underground water for use by Perth residents. If one looks at the history of wetlands in Western Australia it can be seen that they have dried out from time to time because of cycles of climatic activity. To adopt the position now that every wetland and environment in Western Australia will be maintained at the same level of water supply as is necessary for optimum condition is absolute nonsense. The State's water strategy put forward by the Premier - I will talk about that in a moment - discusses the importance of preserving the environment among the most important elements of our water strategy. The environment in Western Australia has not been protected in a pristine condition. Over history, rainfalls have fluctuated. On occasions, wetlands have dried out as a matter of course. When I thought about this I also thought about the Ord Dam and the Ord River. As a matter of interest, people have told me that it is impossible to draw enough water from the Ord Dam to develop what is called stage 2 of the Ord scheme.

Hon John Fischer: That is because they must keep the ecology at the lower end of the river.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: That is the point I was about to make. Before the Ord and Kununurra diversion dams were built, huge amounts of the Ord River used to flow straight out to sea during every wet season. During the dry part of the year the riverbed dried up. The river now has permanent water bodies and in order to preserve the new environment, which is what it is, we must ensure that a certain amount of the water is available in the dam to preserve and maintain the new man-made environment.

I have not been the Minister for Water Resources and I am no expert in water resource management. I am therefore keen to know the facts surrounding our water services in Western Australia and whether we are not being fed a heap of rubbish by people who have a conservationist view that the environment should be considered ahead of the needs of the citizens who live in this rather special part of the world.

As I said, my motivation for moving this motion was a result of the Government's decision to impose water restrictions in the metropolitan area and the goldfields water scheme to save 45 gigalitres of water per annum. According to the advertisements in the newspaper, we have saved that amount. A graph appears every week that shows our weekly performance.

Hon Nick Griffiths: You did well!

Hon NORMAN MOORE: It reminds me of some of the graphs I used as an encouragement strategy when I was a schoolteacher. Children's performances were graphed and if they did not meet the appropriate level of performance, they would be seen to be not performing. I almost expect the Water Corporation to put at the top of the graph, "You have been very naughty this week because you've used more than your limit." Some people have let their gardens die because they are too frightened or, in some cases, too mean to use water. In many cases, they have taken the view that Western Australia faces a dreadful crisis and the best thing they can do is let their lawns die.

Hon Dee Margetts: They could grow a garden that needs less water.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: They can do that if they want to. However, the net result in some households in Western Australia is that existing gardens have died. Hon Dee Margetts might think that is a good thing. I do not think so. I like lawns because they are important aspects of Western Australian gardens due to this State's climatic conditions. Lawns provide a cooling influence in our very hot summers. If I were convinced that we could not afford to grow lawn or gardens because we do not have enough water, I would say that we should get rid of our garden and live in the tropics. However, that argument has not been proved to me. My research indicates that there is plenty of water to maintain the standard of living we have come to regard as a basic necessity in Western Australia.

I am not referring only to Perth. I will refer shortly to some figures concerning the metropolitan area and the south west in particular. I also want the proposed select committee to investigate a number of other issues. The motion does not refer to only the metropolitan area but also the whole State.

I have referred to the Ord Dam about which I would like to know much more. The coalition Government tried very hard to get stage 2 of the Ord scheme operational. For a variety of reasons, including native title, world markets - I think for sugar - and water supply, the project has not proceeded. The poor people of Kununurra have been sitting on the edge of their seat for the past 10 years waiting for stage 2 of the development to take place, with the expectation of serious economic growth in that part of the world. Unfortunately, all the promises and expectations have not been met. If the availability of water is an issue in the future development of the Ord valley, I want to know for certain.

Unbelievable amounts of water fall onto the Kimberley from the monsoonal rains in the wet season. Huge amounts of water run into the rivers. Fortunately, the Ord Dam collects some of it. Huge quantities of water flow out to sea from the Fitzroy River, the Ord River and the other rivers in the northern Kimberley. I am sure that I will be told by someone with a green tinge that if we stop the water flowing to sea, the maritime environment will be affected so it cannot be done. That would not be an option for people who want nothing in the environment to be changed.

There has been talk over the years about damming the Fitzroy River from which a huge volume of water flows down the channel every year. When the idea of damming the Fitzroy was raised, it almost drove some people to distraction. Howls of outrage and concern were felt across the State. Other suggestions were made at one time, such as damming the Margaret River, a tributary of the Fitzroy River, because the landscape in that part of the Fitzroy valley would make it an interesting potential site for a dam, in the same way as the Ord Dam is assisted by the topography of its surrounding landscape.

We have heard at great length arguments about installing a pipeline from the Ord River to the metropolitan area. When the average person in the community is told by the Government that there is a crisis and people read about the situation in the Kimberley, they can be forgiven for asking why the water is not piped from that area to this area.

Hon Nick Griffiths: They do not want to pay for it.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: The Government has not asked them whether they want to pay for it, yet it has been prepared to investigate desalination. Has the Government asked people whether they are prepared to pay for that? At the end of the day it might be necessary to say to the people of the metropolitan area that if they want to

use as much water as they think they need to maintain a healthy lawn and garden, it will cost more because the price of providing that water is high. They should be given that option. The Government should not work on the basis that everybody wants cheap water and is not prepared to pay for more expensive water. I am not saying that the pipeline from the Ord to Perth is anywhere near the answer. From what I have read it is not the answer. A project of that nature would be extraordinarily expensive and there are many cheaper options.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: What about the Fitzroy?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: The same problem would apply. Hon Peter Foss knows a lot about this because, as a former minister responsible for water resources, he has examined it carefully. He explained to me in terms that even I could understand why it was such an expensive option.

Hon Nick Griffiths: That must have been an interesting day.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: It was. He used four-letter words so that I could understand him.

Hon Nick Griffiths: I hope he did not use four-letter words!

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Okay, they were five-letter words!

The average person thinks that piping water from the Kimberley is such an obvious alternative that they write letters to the newspapers and phone talk-back radio programs to ask why the Government does not organise it.

Hon Nick Griffiths: It is all downhill.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: It is downhill. It would run from the north to the south with the assistance of gravity, as we all know!

Hon Nick Griffiths: It is obvious!

Hon NORMAN MOORE: It is.

Hon Nick Griffiths: It should not cost anything!

Hon NORMAN MOORE: That is quite right.

Hon Robin Chapple: If Australia was the other way up -

Hon NORMAN MOORE: It is just as well Australia is the right way up so that the water can run downhill!

The Ord proposal is continually raised, not because Ernie Bridge keeps talking about it but because people think it is a simple solution. It must be reconsidered but not by somebody who is from the Water Corporation or the Government saying what is good for the State. It must be dealt with by someone - perhaps by a parliamentary committee - who can say, "This will not work because it will cost this much." If the Government is then prepared to pay that much, it can have it. However, if it costs more than beer, I will just wash in beer. That would be a simple solution to the problem.

We must consider where water is available in Western Australia and where it is needed. Portability of water is not a new issue. It has been part of the water strategy that has been in place in Western Australia probably since 1829, but most obviously, in 1903 when it was decided to pipe water from Mundaring Weir to Kalgoorlie, a world-renowned project. That project probably would not get a guernsey these days because the pipeline might go through a reserve or something like that. The Legislative Council would then argue about the various reserves it would have to pass through. This morning members referred to the gas pipeline from Dampier to Perth. I drew a map for my colleagues showing the route that would have to be taken by the pipeline if the Greens (WA) had their way. Instead of it being 1 200 kilometres long, it would be 7 000 kilometres long because it would need to go via Queensland and South Australia. They were the only places where there were no reserves.

Hon Frank Hough: You've made a really good point.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I think I have.

Hon Simon O'Brien: It was very well made.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Thank you. One would probably not be able to build a pipeline to Kalgoorlie now or dam the Helena River at Mundaring to build that water scheme -

Hon Peter Foss: The Canning River.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: There is the Canning Dam and all the other dams that we built -

Hon Nick Griffiths: People are complaining about the Canning Dam now.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Yes. However, the notion of transporting water from one region of the State to another became a reality in Western Australia in a way that was significant in international terms. The C.Y. O'Connor pipeline was a brilliant engineering project and has provided water for not just the goldfields of Western Australia but also the agricultural areas along the way. That has been an amazingly successful exercise. As I said, I doubt that that project would get up and running these days with all the constraints in place and the sort of money that would be required to build it.

We must consider moving water from one part of the State to another, and in a moment I will talk about the south west in that regard. A lot of water can be found in the Kimberley, so is there a better way of using it? Are we using it to its maximum potential, not necessarily by transporting it elsewhere, but by using it in the Kimberley?

In Karratha, if one has a cup of tea in a white china cup, the inside of the cup will remain the same colour as the tea after the tea has been drunk. That type of stain permeates everybody's china in the Pilbara and certainly in Karratha where people use water from the Harding Dam mixed up with water from Millstream.

Hon Nick Griffiths: We are fixing up that problem.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I am told it is due to turbidity. The water from the Harding Dam cannot be used and not much can be done about it because of the turbidity of that water source. That may not be able to be fixed, I do not know. However, people who live in those areas of high water use, like Kununurra, pay a high price for their water. In Kununurra, Karratha and Port Hedland there are few lush gardens. People are not prepared to spend the extra dollars to buy larger amounts of water in those parts of the State. One of the great ironies exists in Kununurra: the town sits next to what is probably the largest body of fresh water in Australia and yet water is pumped out of the ground there and people are charged the same price for their water as is paid by people in every other remote part of the State, and every second garden is dead! How ludicrous! People in Perth have said that everybody who lives in the north will pay extra for their water because there is not enough of it and it is a high-use area with a high evaporation rate. This must be looked at carefully.

Recently the Government announced that it was increasing the price of water for the so-called water guzzlers in the metropolitan area where there is a supposed water crisis, but it did not say that it was putting up the price even more in some regional parts of the State. In the high-cost parts of State, water used above 550 kilolitres is incredibly expensive -

Hon Nick Griffiths: There is a lot of misinformation going around about that issue, which is something I intend to respond to -

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Perhaps we need a very good response from the minister or a select committee to find out the truth if misinformation is being spread around.

Hon Nick Griffiths: It is being spread around. Many parts of the State receive significant concessions on water usage and pricing. Some people - not you - who represent those areas of the State go around describing situations that are not the case. It is an issue that is important and must be dealt with.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Yes, it is. However, I will never be able to work out why the uniform pricing structures that are put in place -

Hon Nick Griffiths interjected.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: They are not uniform across the State but uniform in certain regions -

Hon Nick Griffiths: There are major concessions to many significant regional areas.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: What is a concession? If the people in Kununurra put a hose in the dam and pumped out all the water, they could have 50 trillion litres of water a day and not make the slightest difference to the amount of water available.

Just as an aside, there is a crazy scenario in Kununurra where a fellow wants to get water out of the river to put onto his property. The pipe has to go across some public land that is under native title claim; therefore, he cannot put a pipe across it. But that is another story for another day. We have some crazy things happening in this State at the moment.

I referred to the Pilbara, the Harding Dam and Millstream. Again, the quality of the water is average and not enough is available. Karratha is the sort of town that needs a reasonable amount of vegetation to make it more bearable in the high temperatures, and the same applies to Port Hedland. In the Gascoyne, Exmouth - which ought to be the next major tourist town in Western Australia if people can get themselves organised in terms of accommodation and airline systems - has a water supply that is marginal to say the least. If that town is ever to achieve its true potential, it needs a far better water supply than it currently has.

When Ernie Bridge was the Minister for Water Resources and talked about his pipeline from the Ord River to Perth I asked him, "While you are bringing it from the Ord River, would you mind a little branch going off to Exmouth so that that town can benefit from all this water?" He said that that would be too expensive. I was a bit amused about that because we all knew that the whole thing was too expensive anyway.

The Gascoyne River in Carnarvon is an issue that needs to be dealt with by a committee of this nature. The amount of water that can be used from the riverbed for irrigated agriculture is an ongoing issue. There is talk of a dam being built in the Gascoyne. I think it was even suggested by Lang Hancock on one occasion that we should have an atomic explosion in the Gascoyne River so that we could let all the water run into the hole. I do not think that was such a good idea.

Hon John Fischer: I don't know; try it, it could be a good one.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I am told that the blast would turn the rock into something like molten glass and we would be left with a great big underground water jug or something of that nature. The water would just flow into the hole and could be pumped out when it was needed. There is only one problem; one would probably glow in the night if one drank it.

The Shark Bay situation is interesting. It is one of the few places in which reverse osmosis provides drinking water of a reasonable quality. Again, people there have to pay more money for their water. They have a dual reticulation system, which is something we should consider for other parts of the State. For example, each year between 90 and 100 gigalitres of water is pumped from Perth treatment plants into the ocean. I am told that the problem with that water is that the next step - refining it and putting it back into the system - is quite significant. Another reticulation system would have to be put in place if we wanted to use that water for particular purposes. Maybe that is what we have to do. Ninety gigalitres is twice the amount of water that is saved with water restrictions. If the 90 gigalitres pumped into the ocean were used, we would not have water restrictions and we would have an extra 45 gigalitres to use on golf courses, horticultural activities and the like. Shark Bay's system may be a blueprint for others parts of the State.

When Hon Tom Stephens was in opposition, we all heard about the dreadful quality of water available to people living in Cue, Mt Magnet, Meekatharra, Laverton and Leonora. I think there was iodine in the water -

Hon Bill Stretch interjected.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: No, it was a particular chemical that is not good for babies.

The Government said that it would fix that problem, but I am not sure whether it has done so. Maybe Hon Nick Griffiths can tell me whether the problem has been fixed.

Hon Nick Griffiths: It was nitrate.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: That is right. I remember Hon Tom Stephens stating at a meeting in Cue that the water problem was an outrage, that it should not be allowed to continue and that he would fix it if elected to government. I suspect that he has not been able to achieve that.

There are a number of other problems in the goldfields. Fundamentally, there is a shortage of water in the goldfields because rainfall levels are low and there is virtually no underground water of any consequence other than various super saline water that is used in the mining industry. The future water supply in the goldfields must be considered carefully and must be looked at in the context of the Mundaring scheme. However, we must also consider this issue in the context of the type of water that is being used by the mining industry. Various groups have put forward proposals that involve pumping seawater to Kalgoorlie so that it can be used in the mines. On the surface one would not think that pumping salt inland is a good thing. However, the seawater is less salty than the underground water that is currently being used. An alternative suggestion was to desalinate the water at Esperance or Geraldton and to pump desalinated water to the goldfields to use in the mining industry. The mining industry uses a vast amount of water and we must carefully consider how that water will be provided in the future and ensure that the mining process is not constrained by a lack of water.

In recent times I have been advised that a number of smaller towns in the south west of Western Australia have inadequate water supply systems, bearing in mind the fact that these towns have been around for a long time. The south Yarragadee proposal - in which the Government is contemplating piping 45 gigalitres of water to Perth each year - is causing a degree of consternation in the south west. I am not sure where that issue will go. I do not know enough about it to form a view. However, the issue is bubbling along in the south west and it must be considered. The capacity of the Yarragadee aquifer to deliver water is an issue that we must all think about, because, having considered where the water wall is located and what is available, it seems to be the ultimate solution to most of our problems. I would like to know more about this issue. I am sure that a select committee would be able to find out more information.

In the agricultural area, towns on the goldfields water scheme have been affected by restrictions because of the amount of water in the Mundaring Weir. Water restrictions are no more acceptable in those towns than they are in Perth. In some ways they are probably less acceptable, because the hot and dry climate demands that people be entitled to a reasonable garden. I am aware that large numbers of houses and properties in the hills of Perth do not have reticulated water. As Hon Bruce Donaldson is aware, I have a property that is on the edge of the hills and I do not have reticulated water. It costs a small fortune to install tanks, bore holes and dig dams and the like if there is no reticulated water scheme. Every time I write a cheque for a couple of thousand dollars for another hole in the ground, I blame Hon Nick Griffiths. The Government is giving suburban people a rebate if they put in a rainwater tank. However, if someone like me puts a hole in the ground to reach my primary source of water, that is bad luck.

Hon Nick Griffiths: This is the most telling argument I have heard so far. I am worried about getting the blame for the tens of thousands of dollars you are spending.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I have to blame somebody. Who else do I blame if I do not blame the responsible minister? Whenever I drive on a road that is not good, I blame the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. That is how it works; it is the nature of people.

Hon Nick Griffiths: You do not blame Hon Murray Criddle, the former Minister for Transport?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: He built roads in my electorate.

Hon Nick Griffiths: He did not build enough.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: With all due respect, it was a whole lot more than anybody had managed to achieve in the past. The problem is that road funding, like our water supplies, has been turned off. It worries me that the Government is waiting for rain, and not the budget. The Government is hoping that the good Lord will deliver the water -

Hon Simon O'Brien: It is hoping to get decent rain before giving a decent budget.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Perhaps.

Hon Nick Griffiths: We are in government now and we have provided good budgets. It will rain; it is just a matter of when and how much.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: That is an interesting issue, because the Government will remove water restrictions before the next election. There is no doubt in my mind that we will not have water restrictions when the next elections are held. The minister is hoping desperately that it rains before the next election so that he can remove the restrictions. The minister knows as well as I do that if there is no rain and the restrictions are removed, the Government will have to explain where it will get the required 45 gigalitres. Perhaps it will come underground from Nannup. It would be much easier if it rained because it would save much trouble and explanation. We have all been told that we have a crisis on our hands because there is no rain.

Hon Nick Griffiths: It would save a lot of grain.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Rhetorically speaking, I bet the minister - I know I am not supposed to do this in the Chamber - a bottle of Grange that when we go to the next election there will be no water restrictions. I am absolutely convinced about that. One of the reasons I raised this issue is that restrictions are a nasty political issue. They are nasty for Governments that have to introduce them. Governments like to remove them before people vote at forthcoming elections, especially if their best plant has withered, their tree or lawn has died or their swimming pool has been out of use because it could not be filled.

Hon Nick Griffiths: I am very interested to know what year of Grange you are proposing.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I am happy to negotiate that.

The point I was trying to make is that many residents in the hills area and the inner agricultural areas do not have reticulated water. Some people like it that way because they are able to bore holes in the ground, obtain their water from a small superficial aquifer, or build dams to provide their water requirements. For some, the rainwater off the roof may satisfy their water requirements. As a result, they do not pay water rates and do not pay for water. Some people like that. Others are unable to operate using those water sources, because they do not provide enough water. However, they do not get a choice. That is another area in Western Australia that we must consider. I have concentrated on the water issues in parts of the State that must be considered very carefully so that we can achieve good planning. It is important for members of Parliament to be aware of the situation that is affecting water supplies throughout the State and not just the metropolitan area.

I now turn to the metropolitan area, because that is where most people live and where the effects of the water restrictions are mainly felt. Perth gets its water from a number of sources. If my memory serves me right, it

receives about 150 gegalitres a year from dams, depending on how much water is in the dams, and about 150 gegalitres from underground sources. That is the Water Corporation's water. On top of that, other consumers use a couple of hundred gegalitres of underground water, extracted by private bores and bores operated by local authorities and other organisations for reticulation of recreational facilities.

Hon Nick Griffiths: And agriculture.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Well, yes - whatever. The water comes from the dams and from the underground aquifers. There are superficial aquifers at Jandakot and Gnangara, as well as the Leederville aquifer and the deep Yarragadee aquifer. I have been asking how much water there is in those underground aquifers. The very first question I asked Hon Nick Griffiths was about the quantity of water under Perth in the various aquifers. I think the figure that came back was about 300 000 gegalitres.

Hon Nick Griffiths: You were given a very comprehensive answer late last year.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: It was earlier than that. I calculated that, on the basis of the amount of water being taken out of the Perth aquifers by the Water Corporation, without any replenishment at all, we had enough water to last Perth for 3 000 years. That is a lot of water.

Hon Nick Griffiths: That is a lot of water.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: It is a lot of water, and that would be if it was used at the same rate as we are taking it now.

Hon Dee Margetts: That is if you do not mind Perth sinking.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Here we go again. The Greens (WA) think they know all the answers before anybody even asks a question.

Hon Dee Margetts: If you use more than is recovered, you are endangering Perth's environment.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I am not saying that. I said that if we were to use all the water that was currently down there without replenishing, it would take 3 000 years to use it all, and the city might then sink. However, that will not happen, because the replenishment rate under Perth, which I also asked for in the same question, is 600 gegalitres per annum. That is not the south west; just Perth. As I said a while ago, the Water Corporation uses 150 gegalitres a year, and others use about another 200, so that 350 gegalitres is being pumped out every year, and the replenishment rate is 600 gegalitres. It is being replenished at a greater rate than it is being extracted. I am no expert, but I would have thought that if the replenishment rate and the extraction rate remain the same, then everything is in equilibrium.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: Why, then, is Perth not rising?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Because the water goes out to sea. One reason we cannot touch this water and reduce the amount going out to sea, is the underwater ecology. We cannot allow to be jeopardised in any way that fresh water bubbling up under the sea that creates an ecological environment. Some people say we cannot touch the Yarragadee aquifer because it keeps many undersea ecosystems operating.

Hon Peter Foss: Sterilise the population. That will solve the problem.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I am surprised that is not the Greens' first strategy - to stop having children, so that we do not need water.

The Water Corporation now has a good web site, and I have had a quick look at it. I got this document on 8 April, which was yesterday. It discusses the future water needs of Perth and states -

Current source plans are based on a population for Perth of 3 million by 2050 (increasing the current water demand from 300 gegalitres to 570 gegalitres a year).

Hon Peter Foss: Sterilise the population. That is the solution.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: We could poison the water, although we would not be successful, because people are not drinking it any more. Some people do not, because it is politically incorrect to waste water. The document continues -

It is estimated that there are currently 2,400 gegalitres of un-allocated ground and surface water that can be sustainably accessed to provide the additional 270 gegalitres we expect will be required.

That is a very interesting statement. Between now and 2050, we will need an extra 270 gegalitres of water to maintain the existing consumption and to take growth into account. There are currently 2 400 gegalitres of unallocated ground water and surface water to provide the 270 gegalitres we will need. How can the Water Corporation decide that a certain amount of water is sustainably accessible, and then say that it cannot be used? I want to know the answer to that. The document further states -

It is unlikely that the availability of water will limit population growth in Perth. That said it is true that the cost of water supply will become more expensive as more distant sources, desalination of sea water or wastewater reuse are developed.

That statement makes me think either that I do not understand this, which is quite possible, or that the Water Corporation is not making it very clear, which is also quite possible. It is saying that there are 2 400 gegalitres of sustainably accessible unallocated ground water, and that we will need only 270 gegalitres; yet it will become more expensive because we must use distant sources, desalinated sea water and recycled waste water. Does that mean that we will not use the 270 gegalitres from underground, when we are told that it can actually be done? The minister said a while ago by way of interjection that it is a matter of how much people are prepared to pay. I suggest that there is plenty of sustainably accessible underground water, the use of which would avoid the need to transport water over long distances, to desalinate sea water and to reuse waste water, although I believe we should reuse waste water. It makes a lot of sense to do that. The Water Corporation web site lists some of the available options. In the Gingin-Jurien area, 80 gegalitres of ground water per annum are available; and in the south west Yarragadee area, 100 gegalitres per annum are available, according to this document. The minister is talking about taking 45 gegalitres. In the Perth north west coastal area, another 60 gegalitres are available, and in the Tamworth-Karnup area, 25 gegalitres. That is all ground water. The Wellington Dam has another 20 gegalitres of surface water, and the Brunswick River 30 gegalitres. These amounts total 315 gegalitres, which is more than we will need between now and 2050 to meet the needs of Perth.

A document from the Water and Rivers Commission web site, entitled "How much groundwater?", states -

The confined aquifers in the sedimentary basins contain most of the State's groundwater. The largest groundwater resource is believed to be the Canning Basin, which has an estimated storage of over 12 million gegalitres (one gegalitre is a thousand million litres).

Groundwater which is fresh enough to contribute to use for water supply may contain up to 1500 milligrams per litre total dissolved salts (mg/L TDS). Groundwater in some areas is only suitable for stock (up to 14 000 mg/L), or ore processing (up to 200 000 mg/L).

The next paragraph is the important part -

The annual renewable amount of groundwater in Western Australia's sedimentary basins that is fresh enough to contribute to water supplies is estimated to be about 2500 gegalitres per year, of which approximately 1400 gegalitres is in the Perth Basin. This is about twelve times Perth's current scheme water consumption.

These figures keep telling me that there are vast quantities of underground water able to be used in a sustainable way. I have read some of the work done by Professor Jorg Imberger at the Centre for Water Research at the University of Western Australia. The sorts of figures he is talking about are the same figures used by the Water and Rivers Commission and the Water Corporation. Those bodies agree that vast quantities of water can be accessed in a sustainable way. I understand that some 40 bores into the superficial aquifer in the metropolitan area have been switched off as part of the Government's response to the shortage of rain. Whenever I have asked why these bores have been turned off, I have been told that it is because the Government does not want any trees to die. If the Minister for Agriculture drove around the hills, he would find a lot of dead trees around the place. Trees die when rainfall diminishes over time. To keep the green constituency happy, the minister is seeking to keep the trees alive on the Perth coastal plain. It is okay if people's lawns or rose bushes die or if the local swimming pool is closed for the summer, but the Government will not let a tree somewhere die naturally.

Today I asked the minister: how many trees does the Government estimate have died because of the current removal of underground water? It is all very well for people to argue that we should not affect the environment. However, they must acknowledge that human beings exist on this landscape and they need and use water. I am not arguing for one minute that people should waste water. I would argue that people should not waste anything. Being wasteful is an unnecessary pursuit regardless of the way it is done. I will always argue against wasting water. That is why it is sensible at times to put in train education campaigns to encourage people not to be wasteful. The Government has been running a campaign on water use and being wasteful. A certain level of water consumption should be provided to the community as long as it does not waste it. We can meet that level of consumption with the amount of water we have now. That means that water restrictions should not be in place; we do not need them. There is enough water to provide for the requirements of the metropolitan area and the people living on the goldfields pipeline without putting restrictions in place. It is a matter of the Government getting the water out of the ground or hoping like hell that it rains. However, it is not good enough to rely on the rain. The Government is capable of delivering the water requirements of Western Australians, even if there is a shortage of rain, because there is plenty of underground water. The figures I have reported today clearly show that.

When we were in Government in 1995, the then Water Authority of Western Australia -

Hon Kim Chance: And a very good authority it was. It had an excellent board.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I refer to "Perth's Water Future: a Water Supply Strategy for Perth and Mandurah". It is quite a thick book full of all sorts of interesting information. It was produced in 1995.

Hon Peter Foss: That is when I was the minister - I remember that.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: It is an excellent document. It describes what the Water Corporation had in mind for the future water supply needs and requirements of Perth and Mandurah. It had in place a program of a gradual increase in the water supply capacity for the system to meet the increase in demand. Then Premier Richard Court released a policy to make Perth waterproof. The Government provided a significant capital investment of \$500 million to put in place the necessary infrastructure to make Perth waterproof. Some 150 gigalitres of extra capacity was put into the system at that time. That is a significant amount of extra water, which was collected by drilling some additional bores, and building dams, including the Harvey Dam in the south west.

That document was a very well thought out plan for the future. I find the similarities between the 1995 document and the Government's current glossy brochure titled "Securing our Water Future: A State Water Strategy", which was issued in February 2003, very interesting. I must confess that I have not read both of them. However, a research officer read them and listed the types of issues that are addressed in both. We discovered that they are amazingly similar

Hon Kim Chance: They both derive from a document in which I had some part titled "Water 2020" put out by the Water Authority in the 1980s when I was on the board.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I suspect that the minister would be inclined to agree with me.

Hon Kim Chance: I am. "Water 2020" outlined the sources of water that were available until 2020.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: A problem that has arisen since 1995 or earlier is that more and more people are putting pressure on the Water and Rivers Commission, which is now part of the environment portfolio, to get its hands off the ground water.

Hon Kim Chance: And also to stop building dams. That was identified in the 2020 report.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Yes. We do not want to create any more capacity because dams are not good for anybody - I do not know why; I like dams -

Hon Nick Griffiths: This is the regulatory structure that your Government put in place.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: The Water and Rivers Commission is now being merged with the Department of Environmental Protection. Therefore, its future rests on carrying out the environmental policies of whoever gets in its ear. I think one of the reasons the Government has listed desalination as a potential future water resource is so that it will not have to get approval from the Water and Rivers Commission. Water used for desalination could be sucked out of the ocean. Surely the Water and Rivers Commission does not have control of the ocean. Any amount of water could be desalinated and pumped into the system without the approval of the Water and Rivers Commission. Currently, when the poor old Water Corporation wants to get more water out of the ground, it must make a submission to the Water and Rivers Commission, which says either it can or cannot do that. It is very hard for the Water Corporation to manage the strategies contained in the 1995 document. It is now being told that it cannot access that water because it has been discovered that it would not be sustainable. That is despite often being told that thousands of gigalitres of underground water can be used in a sustainable way.

Hon Barry House: There may be a good reason for that. In the south west, somebody has to properly assess the aquifer.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I am not suggesting that that not be done. The problem I have is the amount of time taken to get an adequate result to assess whether water can be used and the amount of time it takes for the Greens (WA) to be satisfied with the result. They are never satisfied unless they are told that the water cannot be touched. We will have an ongoing argument about the use of underground aquifers until such time as somebody says that it cannot be done, at which time the green lobby will be happy. In the meantime, all the lawns will die, but that does not matter to the green lobby.

The document titled "Securing our Water Future: A State Water Strategy for Western Australia" highlights another matter that must be investigated; that is, the way in which water in Western Australia is managed from an administrative point of view. Is it better to have the present Water Corporation which, when the minister is asked whether a level 4 employee should have been involved in putting the Premier's name on a survey, says that it is none of his business because he does not run the Water Corporation? Somebody must be made accountable for those things that happen. Perhaps the minister should ring up the Water Corporation's chief executive officer and tell him to do something about that sort of thing even though the minister cannot tell the CEO what to do. We must look at the relationship between the Water Corporation and the Water and Rivers

Commission. We must make sure that we have in place a structure, which the former Government put in place, that works the way it was intended. At the same time it highlights the fact that the Minister for Government Enterprises, who has responsibility for the Water Corporation, does not have responsibility for the state water strategy.

Hon Nick Griffiths: It is a whole-of-government approach.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: It is run by the Premier and the Premier's right-hand man, David Hatt. Why is that the case? Is it because the Minister for Government Enterprises is incompetent? He happens to be a friend of mine. I do not think that he is incompetent at all. I have the highest regard for the Minister for Government Enterprises. I think in the context of his colleagues he is among the most competent.

Hon Barry House: There is also the Dockers' track record.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Hon Barry House has beaten me to it. The Premier has taken over water resources and put in place at its head David Hatt, whose record has been anything but flash during his time in various enterprises, particularly when running the Dockers. The worst time when he was running the Dockers was when the federal member for Fremantle was the No 1 ticket holder and he was the chief executive officer. That was a dreadful combination. When the Dockers were first formed and that was the combination to start them off, I knew that they would spend the next 50 years languishing in the bottom half of the premiership table.

Hon Nick Griffiths: As an Eagles supporter, what is wrong with that?

Hon Kim Chance: Ye of little faith.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: The Dockers have got rid of their No 1 ticket holder, which was a very good move indeed. She had turned off vast numbers of people who would have otherwise supported them. They also got rid of David Hatt. Two problems have been solved for the Dockers but one problem has been created at government level because Mr Hatt has moved back into government to assist the Government to sort out the water problem.

Hon Peter Foss used to say to us that a very good political strategy is to put a cat on the roof. The cat would put on a serious performance, causing a lot of distress and concern to everybody who saw the poor cat on the roof. One solved the problem by getting on the roof and taking the cat off. One got all the credit for saving the cat. If the Government tells the people of Western Australia long enough and hard enough that the State has a serious water crisis on its hands and that it is almost a criminal offence, if not a sin, to use more than a minimum amount of water, and if people are feeling intimidated by the pressure that is put on them because of the water they use, that is the same as putting the cat on the roof. The Government came along with a document put together by David Hatt, which talks of securing our water future, stopping the guzzlers and fixing the future of water for Western Australia, and it is signed by the Premier. The strategy is that the Government creates a problem and then solves it.

As I have said, the bottle of Grange is all about restrictions coming off next year, because the Government will be saying to the population of Western Australia just before the next election that it has solved the problem. It will say to people that they know how bad it was because it told them every day on the television. Ningali Lawford has been telling people every day that they cannot use water for some purposes but must do this or that in their gardens. A graph has appeared in the newspaper every day telling people that they have been naughty and used too much water. We have had all that sort of stuff pushed down our throats for years. I think \$3 million was about the figure that I was recently given for the money spent on telling people about the water crisis.

The Government ran a survey to find out who should go on television to tell the people that the Government has the solution for them. It put the Premier's name on the list just to see whether people would like him to do it. The Government will not give the results of the survey. I wonder why. The question was whether people saw them to be trustworthy, and the answer was yes, no or do not know. I would dearly love to know what the result was. As a contributor to the Water Corporation's budget, I helped pay for the survey. The Government and the Labor Party did not pay for it and I suspect that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet did not pay for it. The Water Corporation paid for it. As an aside because it is not germane to this debate, I would like to know whether the Premier is considered to be trustworthy in that survey. If he is, I would have thought that the first thing he would be doing is saying that 97 per cent of the population thinks that he is trustworthy and that proves everything the Government has been saying. If it is the case, the Government has no problem with showing the results to me. If the Government will not show it to me, I can only presume that it is not 97 per cent.

We now have the Government's solution to the water crisis that it has helped to create, which is a document virtually identical to a properly and carefully planned document put out in 1995 by the then Water Authority that was to take us into the future with the water needs of Western Australia. It was not accompanied in 1995 by

some predictions of dire consequences if we did not do certain things about water consumption; it was a very well thought out, planned and sensible approach to Perth's water needs over time. It built into future planning the need for certain capital works to take place at certain times. It allowed for an ongoing growth in consumption levels.

This Government has decided to get out the great big stick. One way of stopping people consuming water, but more importantly to give the Government more revenue, is to whack up the price of water for those so-called guzzlers. I think they are those consumers who use more than 500 kilolitres per annum. It is interesting in the context of that that the Government has also said that it will try to put in place a water consumption per capita level of 155 kilolitres per person per annum. That is what we had in 1955. Since then consumption has gone up, although it went down when restrictions were imposed. It is now about 180 kilolitres per person per annum. The Government is saying that it wants to achieve a target of 155 kilolitres per person per annum. A family of four might consume 620 kilolitres. The Government is saying that anybody who uses over 500 kilolitres is a water guzzler. The Government cannot have it both ways.

Hon Nick Griffiths: We can.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: The Government thinks it can. It has said that somehow or other the price increase that it will impose on those so-called water guzzlers will not affect large families. A family of four is not large. What if there was a really large family of eight people?

Hon Kim Chance: It is a lot of water and the equivalent of 12 road trains of water.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: The Government is saying that is what we should use. We use more than that now.

Hon Kim Chance: We are suggesting that it is a reasonable level to use.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: How did the Government arrive at that figure?

Hon Kim Chance: I think it was predicated on past use.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: With due respect, the minister should find out. I reckon the Government simply plucked the figure out of the air and said that it would aim for that. Why 155; why not 160 or 120 kilolitres per annum?

Hon Peter Foss: The Water Authority had a very good program in which one could take the figures and get all sorts of results.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: That is exactly right. The Water Corporation used to have a terrific guy who could do exactly that. He was an absolute wizard at making sure that the amount of revenue to the Government was maximised and the amount of water that was used was minimised. The approach was similar to that of the tax on cigarettes. That tax was never put up by so much that would stop people smoking because it cut out the revenue source. That balancing act is so very important.

On top of all this we have been told by the Government that it will aim at that consumption level and also put in place a \$7 million campaign to encourage people to use water saving devices. The \$7 million across the whole State is a drop in the Yarragadee aquifer. Let us look at them. We will give people a subsidy to put in rainwater tanks. Let us think about that. First, most rainwater tanks if not looked after properly are a health hazard. Second, a couple of thousand gallons of water is the most that can be collected in a backyard rainwater tank in a suburban house, and that water will not last long in home use. Also, the water that enters the rainwater tank would have otherwise run off the roof and down the soakwell into the aquifers. Therefore, the rainwater tank stops the water running into the aquifers, which is from where the Water Corporation gets its water. Where is the sense in that? We are also told that we cannot take ground water and that the Water and Rivers Commission has closed 40 bores. Nevertheless, part of the deal is to provide a subsidy to put a bore in the front yard to take more water from the aquifers. That does not make a lot of sense to me either.

We then have shower heads. If we spent the whole \$7 million on shower heads, giving a subsidy of \$10 each, we would save 0.2 of a gegalitre of water. That is not a good way to spend \$7 million.

Hon Dee Margetts: How long did you work out was the average shower?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I refer to the basis on which the savings, we are told, will eventuate. I guess the member is right: the longer the shower, the more water used - it is simple really. The departmental officers would have worked out their calculations on the basis of an average shower being a certain duration.

Also, if special front-loading washing machines are purchased, a lot of water will be saved as well, we are told. I asked the minister whether any front-loading washing machines are produced in Australia. No, I was told; they are all imported. The Government is encouraging people to buy imported washing machines. What about the

local industry and people who make washing machines in Australia? I do not spend a lot of time using washing machines.

Hon Sue Ellery: Don't you?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: No.

Hon Sue Ellery: You should.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I do not know much about how they work and how much water they use. However, I know that front-loading washing machines take three times as long as top-loading machines to wash the same load. They use less water, but use more electricity.

Hon Paddy Embry: And have smaller loads.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: That is right. To do the same load of washing, the front-loader machine uses more energy than the top-loader machine. Did the Government think about that when it told people to purchase front-loading washing machines? Did the minister think about people working for Simpson and other Australian companies?

When planning the subsidies for rainwater tanks and ground water bores, was the minister thinking about the aquifers? When talking about shower heads and front-loading washing machines, was the minister thinking about electricity consumption and how much water would be saved for the \$7 million expenditure? The minister could do a lot of things with \$7 million to provide more water to everybody, rather than giving it to people buying appliances to save a minimum amount of water in the overall scheme of things. Will the minister indicate how much water the \$7 million is expected to save? Does he have any idea?

Sitting suspended from 3.45 to 4.00 pm

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I will not be much longer. I have sought to present an argument that will justify the House setting up a select committee to look at the issue of water resources in Western Australia. I was talking about the Government's response to the current so-called water crisis and the \$7 million that will, for some reason or other, make a big difference. I am keen to know what sort of benefits will be achieved through \$7 million in rebates. As I said, money for backyard bores and rainwater tanks takes away water that the Water Corporation would otherwise have access to. Whether the scheme is of any value to anyone I do not know. As someone said during the afternoon tea break, when using the new shower heads, a person has to shower twice as long to wash off the soap. Perhaps that is another waste of the \$7 million. When *The West Australian* conducted a survey of ministers to see which were garden-wise and water-wise, it showed that most of them were not. I thought that was interesting. Is there not a conflict of interest for them in accessing a rebate that the Government decides to provide?

Hon Peter Foss: There is no rebate for the new toilet bowls.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Perhaps the member and the minister can talk about that.

The Water Corporation produced a graph recently that shows future demand and supply of water. It is titled "A secure water supply". When comparing demand with the supply provided by surface water and existing ground water assets, the supply capacity is significantly greater than the demand. It is also interesting to note that when looking at the demand supplied by surface water, a significant increase is shown for the end of 2004 in the amount of water projected to be available. I do not know how it can be predicted that the demand met by surface water will jump by that much just before the next election. I am interested to know how the Water Corporation comes to that conclusion. I am happy to show and explain the graph to the minister afterwards because it is hard to describe in words. The demand met by surface water remains fairly constant but, at the end of 2004, it jumps by about 10 or 20 gegalitres - even more - just before the election. Does that mean it will rain just before the election or does it mean that the Government is mucking around with the figures?

Hon Nick Griffiths: We have some pretty powerful friends!

Hon Barry House interjected.

Hon Nick Griffiths: We did not pump water up from the Canning to Mundaring just before the 1996 election to give the impression that everything was overflowing.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: That is a very cynical remark by the minister. He knows full well that the previous Government committed very large sums of capital to ensure that we had the proper infrastructure in place to avoid the necessity of water restrictions. It is in place and this Government is using it. With all due respect, this Government's contribution by way of capital investment over the past two years has been minimal by comparison with the past.

Hon Peter Foss: It is down by \$50 million.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: That was the next point I was going to make. The price of water for the so-called water guzzlers has gone up dramatically, I suspect, to compensate for any loss of revenue because of fewer water sales and to maintain the dividend the Government is taking from the Water Corporation. I am interested to know what sort of dividend the Government has been taking over the past few years. Perhaps the minister will give some explanation about how the Government thinks it can keep taking money from a corporation that is providing one of the essentials of life when it is reducing the amount of water that people can use. The Government is having it both ways; it has increased the price so it does not lose any revenue. By doing that it maintains its dividend. At the same time, the Government is saying that there is a crisis in water supply. Is the \$50 million being used to provide deep bores or research into the Yarragadee aquifer or another dam? Is it being used to provide better reticulation systems in the metropolitan area? Is waste water being used? There are all sorts of ways that \$7 million can be spent other than by giving away rebates. There are plenty of ways to spend \$50 million on infrastructure that will make the water supply situation vastly better.

I am interested in knowing more about another area to which the minister may wish to contribute. The Government's water strategy document mentions additional run-off to existing dams from enhanced surface water catchment management activities. As indicated on page 39 of the document, the amount of water in our dams could be increased by up to 40 gigalitres over 10 years. I suspect that when the Greens (WA) read that sentence, they almost passed out because it is a well-known fact that by reducing clearing in water catchment areas, run-off is reduced. Less run-off means less water in the dams. Page 3 of the document contains a telling graph. It shows the amount of water going into catchments from 1910 to 2001. It notes that a year is taken from May to April and that the inflow is simulated based on Perth dams in 2001. It states that Stirling Dam is not included. I am not sure what that means; the minister may be able to tell me. The graph shows the inflow to the dams. It has a green horizontal line showing the average from 1910 to 1970. It has a red horizontal line showing the average from 1971 to 2001, which shows a quite dramatic decrease. Someone looking at that may think it reflects rainfall figures. In fact, that is not the case. The graph reflects water flow into dams. I wonder how much water we are forgoing by not having the same level of clearing in the catchment areas for our dams. That is another balance that the Government must get right.

Hon Nick Griffiths: It is not a new issue; Hon Peter Foss made comment on it some months ago. He referred to clearing practices around dams.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: The message the Water Corporation is trying to give is that there has been a dramatic decrease in rainfall, which has been brought about by the terrible activities of the human race. Because there is less rainfall, there is less run-off; therefore, there is not as much water in the dams. It forgets to tell us that the document acknowledges that different practices of managing water catchment areas affects the amount of water going into dams, regardless of rainfall. The document states there could be an increase of 40 gigalitres over the next 10 years; that is, four gigalitres a year. There are other options. I am interested to hear from the minister what will be done about them. The document states that new sources of water may be available. It includes up to 17 gigalitres from Eglinton ground water; up to 40 gigalitres from Gingin ground water; 15 gigalitres from Wellington Dam; 45 gigalitres from south west Yarragadee - but the other Water Corporation document mentions 100 gigalitres; 30 gigalitres in the short term from seawater desalination - I would like to know the cost per litre of desalinating seawater; up to 30 gigalitres from the Brunswick River - I am not sure how that will be done; up to 11 gigalitres from Yanchep ground water; up to 22 gigalitres from Karnup-Dandalup ground water; and water trading. It does not quantify the amount of savings or the amount of additional water available from water trading.

When one looks at the availability of ground water and the capacity to increase inflow to the dams - all the future options mentioned by the Government and Water Corporation - it comes down to a simple question of the Government being prepared to spend the money to make sure that the legitimate water requirements of the population are met. The water is available; it is a matter of spending the money to get it. It is an unfair and unnecessary strategy to spend a lot of time, energy and money brainwashing the population into believing the State faces a crisis of monumental proportions. So much rubbish from the green lobby is covered in the media about the end of the world being nigh that it is a wonder the Greens can sleep at night when they are worrying about these issues. They try to make everybody else worry about them when it is unnecessary and, in most cases, their view is exaggerated. The more people are frightened about environmental matters, the more votes the Greens will get.

Hon Peter Foss: That is right - the more people join up.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Exaggerations are unnecessary and do more damage than good.

I have sought to indicate to the House that there is a thirst for knowledge about the water situation in Western Australia! I am not clear how much water is available and how difficult it is to extract it. Obviously, I am not an authority on the consequences of removing ground water at a far greater rate than we do now and I would like to

know more about it. I would like to know how government statutory authorities can assess the renewable amount of water we can extract, and on the basis of very large numbers, say that we cannot use it. I would like to know what benefits the Government will receive from the \$7 million worth of rebates it has offered to people for what seems to be a serious window-dressing exercise by David Hatt and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

Hon Peter Foss: I would like to know what the people are getting. I know what the Government is getting.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I gather that people are not getting much. There are some interesting scenarios attached to the \$7 million and the purpose for which the rebates have been allocated. As indicated in part of the motion, the select committee would investigate issues confronting Western Australia that arise from, or relate to, the present and future supply, retention and maintenance of the water service throughout the State.

The motion quite deliberately refers to beyond the Perth metropolitan area, although the metropolitan area is where most people live and that is the area to which restrictions apply. The second part of the motion seeks to allow the committee to have the power to send for persons, papers and records. Part (3) will give the select committee the same powers as a standing committee.

Hon Nick Griffiths: Part (4) looks novel to me.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: It is necessary to seek leave to present an interim report. I do not know why.

Hon Nick Griffiths: Leave has never been refused.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: It could be. Perhaps this is an attempt to highlight a silly standing order that should not exist. I do not know why leave must be granted for members to present an interim report. It does not make any difference to me if the minister puts a line through that part.

Hon Nick Griffiths: I would prefer not to do something that alters the traditions of the House, if that can be avoided. If anyone refused such leave, they would be held up for public ridicule.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: If that is the only problem the minister has with the motion, I am happy to put a line through that bit to amend it immediately! However, I gather that is not the only problem the minister has.

The result of a committee of this nature would be a bit like being provided with survey results. Some things can be helpful to the Government. It is helpful for the Premier to learn that 97 per cent of the population says that he is trustworthy. Surely, in a similar way, if the Government is doing the right thing and looking after our water supplies and services properly, it will welcome an inquiry by a parliamentary committee. As I said, I have regard for the minister. I am sure that he is doing his best to ensure that the people of Western Australia are being looked after regarding one of the most important commodities in the community. He has stewardship of that. I think the Government is doing silly things by splitting responsibility for these issues. I cannot understand why they have been split, other than for political purposes. It could be said to enhance the magnitude of the crisis if an upper House minister is looking after the water crisis while the Premier and his right-hand man, Mr Hatt, are addressing the problem. It is even more important if the Premier, rather than the minister, gets on the roof and removes the cat! It adds further to the notion that Western Australia is facing a serious water crisis and Dr Dolittle Gallop is coming to the rescue.

Hon Peter Foss: It is like the Keystone Cops fixing it.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: That is right. Surely the minister welcomes an inquiry of this nature and will provide all the support such a committee would need, bearing in mind that it will have a lot to do. If there was any suggestion that the committee might be established, I would move to extend the reporting date from 3 June because it is too short a time. Considering the magnitude of the work to be done, the reporting date should be 2004. I have not thought long and hard about who should sit on a committee of this nature. Given that it would need to travel and familiarise itself with the circumstances in places such as Kununurra, Kalgoorlie, Exmouth and Denham, a smaller committee would be preferable to a larger one. However, I am subject to persuasion on that. This motion is designed not necessarily as an exercise to "do the Government over", even though as a politician I would like to. I have a genuine interest in this issue. I have not taken much interest in water supplies in the past. When the Government brought in water restrictions, I thought it provided an opportunity to give the Government a hard time because it was not a popular move. Having spent time asking a lot of questions and reading a lot about the water supply situation I have reached some conclusions. However, I am happy to be proved wrong. My initial reading is that there is plenty of water and we do not need to frighten people with restrictions. We should allow people to use the amount of water they need - not what they want. I do not think 155 kilolitres is enough. It is significantly less than the amount that people use now, and it is a significant reduction on what each household is used to. The net effect will be to reduce the quality of gardens and lawns, which I think are important in our society, especially in the remote parts of the State. As I said, I can be convinced of a different view. However, a detailed analysis of the circumstances in Western Australia by a select committee of this sort will do nothing but good for the Government and the Opposition and provide what I

hope will be very meaningful, useful information and recommendations to the general community, which is, quite rightly, seriously interested in this subject and which wants to know the facts. The community wants to know what to do about ensuring we have a regular and reliable water supply in the future. I commend the motion to the House.

HON DEE MARGETTS (Agricultural) [4.18 pm]: The concept of a select committee to inquire into issues confronting water use and supply in Western Australia is probably a very good one. The Water Symposium should have dealt with many issues that did not get on the agenda. I listened hard but I did not hear Hon Norman Moore say anything about the major water user and the area of major water use growth in Western Australia, especially the southern part of Western Australia. I am referring to irrigated water. The major single-industry group water users are new irrigation schemes, which are also showing the largest growth. If the Parliament is to deal with future water supplies and needs, it must deal with the source of that growth and whether it is sustainable. We have concentrated on domestic water use, which is not a bad thing. It is good to consider that. I have been to a number of meetings with the rural water council in Northam, Merredin and areas along the golden pipeline. It is interesting to note that at those meetings there is the feeling that Perth is a water-guzzling place. The image is that people will often waste water.

In some ways, one of the most important elements of the water-saving strategies that have been drafted in the last year or so is that it is seen to be a shared issue, which it is. We are sharing the same water resources. Perth uses dam and ground water, which is the same water that is used along the pipeline. People along the pipeline want access to that system and people in areas just north of Perth want access to irrigation water. Some areas close to Perth irrigation waters and in the new areas of dryland irrigation around the Gingin ground water region have already reached what is considered to be their capacity for large ground water allocations, especially from the deeper aquifers.

We still do not know a lot about sustainable water use. After some very dry seasons, the fact that we are noticing deaths amongst banksia bushlands, drops in wetlands and potential ecological disasters in a number of places indicates that sustainable water use is something that we must think about carefully. How much water can we pull out of the system and where can we pull it from without incurring enormous damage? Banksias may not be terribly impressive to many people but they are extremely slow-growing trees. They do not require a lot of water but when the watertable has dropped sufficient that their root system cannot access water and there is no rain to provide for the basic necessities of regeneration, amazing events occur and large areas of bushland die.

I was amazed to hear Hon Norman Moore suggest that somehow or other the Greens (WA) or greenies were responsible for the drop of useable water in dams. It is interesting to see how easy it is for people to blame someone else for what is happening: "If it is climate change or a salinity problem, let us blame the Greens." Is it not amazing! For decades the Greens have been trying to tell people that they need to prepare for climate change. When the elements of climate change begin to appear, suddenly it is a lot easier to find someone else to blame. I have seen it happen at a number of meetings at which people feel it is a lot easier to thump the table and demand that Governments find new sources of water. Table thumping is a popular thing to do. It is a lot easier than dealing with the fact that as a community, a State or a population, we may have to do things differently from before.

One major disagreement that I and most Greens have with what Hon Norman Moore said is that somehow or other our quality of life will suffer because we cannot have totally exotic gardens or a garden based on introduced species. On the contrary, households can do a range of things to help deal with this problem. In the case of watering trees, we can work out systems for the re-use of ground water; perhaps artificial wetlands could be used in some places. We can use rainwater on our fruit trees and so on. We can also think about how we can create a living, enjoyable, attractive and green environment that does not require constant daily or regular watering. It does not impact on one's quality of life one iota. I confess that I still have some rose bushes at my house that have not yet died. However, I feel kind of guilty because some of them have been growing since the 1920s and -

Hon Paddy Embry: A greenie with a rosebush!

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Yes, that is true.

Hon Robin Chapple: "Inside Cover" please.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Yes, that is right. However, ironically roses are relatively drought proof, except that total neglect is not terribly good for them. Over time I have replaced my front couch grass with lipia. I still have couch at the back. There is very little one can do to kill couch because once there is a wet season it will come up again. I have a water tank in the backyard and -

Hon Paddy Embry: What do you use that water for?

Hon DEE MARGETTS: I use it on the garden. I live near a major road and I do not want to be drinking people's brake linings. Hon Norman Moore was quite right when he said that rainwater tanks are not the issue. People would be surprised to know just how little a rainwater tank meets their normal water requirements. At a number of fora it has been said that the purpose of a rainwater tank is not so much that that will supply the needs of a household, because it will not. People who have rainwater tanks in the country usually have a couple coming off their house and any major shed on the property has a rainwater tank attached. They know what they can use that water for and how long they can have a bath or a shower. They know that they cannot all have long showers or perhaps even have a shower at all. In many places they have a bath and the water is re-used. It is a matter of awareness. As soon as a person has a tank, he begins to realise just how much water he uses and in what areas. The awareness part of the education process is extremely important. People use different amounts of water. In our household of two we probably use about 150 kilolitres. However, that is probably not an average figure. As I say, our back lawn is not exactly healthy but that has not been our priority.

This motion has some benefits. We should consider present and future water supplies. From the point of view of the Greens (WA), it is not just a matter of where the water will come from now and in the future. We would like a sustainable model for the future. We cannot assume there is so much water in the Yarragadee and work out how it can be used over the next few years without worrying about the wetlands, the tree losses and the things that we need for our survival, because that is an ecosystem. The birds, the critters and the insects all need those trees, even in the urban areas. This motion does not deal with the issues of water quality. Hon Norman Moore referred to nitrates in the system, which is a water quality issue that should be looked at. However, the Wellington Dam also has a water quality issue with salinity and nutrients. We cannot just take into consideration the quantity of water, but what quality of water can be used for feeding stock? What is a reasonable quality of water that can be used for irrigation or safely used as drinking water? This motion will not be sufficient unless it specifically addresses those issues.

Before I finish, I will seek to move two small amendments to the first paragraph of the motion. One amendment will insert after the word "future", the word "sustainable". Therefore, we will not just assume but we will take into consideration that future water use is not about where water is found over the next 10 years, how it is averaged out or what the Water Corporation says we have, but that it is about all of the information that is available on sustainable water use.

The drop in the watertable, and in the water level of the Gngangara mound, has occurred for a range of reasons, including the pines. The pines were planted because there was a rise in the watertable. We have responded to this issue because we are experiencing drought conditions on a more regular basis. It is ridiculous to block out the fact that, on average, there has been a reduction in rainfall over the past 30 years. Scientists have told us that a relatively small drop in annual rainfall means a substantial drop of useable water in our water supply systems. A 20 per cent drop in rainfall equates to a 40 per cent drop of usable water in our water systems. There are a range of reasons that such water cannot be made available, including the trees and vegetation in our catchments and the metropolitan area. Moreover, sometimes the water runs into rivers and underground aquifers, while at other times it moves out to sea along the coast. Freshwater comes out of not only estuaries, but also coastal sand plains. The entire coastal ecosystem, including our hugely valuable fishing industry, relies on a balance; if the balance between the mix of fresh and saltwater is upset, the impact will be felt by not only the "greenies", but also the industries and ecosystems that rely on that balance. It is ridiculous to blame greenies for the fact that water naturally passes through the system and that much of it finds its way to the ocean either through the sandy coastal plain or through the river system to the estuarine system. The estuarine system is extremely important and valuable to our fishing resources.

Hon Peter Foss: Some water has to be drunk.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Absolutely, and there will be costs for every new resource, because costs are involved in locating and pumping the resource. Indeed, there will be enormous energy and economic costs. Even if we find water, its quality may vary. We are still finding out information about the flow of water from one part of the Yarragadee to the other. There is no big bath of water under the Western Australian coastal plain. We are still learning about the series of aquifers -

Hon Paddy Embry: Are you saying that you don't know everything and have more to learn?

Hon DEE MARGETTS: We can all learn more about our water supply. The environmental assessment of the proposed new bores in the Yarragadee north of Perth revealed connections between the near surface aquifers and the deeper aquifers. If 10 gigalitres of water is removed from two bores, the nearby wetlands and underground cave systems may lose their water. We do not want a situation in which animals die because a cave system that has a unique ecology loses its water. We cannot assume that we will be able to regenerate life in the future and that the ecosystem will suddenly come back to life. That may or may not happen. We have an obligation to ensure that we do not deliberately destroy something that cannot be regenerated. We have an obligation to ensure that a balance is created at the place from which water is taken. It is also true that the areas in which

people are encouraged to put bores are often the areas in which there is surface expression. People are often encouraged to install bores in wetlands areas because of rising watertables. There is no doubt that the drought of the past couple of years has provided more modelling information than would have otherwise been the case. People are finding out that some of their assumptions have to be adjusted. Some of the modelling for Yarragadee must also be adjusted. On a number of occasions scientists at various seminars have indicated that they know more about the area around the Perth water supply but are less familiar with the areas north of Perth into the Gingin ground water area and beyond, about which they make educated guesses. They have not done enough work to fully evaluate not only what is there, but also the implications. A private proponent submitted a proposal to put in its own water supply system at Marbling Brook. However, the Water and Rivers Commission does not know for sure the impact that that proposal may have on other people's bores and water supplies. When test pumping was carried out, the level of the bores in surrounding properties dropped. That gave a pretty good indication that there was likely to be an impact. The commission is saying that it will have to wait and see what happens.

People in the Pilbara and other parts of Western Australia can learn how to live within the environment. During the 1992 Ashburton by-election, all sorts of pork-barrelling took place. Instead of cutting a ribbon for the opening of a gas pipeline or another pipeline - pipelines were opening here, there and everywhere - the Greens candidate, Hugh Patterson, cut a ribbon for the grey water pipeline from Sue Starr's washing machine to the trees in her garden. Even in an area like the Pilbara there are ways of using water to provide a pleasant environment without the belief that a tropical, lush paradise should be created because of the arid environment. We should not try to fool ourselves. Perth has by far the greatest population in Western Australia, and water in a dry continent like Australia is a precious commodity and resource. Thumping the table and saying that the Government has to find and provide cheap water will not solve the problem. I have attended a range of forums at which people have thumped the table and said "You must provide us with water from the farm water scheme". At another forum farmers have mumbled to me "Well, they should have known and done what we did 10 or 15 years ago and made the provisions to ensure they have alternative water resources". People who did not do that thumped the table and demanded that the Government provide the funds to put in alternative water resources. I have also been at another meeting at which a person said "Look, I have scheme water, but why can't I get the subsidy to put in a farm water scheme". I explained to that person that given that there is a bucket of money - excuse the pun - and given that some people have to cart water because they have no water access at all, it would not be entirely fair if public money were used to subsidise the farm water scheme. It is a difficult situation, but there are links between the water supply and the increase in the growth of our water supply, especially with irrigation. There are links between the changes that have occurred through the rights to water and irrigation and there are links between the tax-effective schemes and what they have done to water supply, use and allocation in Western Australia. We are not talking about those issues. If we have an inquiry, it must be open to the WA Water Users Coalition, the people involved in the golden pipeline and the people of Merredin and Kalgoorlie, so that they can talk to and communicate with people from the Gingin, Arrowsmith and Jurien ground water areas to determine their current ground. They should discuss the water needs, the water supply and sustainable solutions. It is not just about getting more water. Some quite exciting ideas for reuse and harvesting of fresh water are being looked at right now, and there is more potential for that. An article in the newspaper not long ago dealt with former National Party members of Parliament looking at schemes to process the semi-fresh water from some wheatbelt towns having problems with rising watertables. There is much potential in those schemes. I have recently looked at the Merredin water scheme, which is trying something similar, although it has problems with leaks in its clay dam system. All these schemes are really worthy of being examined. Also worthy of examination is that the towns along the goldfields pipeline, which have had water conveyed to them for over 100 years, now face a situation in which the water being sent to them is increasing their watertables, bringing in impurities and increasing salinity. They have a problem in working out how to deal with that in a cost-effective way. We must also examine how we deal with these problems in a way that is sustainable in energy use as well. My feelings, and those of many members of the green movement, are that if we can combine sustainable energy use with those innovative schemes of reverse osmosis and fresh water harvesting, we will be truly on the way to a more sustainable future in many of the wheatbelt areas of Western Australia. There is now talk of towns using those water resources to reduce their own costs. The debate needs to be open. I know that many people in the wheatbelt do not necessarily want to talk about it, but we must examine the cost of providing water to Kalgoorlie and all the areas along the pipeline, and consider other options. If we did an honest appraisal we might find that renewable energy is a reasonable option.

Amendment to Motion

Hon DEE MARGETTS: I move -

In paragraph (1) -

(1) after "future" - to insert "sustainable"; and

(2) after “supply,” - to insert “quality,”.

There is no point talking only about the quantity of water. We must also talk about quality, and that means levels of salinity, concentrations of nitrates, and why catchment protection is necessary to protect water quality.

If this committee were to get up, the Greens (WA) are extremely interested in this area, and believe that the committee should have wide participation from this Chamber. A committee of three would not be sufficient to make sure that there is a reasonable mixture of views. That Hon Norman Moore has taken an almost diametrically opposed position on water indicates that a range of views need to be incorporated into such an inquiry.

Hon Norman Moore: I was generous enough to say that I did not know all the answers, and that I could be persuaded to a different view, which I hope would be the same in your case.

Hon Paddy Embry: I thought committees were about seeking views, not about making the views of committee members known. Is that not what committees are for?

Hon DEE MARGETTS: I understand that point of view, but we have heard a fairly long presentation from Hon Norman Moore, who has indicated exactly what he wants to get out of that committee. He has said that he wants to look at the Ord River, and at thumping the table and telling the Government to come up with more water supplies. He has already given a fairly clear idea of what he thinks the committee should do. There should be some balance, because as members know, the answers obtained depend on the questions asked, and that is affected by the witnesses invited and the people asked to supply information.

Hon Nick Griffiths: Would the honourable member indicate how she would see the committee being constituted in the event that the House agreed to it being set up? How many members would it need, and where would they be drawn from?

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Uneven numbers would be better; five would probably be a suitable number.

Hon Nick Griffiths: What would you see its constitution being, without mentioning names?

Hon Paddy Embry: Five greens and nobody else!

Hon DEE MARGETTS: That would be a fabulous idea, but I do not think so. Obviously there should be a member from the Government and one from the Opposition. I am saying that the Greens (WA) have an interest in this and we would like to be involved in it. There are still two more positions. If One Nation had an interest in the subject, which I am sure it does, it should be involved. I guess it is up to the National Party and the Liberal Party to work out who the other person should be. That is a reasonable approach.

Hon Nick Griffiths: You are suggesting a five-person committee, on which there would be only one government member.

Hon Peter Foss: That is about the representation of the House.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: That is an interesting point. The other suggestion is that there could be two members from the Government, one from -

Hon Nick Griffiths: I am interested in your views.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: This is one of the issues on which it would be better to have discussions when we are not actually debating the motion.

Hon Norman Moore: When such a motion is passed, it is incumbent on the mover of the motion to put forward a further motion about the membership of the committee.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: How would three members be selected?

Hon Peter Foss: You are suggesting changing it to five.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: The motion makes no suggestion for the make-up of the committee. My point is that a committee needs to have the ability to incorporate the ideas and the energy from a range of views, and reflect the make-up of this Chamber.

Hon Peter Foss: One from each party would do that.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: One member from each party would give the National Party - which has one member in this House - a rather large influence. It may well be that the make-up of this Chamber is such that there should be three from this side and two from the other side.

Hon Norman Moore: You are not from that side. You are independent.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: That is not what the honourable member usually says. It is probably better that we do not talk about the make-up of the committee only on the floor of this House. A committee of Hon Norman Moore and two other Liberals would probably not be very balanced.

Hon Norman Moore: I will be happy to discuss the membership of the committee with every party if the motion is passed, and will seek to get some sort of agreement.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: Okay; however, I also indicate that the inquiry should include sustainability and quality amongst its terms of reference.

Hon Norman Moore: I agree with that. I do not have a problem with your opinion.

Hon DEE MARGETTS: My amendment is not written in a technical way; however, it reads -

In paragraph (1) - After “future”, to insert “sustainable” and after “supply,” to insert “quality,”.

With those words, provided that it is agreed that the make-up of the committee is reasonable, the Greens (WA) would consider supporting the inquiry.

HON JIM SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [4.50 pm]: I will say a few words based on my recent experience of looking at water supply issues in this State, particularly in the metropolitan area. When I was shown around the Jandakot water mound, it became very apparent to me that a number of issues regarding the management of that water body were deeply concerning. Probably the biggest concern is that the management of the mound is in a mess. So many different organisations have different roles to play in the maintenance of the water supply and the water quality of the water mound that nobody seems to know who has complete control in that area. For instance, one body considers whether land can be cleared on the water mound, another considers whether quarrying should take place and yet another considers how much water should be pumped out of the mound. At Atwell I was shown four huge water pumps that operate for 24 hours a day and pump huge amounts of water into drainage systems that go out to sea in order to dewater the area for housing. Millions of gallons of water are being poured out to sea and are being wasted at a time when we are supposed to be conserving water. Who manages this water mound? Land in the middle of the mound is being quarried. The rainwater collected by the residents is filthy. LandCorp is pushing to develop more and more housing on top of the mound and land is being cleared. The Department of Agriculture, not LandCorp, is in charge of deciding whether land should be cleared. Local government is deciding whether or not it will allow industries to be developed on top of the mound. I was shown industries that recycle old industrial equipment that were built on top of the water mound and old underground petrol tanks were being cleaned and cut up on top of it.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: That was allowed when it was assumed that that was a priority-free area. Clearly, things have now changed with the demand for the Jandakot mound.

Hon JIM SCOTT: Things have not changed.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: Not in terms of the existing infrastructure, you are right.

Hon JIM SCOTT: A line has been drawn around the mound, which does not really deal with where the water is.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: You and I agreed to that.

Hon JIM SCOTT: We did, but some of us were restricted in what we could say because houses already sat along the bore line, and they cannot be removed.

The essence of what I am saying is that probably seven different agencies have vital roles to play in ensuring the quality and retention of the water supply. There is a huge amount of confusion about who is in charge. It is very important that a single body have total control of protecting those water supplies. If that is not done, we will have very serious problems in the future. That is the main issue I wanted to raise.

I draw attention also to the fact that within that framework different agencies have different aims. LandCorp is about flogging and developing land. I believe that it is acting to the detriment of the city by pushing for the development of inappropriate land on top of the water mound. I do not blame either Government for this, because I believe some of the worst problems occurred along the bore line under the previous Labor Government. The same thing is occurring now. Further bushland is being cleared on top of the mound. The residents who take water directly from the water mound for their own private bores are finding that the disturbances that are occurring are affecting the quality of the water. This will eventually impact on the deeper bores.

If and when this committee is formed - it is a very important committee - I hope it looks at the mishmash of different regulatory agencies that are messing up our water supplies. They include the Department for Planning and Infrastructure, the Department of Industry and Resources, the Department of Agriculture and local governments. All of those bodies must cede their control of important water areas to the Water and Rivers

Commission or a similar body to make sure that some control is maintained over the mound. Currently, rubbish of all sorts is being dumped everywhere, including burnt car bodies and oil. A lot of waste is seeping into the ground water in that area. It is being very poorly managed.

Hon Derrick Tomlinson: Should the body that has responsibility for the management of the mound also have responsibility for the sustainable use of that water?

Hon JIM SCOTT: I think it should be the same body. It should be able to control the planning for the types of activities that can take place on the mound as well as the physical management of the water supply. If this does not occur, we will get more of what is happening now. I ask members to look at the water mound. They will be shocked at what they see. They should talk to some of the people who have seen the water quality go downhill very fast, particularly in the past few years, to the point at which the water is virtually undrinkable for residents in that area.

I must reply to Hon Norman Moore, who said that the Greens (WA) are being alarmist on these issues. I can tell Hon Norman Moore that it is alarming that the water levels have either flat lined or dropped for the past 25 or 27 years by 45 per cent. We ought to be alarmed and we ought to do something about it.

The PRESIDENT: Order members! I give the call to Hon Barry House.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to sessional orders.