

WATER USERS COALITION FORUM — MANJIMUP

**657. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Water:**

I also acknowledge the contribution that John Henchy made to many things agricultural in Western Australia. He was a great man.

I refer to the community water forum held by the Western Australian Water Users Coalition in Manjimup yesterday afternoon. I note that invitations were sent to 42 Labor members of Parliament, with six weeks' notice, including to the minister, as well as the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

- (1) Why did the minister fail to attend this important community forum?
- (2) Where was the member for Warren–Blackwood, who is the chair of the Warren Donnelly Water Advisory Committee?
- (3) How does the minister explain the absence of even one single government member or departmental representative?

**Ms S.F. McGURK replied:**

- (1)–(3) I am very pleased to be able to address this issue because I cannot overstate this government's commitment to consulting and working with that local community —

**Mr P.J. Rundle** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** — in understanding how we can deal with the challenges that water security presents to the broader Warren–Blackwood catchment area, including Manjimup and the surrounding district. Of course, that is all the more the case now that we have seen the impacts of climate change. Over the years, we have seen the trend of declining rainfall and particularly unreliable rainfall and water from natural sources. There is no doubt that there are challenges. It is true that I was invited by Mr Bevan Eatts to attend the forum. Unfortunately, I was not consulted about the date. I was just given a date and asked whether I could attend. I reiterated in my response to him that I would consult the local community. I plan on holding a public forum and he and other stakeholders will be invited to it; I just was not able to make that particular date. I cannot speak for other members, but when a stakeholder wants a minister to attend a forum, the usual way of going about securing a minister to attend that forum is to try to work with the office to make a time. If he had done that, we would have arrived at a date, but he did not do that.

**Mr P.J. Rundle** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please! You will not get a supplementary if you continue to interject.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** Mr Eatts did not do that. He simply gave us a date and I was not able to make that date. I communicated with him about that.

I wonder whether Mr Eatts is trying to increase his profile in the lead-up to preselection because he was able to get some coverage about the forum in *Farm Weekly* just last week. He said in the article that he was disappointed that we were not attending but he also said that he was disappointed with the new guidelines for spring exemptions and what that would mean to any changes that we will make to water legislation. Currently, a “spring” is technically defined. People with a spring water source on their land do not have to seek a licence to use that water. There is a very narrow and strict definition of those springs. That is what is referred to as the “spring exemptions”. Mr Bevan Eatts told *Farm Weekly* that the guidelines about these changes were released by the government in June, but that there had not been any industry consultation in formulating the exemptions policy. I was a bit surprised to hear him say that because, in fact, there had been extensive consultation about the spring exemption guidelines and he and his organisation had attended a series of consultations. I am not quite sure what Mr Eatts is on, but he might want to pace himself with whatever he is consuming down there, because he has actually attended a number of the consultations.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** I will quickly outline the consultations that have occurred. A draft spring exemption guideline was subject to a five-month consultation period from December 2021 to May 2022 and field testing was conducted with the Warren Donnelly Water Advisory Committee. The final exempted guidelines were publicly released in April this year. During the consultation period, the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation received 73 submissions, 50 phone calls and over 2 000 hits on the consultation website. In May 2022, the department posted a series of online forums with the Manjimup Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Warren Catchments Council, the Manjimup Water Security Group and Mr Eatts' organisation, the Western Australian Water Users

Coalition. Mr Eatts is the president of the Manjimup Chamber of Commerce and Industry and is also the chairman of the WA Water Users Coalition. I understand that Mr Eatts attended both of the online briefings. For him to then say that there was no consultation is a little curious. I am sorry that he feels that he was not consulted, but he clearly was, and there was extensive consultation. This is about the spring exemptions that I referred to, and the guidelines have now been released.

I reiterate that I am prepared to go down to the community. The member for Warren–Blackwood has invited me to go there and I have committed to her that I will go. We have talked about the water bill previously in the chamber. It is a very complex piece of drafting because it brings together six pieces of existing legislation, some of which are over a hundred years old.

**Mr P.J. Rundle** interjected.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** At least two ministers on the member for Roe’s side of the chamber committed to that legislation but were not able to deliver on it.

**Mr P.J. Rundle** interjected.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** It is actually quite difficult to answer the question when you yell at me, member.

We have consulted that community, we will continue to consult with that community, and I hope to do so again in the future.