

WATER AND RIVERS COMMISSION, MERGING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT

579. Mr P.D. OMODEI to the Minister for the Environment:

I refer the minister to her actions to merge the Water and Rivers Commission with the Department of Environment and to the fact that the Water and Rivers Commission is a statutory body, created by law, which therefore cannot be abolished or amalgamated with other agencies without the approval of Parliament.

- (1) Does the minister remember introducing the Machinery of Government (Water Resources) Amendment Bill into the Parliament to abolish the commission, which did not proceed through the Parliament?
- (2) Why did the minister subsequently subvert the law by merging the Water and Rivers Commission with the Department of Environment without Parliament's approval?
- (3) As the minister's actions have demonstrated a clear failure to adhere to the lawful requirements of the act for which she is responsible, will the minister resign, or does she think that she and this Labor government are above the law?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS replied:

- (1)-(3) What a strange question. Yes, of course I remember that legislation. I also remember what members opposite said about water resource management charges. Talk about flip-flop. First they opposed them. Then when the National Water Initiative came in, they wanted them. However, when the government put out the irrigation review report and said that it was seriously thinking about the charges, they suddenly did not know where they were. I can remember that.

Mr P.D. Omodei interjected.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The machinery of government bill passed through this chamber and went to the other house, but then there was an election.

Mr P.D. Omodei interjected.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The member is entirely wrong in the second part of his question. If he reads the budget papers every year, he will see a division for the Water and Rivers Commission. Of course the Water and Rivers Commission still exists, because the legislation to repeal the commission has not gone through the Parliament. There has been no breaking of the law. It is administratively quite legitimate to create departments, as happened with the Department of Environment. The Department of Environment has replaced the previous Department of Environmental Protection. It also services the Water and Rivers Commission.