

YARRAGADEE AQUIFER - PLANS FOR WATER EXTRACTION

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

Given that the government is unable to rule out environmental damage to the south west as a result of its reckless proposal to drain more water from the southern Yarragadee aquifer, will the Premier now show some leadership on this important environmental issue, and join with the Liberal and National Parties in halting the current proposal to further drain the southern Yarragadee aquifer; and, if not, why not?

[Interruption from the gallery.]

The SPEAKER: Once again, I reluctantly remind members of the public that they are not to interrupt the progress of this chamber. I ask them to please refrain from making noises that are designed to do exactly that.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER replied:

I thank the member for the question. I am glad, and I think it is a good thing, that some people have come to Parliament House today to make their feelings on this issue known, and to let people know that they have a very deep commitment to protecting the environmental values of the south west. It is fortunate for those people that they have been given the opportunity to sit through question time, and to make some judgements about what goes on in Parliament. It will be interesting to see whether it has any effect on the normal shockingly bad behaviour of members opposite during question time.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: We are beginning to get a little sense of it already. I also invite people who are deeply interested in the issues of the environment in the south west to be aware of the history that leads to the point we are at today. They should, for example, take the opportunity to read the maiden speech of the present Leader of the Opposition, in which he advocated the wholesale destruction of the Shannon River valley through old-growth forest woodchipping.

Point of Order

Mr P.D. OMODEI: I refer to standing order 94. That matter has nothing to do with the question. We had a campaign to manage the Shannon sensibly. Standing order 94 refers to relevance. Why does the Premier not answer the question? I asked him three questions last week that he could not answer. What about him answering this one?

The SPEAKER: The Premier is endeavouring to answer the question. I appreciate the fact that the Leader of the Opposition may not enjoy or appreciate that answer; however, it is the Premier's answer.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Dr J.M. Woollard: Premier, you're still clearing forests. Where is your credibility?

The SPEAKER: Member for Alfred Cove!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: It is instructive to see the totality of the picture rather than the most recent issue that a person latches himself onto because he thinks there is some short-term political gain in doing that. Have a look at the totality of the picture. If it was up to the current Leader of the Liberal Party and his colleagues, the old-growth forest in the south west would not exist. They would have flattened the lot of it. They would have milled it, woodchipped it and sent it to Japan or Korea. That is what the Liberal Party would have done because that is what it intended to do. Do not take my word for it. I invite members to read the maiden speech of the now Leader of the Opposition. Look at the values that underpin the political thinking of this man.

In the lead-up to question time when we were debating whether there should be a suspension of standing orders, the member for Capel referred to the 20 eminent scientists who have been quoted in *The West Australian* newspaper in the past couple of days. One of the eminent scientists, Bernie Masters, was, until the last election, a member of this Parliament. So attached to the Liberal Party were his values that he was forced out of Parliament. The Liberal Party kicked him out of Parliament and replaced him with none other than the current Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who is a puppet for Noel Crichton-Browne. I ask people to think about Noel Crichton-Browne's commitment to environmental issues in the south west, and they will then start to get a clearer picture of how genuine members on the other side are. As for the National Party running up issues of environmental protection, please! Is this opportunistic politics at its very worst or not? Which political party went to great lengths to protect the environmental values of the south west? We did.

Dr J.M. Woollard: Liberals for forests did, Premier.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I could take a point of order while I am on my feet. The former Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Cottesloe, had a few things to say about water supplies in Western Australia as well. He was not shy in letting us know what he thought about this government's attitude towards trying to better manage our precious and scarce water resources when we first came to government. When we entered government, there was no water management regime in place whatsoever. Our dams were at about 25 per cent capacity at that stage and people were allowed to leave the taps running for 24 hours a day. There was no strategy involved in demand management and when we tried to put one in place, we were roundly criticised.

Mr T. Buswell: What have you done to stop people leaving the taps running all day? Is there a tap Nazi? What a stupid statement!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Since 2001 or 2002 sprinklers bans and regulations have in been in place.

Mr T. Buswell: You said taps.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Sprinklers are connected to taps, my friend. The member for Cottesloe said that talk of a water shortage was a scare tactic. He said there was no water shortage and that there was an abundance of water. He said that the underground water resources had been carefully developed over a number of years and should continue to be developed. When my predecessor, the honourable - and I mean it - Geoffrey Gallop decided to pursue a desalination plant, what happened? We were roundly criticised and attacked for pursuing that option.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Why don't you answer the question?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I am answering it. It was assured at that time by members opposite and also by people in the media that we should be pursuing the Yarragadee option. Therein lay the answer, they said. First they accused the Water Corporation and then the government of deceiving people because they said that the Yarragadee was available and waiting to be used. They asked why the government was deceiving the people and running up the desalination plant instead. What was this government doing deceiving people? That is what we were criticised for. Now we have in place a proper environmental assessment process, which will take its course. If the public has its doubts about whether the government will do the right thing, I suggest people look at the history of the two sides involved in politics here and make a judgement based on the way we have acted in the past and their assessment of the honesty -

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The public should make its assessment based on the historical performance -

Mr C.J. Barnett: They might be able to if you answered the question.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I am. The member for Cottesloe hates the fact that in the early part of this decade when we were raising water supply as a critical issue for the state, he said that it was a furphy, that there was an abundance of water and that the government was pulling the wool over people's eyes. He said that we should get on with using the underground aquifer.

Mr P.D. Omodei: We built the Harvey Dam.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The coalition government built the Harvey Dam. Whacko! We are not talking about the Harvey Dam; we are talking about securing, on a sustainable basis, water supplies for the future. It will be done properly and according to the best available information, and there will be no endgame here. There is no end to the game; there is no magic solution. We are not going to dig a dirt canal 3 000 kilometres from a non-existent Fitzroy dam and say, "There's your answer; don't worry about the cost." We will not make those sorts of decisions on the spur of the moment. We will do these things properly, based on the science and proper assessment, and we will continue immediately thereafter, and even before that, to secure the next major water supply, whether it be another desalination plant or the Wellington Dam. That is it. We will do these things properly; we will not do them cynically and we will not do them for opportunistic short-term political gain.