

SOUTHERN YARRAGADEE AQUIFER

783. Mr P.D. OMODEI to the Premier:

I refer to the Government's state water strategy for Western Australia of February 2003, which shows that the sustainable yield for ground water resources under the Perth metropolitan area is more than 1 900 gegalitres, which is 1.9 million cubic metres.

- (1) Why is the Government proposing to take 45 gegalitres of water from the southern Yarragadee?
- (2) Does the Government propose to take any more water from the southern Yarragadee?
- (3) Is that water being taken because the Labor Party considers it too politically sensitive to take an extra 45 gegalitres from the Perth ground water source?

Dr G.I. GALLOP replied:

- (1)-(3) That is a very disappointing question from the member. There is water under the metropolitan area, a significant portion of which is used for our everyday needs. It is subject to, firstly, a quality constraint and, secondly, an ecological and environmental constraint. The Water and Rivers Commission constantly monitors the underground water throughout the metropolitan area. Bores are occasionally closed as a result of the commission's findings in order to guarantee the future sustainability of the supply.

Perth has a growing population and it has been experiencing a declining rainfall. The fact is that the people of Perth will need a new source of water to meet their future needs. As you know, Mr Speaker, through the water strategy the Government is considering two options, one of which is desalination. All the necessary work has been done on the possibility of using that option. If we need to seek tenders on desalination, we could do so. The second option is to extract water from the Yarragadee aquifer, a massive water formation. That potential supply is being investigated in consultation with all the relevant economic and other interests in the south west. Any decision would be made only on the basis of its future sustainability.

I find the question extraordinary. One of the great jewels in the crown of Western Australia is the Mundaring to Kalgoorlie pipeline. What is the logic behind that pipeline? The logic is that certain water collects in the hills around Perth and we can share that with the people of Kalgoorlie, who need it for the development of their community. The notion is ludicrous that the water in the south west, the dams in the hills and the water underneath the metropolitan area is the monopoly of the people who live in those areas. That is the assumption underpinning this question. We must break down this silly conflict that is created in our community for base political purposes. That is what the question is all about.

The Water and Rivers Commission is given the job of making sure we use water sustainably. I am very proud that when we discuss water issues in the Council of Australian Governments, I do not have to deal with the issues Queensland and New South Wales face.

Do members know what the issue is in those States? The National Party rorted the system over many decades. Water is now used in Queensland in unsustainable ways. I spoke to my colleague Premier Beattie about this matter. A disgraceful system was created over many decades, a system one could almost describe as corrupt, and water is being used in an unsustainable manner. I am pleased to say that that has not been allowed to happen in Western Australia. In this State water allocations are based on a proper sustainability principle. I am very proud of that. That is why when the federal Government told Western Australia that it should put in money to help farmers in the eastern States who have ripped off taxpayers over the years, I told it no way. We will not spend Western Australian taxpayers' money to rectify the ripping off that occurred in the eastern States.

The underpinning assumption of the member's question was that Western Australian water is owned by the people who live in the area from which it comes. I live in Western Australia. I regard Western Australia as a community. If it is the proper thing to do and if it can be done properly and sustainably, some of the water from the south west will be shared with the metropolitan area. However, it will be done properly. It will be done on the basis of scientific analysis and full consultation. I become somewhat annoyed when these sorts of issues are raised. As I said, the jewel in the crown of Western Australia is the sharing of water between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. That should be the philosophy of Western Australia; rural and city areas should work together to deal with a common problem.