

SELECT COMMITTEE INTO WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S WATER RESOURCES

Motion

Resumed from 21 September on the following motion moved by Mr P.D. Omodei (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) -

- (1) That a select committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to inquire into and report on -
- (a) the extent of surface and ground water available for consumption and use in Western Australia;
 - (b) the government's role in planning for the future given climate change predictions;
 - (c) the government's role in planning for increased water demand;
 - (d) the failure of the government to implement alternative water recycling and re-use programs;
 - (e) the failure of the government to provide appropriate water supplies in high rainfall areas of Western Australia, such as Manjimup, Bridgetown and Boyup Brook;
 - (f) the ability to source additional water from Wellington Dam, particularly 45 gegalitres of saline water purged from the dam;
 - (g) the success of the farm water grants scheme and potential to expand the scheme further;
 - (h) catchment thinning as an option to increase stream flow into water reservoirs;
 - (i) research into innovative water conservation measures;
 - (j) the social, economic and environmental impacts on the south west as a result of using the southern Yarragadee aquifer;
 - (k) the level of research undertaken in regard to the future regional water requirements of the south west, as it applies to the southern Yarragadee; and
 - (l) any other matter which will provide appropriate water supplies for the state of Western Australia.
- (2) That the committee report to the Legislative Assembly by 30 June 2006.

DR S.C. THOMAS (Capel) [5.55 pm]: There is a new member in the opposition! The member for Kimberley is still sitting in the seat she was in during the division. We proudly welcome her! The pro-uranium lobby has now moved to the opposition side of the house! I am a little confused; we were well prepared for the debate on uranium. Perhaps some of the other members opposite, such as the member for Collie, might also join us! We are not debating uranium. We will debate the motion moved by the member for Warren-Blackwood on water, which is far more important to Western Australia given its arid climate.

The member for Warren-Blackwood's motion seeks to appoint a select committee of the Legislative Assembly to inquire into and report on a large number of issues, so members have carte blanche to talk about anything to do with water. We can go through the issues piece by piece because all the points in the motion are relevant. The first point on which the committee will inquire into and report on states -

- (a) the extent of surface and ground water available for consumption and use in Western Australia;

Obviously, most of Western Australia has very little surface ground water available because it is a very arid state. Although some members of the community might argue about the validity of global warming and the drying of continents, we can now progress past that debate. We genuinely appreciate that those are scientific realities and we are dealing with changes in climate and a reduction in rainfall throughout most of Australia. In light of that, we can expect the amount of surface water in Western Australia to decrease. Obviously a plan must be prepared to enable us to deal with that. The use of ground water and, particularly underground water, is contentious. A number of underground sources have not been fully researched. We have been using the Gngangara mound in the Perth surrounds for some time. I will not discuss in great detail the fact that those areas of ground water are under threat and are stressed to their limits. The damage caused by overusing that water and not allowing for adequate recharge may well come back to haunt us for some years. Having said that, I remain concerned that we are beginning the next step towards the same process with the southern Yarragadee aquifer, the next great underground resource, which appears to be a much larger body of water than the Gngangara mound. Once that faces overuse, we will be looking for further sources of water.

I am pleased to say - probably the Minister Assisting the Minister for Water Resources will back me up on this - that we have received at least some verbal confirmation from the Water Corporation that if damage is done as a result of taking water from the southern Yarragadee, the taps will be turned off and no more water will be taken from there. I do not know whether that is in writing anywhere, but that was certainly the undertaking given in the briefings in the south west. At some stage I would like the minister to reiterate that undertaking; that is, if any form of environmental damage occurs as a result of taking water from the southern Yarragadee, the taps will be turned off. The issue in which I am particularly interested is the dropping of the superficial watertables - not only of the Leederville aquifer but also of the superficial aquifers that sit on top of it - which could have an impact on some of the shallow-rooted forest that sits on top of that area, particularly the tuart forests. Monitoring will be undertaken by various departments.

Another issue may arise at some stage because of the influx of water into and the efflux of water out of the ocean, as the Yarragadee has connecting points with the ocean. Pressures are obviously at play. We think that there will be no influx of saline water back into the southern Yarragadee aquifer. However, we are not entirely sure. We are looking for some reinforcement from the minister that if saline water influxes into the Yarragadee aquifer or the superficial aquifers due to a change in the pressures -

Mr P.D. Omodei: It is already happening at Busselton.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: There is certainly increased salinity in the Busselton region. I say to the member for Warren-Blackwood that I do not think there is any doubt that salinity issues are creeping in down there. I do not know how great they are in the southern Yarragadee and whether that relates to the superficial aquifers and other water being taken. I will not stand in this place and say that it is directly attributable to any form of Yarragadee aquifer activity. Although we are talking at the moment about taking 45 gegalitres of water out of the southern Yarragadee, we are all aware that a fair amount of water is already being taken out of the southern Yarragadee. That will become part of the plans, of course. I am trying to remember -

Mr P.D. Omodei: Seventy gegalitres.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: That is more than I thought it was.

Mr P.D. Omodei: And about 130 gegalitres are committed.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: There are 70 gegalitres at the moment. I thought it might be a little less than that. Those activities are already happening. Obviously, there needs to be some reinforcement that if damage occurs to the southern Yarragadee, we have the ability to turn off the tap. Beyond that, if that water is required in the south west for growth in that area and it does not reach Perth, we would expect, I believe quite rightly, that water to be used in the south west and the resources expended nearest to where they are required to allow that growth in the south west corner to occur. I think we can say that the transfer to Perth of the 45 gegalitres of underground water will occur. It is a fait accompli to a large degree. I do not think we should spend time trying to stop it at this stage, but merely make sure that there is no environmental damage.

We will get into another debate at another stage; that is, that some of the money saved in using this resource should be reinvested in the activities of the Water Corporation in the south west. I have been saying in a number of public forums for some time that we need to look at reinvesting in deep sewerage and water for a number of rural towns that are struggling. I know that the Water Corporation has some plans in place for towns such as Kirup, Balingup and Boyup Brook, which struggle for their water resources. Obviously, by taking water from the southern Yarragadee, the government will save about half the production costs of a desalination plant. I would like some of that money to be reinvested in the deep sewerage program in the south west in particular. That would be fair and reasonable compensation, if everything else went well in taking water out of the southern Yarragadee. I would love the government to commit to reinvesting a certain proportion in that program, because the lack of deep sewerage in those country towns in the south west is a limiting factor. It probably is a limiting factor in the development and growth of the country towns in your electorate, Mr Speaker. As your electorate is a coastal electorate to a large degree, it will have country towns in which expansion is limited. I have no objection, and I am sure that the member for Warren-Blackwood would have no objection, to sharing the wealth of the south west and the savings from the southern Yarragadee with all areas that require deep sewerage by reinvesting that money in the Water Corporation and the sewerage program. I believe that sharing that across the entire state of Western Australia would be a positive outcome.

I have been speaking for eight minutes of the 20 available to me, and I have dealt with only subparagraph (a) of the motion. I will have to try to speed this up a bit.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: We'll give you an extension!

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I thank the minister.

Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan: He's going for the David Parker speed-speaking trial.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: David Parker?

Several members interjected.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: We would be correct to call him the erstwhile member! Anyway, we will not get back into a WA Inc debate.

An opposition member interjected.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: It was handed to him directly in cash - from one pocket to the other.

Subparagraph (b) refers to the government's role in planning, and its role in planning for future water needs should be a part of the whole debate. Obviously, the government's role in planning for increased water needs will be important. Interestingly enough, when the Water Corporation did its planned projections of the water needs of the south west, it recognised that the massive population growth in the south west will require massive increases in water for domestic consumption. I have always been a little intrigued, because the Water Corporation has also projected a fairly massive growth in the amount of water required for agricultural use in the south west. The Water Corporation is suggesting that agriculture in the south west will triple. That is a remarkably optimistic position to take. The member for Collie-Wellington would recognise that, for the most part, the agricultural areas in the south west are suffering somewhat. I would be surprised if agriculture has the wherewithal to triple, given its economic return at the moment. I know that in the electorate of Collie-Wellington some vineyards have been expanded, and they are obviously high water users. Over time, given the current fluctuation in the price of grapes and wine pulp, that expansion might slow down. However, that might be a positive; there might be a little more water than we thought there would be. I believe that agriculture will continue to struggle for the next 10 years or so, and the growth will, to a large degree, be in domestic consumption.

I would like to see some growth in secondary industries. However, growth in water consumption by the secondary industries in the south west corner is not projected. To a large degree that is because some of those industries will become more water efficient. Those industries may well grow, but they will not necessarily demand more water. That is probably realistic. I know that there should not necessarily be an increased demand for water by some of the big users, such as the mineral sands companies.

I will now address subparagraph (d), which deals with the failure of the government to implement alternative water recycling and reuse programs. I believe that greater emphasis should be placed on grey water and recycling programs. The minister will probably tell us that some emphasis has certainly been placed on that area, and I will not stand in this place and say that there has not been. However, there is further scope for the use of grey water, in particular, and certainly on a larger scale. Perhaps in this state we place this issue at too low a level. We look at the individual use of grey water to a large degree; that is, somebody who picks up the grey water from a small system and sends it out. There is great potential for us to use grey water in a more universal manner. At some stage during this debate the minister will probably -

Mr J.C. Kobelke: I agree with what you said. We have actually set fairly high targets. There is a lot more to be done. However, the part of the terms of reference that you read out is clearly a nonsense. It is clearly not accurate to say that we have failed, when we have done far more than was happening before we came to government. However, you are right in saying that there is a lot more to be done.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I agree; there is certainly more to be done.

I have addressed to some degree subparagraph (e), which deals with the provision of water in high-rainfall areas such as Manjimup, Bridgetown and Boyup Brook. My understanding is that the Water Corporation will be using water from the south west Yarragadee for some of those proposals. I suggest that we are to some extent limiting the growth of those towns by not providing adequate water. However, we are probably limiting those towns even more by not providing adequate sewerage outlets. I reiterate the point that reinvesting some of that money back into the sewerage program would be a very positive move.

Subparagraph (f) refers to the ability to source additional water from Wellington Dam, particularly the 45 gigalitres of saline water that is purged from the dam. Again, I am glad the member for Collie is here, because he has a vested interest in Wellington Dam. There are some salinity and water quality issues with Wellington Dam. There is also an issue with the recreational use of both the Wellington and Glen Merryn Dams in the south west. Obviously the use of water for human consumption is only one part of what can be done with the surface water that we trap in a dam. Wellington Dam has been used as a recreation facility for a very long time. I remember faintly that what was the Young Farmers Organisation and eventually became Rural Youth used to have a camp at Wellington Dam every year. That is only one of the organisations that took the opportunity to spend a weekend at the many camp sites at Wellington Dam. I suspect that a couple of hundred, if not close to a thousand, people circulate around the Wellington and Glen Merryn Dams on weekends.

Therefore, this issue needs to be handled carefully, because the recreational use of these dams is very important. One of the problems is that if we continue to use these dams as water sources, we will limit the ability for people to use these dams for recreational purposes. The Water Corporation does not want people to swim in water that other people will be drinking, because it makes it all the more difficult to process and treat that water to make it safe to drink. This is an issue not just for Collie but for the entire south west, because the people of the entire south west area use these dams as a recreational resource. I believe that even the people of Perth could make greater use of the water resources in the south west corner of the state and that, over time, the south west could become the aquatic playground of the state, as it were -

Mr J.E. McGrath: You would need to warm it up a bit!

Dr S.C. THOMAS: It is not that cold. It is only cold if people stay still and do not move quickly enough. If people move fairly quickly, it is not too bad.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: So the member used to be a fast mover?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: We will not engage in any age jokes, because we will get into a great deal of trouble with the majority of the members of this house!

Mr J.E. McGrath: It is illegal!

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I am sure there is a punishment for it; it will cost me later!

Those dams could be used as an aquatic playground. I am not sure that we are using the area between Collie, Dardanup, Donnybrook and the Preston Valley to its full potential in terms of the capture of water and the use of that water for recreational purposes. There is certainly the potential to increase tourism by making use of that water resource. Those areas are currently underutilised as a tourism destination, but they have a lot to offer.

There is also potential to use some of the water from the south west as a source of potable water, particularly the overflow from the dams, and also some of the rivers. Once the rivers get close to the coast, there is the potential to harvest water from those rivers.

[Leave granted for the member's time to be extended.]

Dr S.C. THOMAS: It has been suggested to me that near the mouth of a number of rivers there are collection points that could be used for a number of water sources, not necessarily just potable water. The motion refers to water and its uses. I do not think it is limited to drinking water. It would be good if some of our rivers were used for the benefit of the local community as well as just to provide potable water.

Subparagraph (g) of the motion refers to the success of the farm water grants scheme and the potential to expand that scheme further. The use of water on farms is very interesting. There seem to be two extremes of farming. In one type of farming the water usage is quite high. Many of the farm water grants are for more extensive blocks in which the water is used in quite a good downstream processing way. If a farmer is engaged in extensive grazing programs, the use of water for agricultural purposes is quite low when compared with production. It continues to amaze me that farmers in this state are able to produce a wheat crop in areas of average rainfall; for example, only four inches a year. I suggest that they are making very good use of the natural rainfall. Therefore, I do not think there is much that we can do to increase the savings that can be made by agriculture in those areas, because the farmers are already producing crops when they get only four inches of rain. Many of our farmers are running dairy cattle in areas in which there is very little irrigation. That is a bonus for our industries. One of the problems in the south west is that we are competing with countries for which water is no issue at all. I am thinking in particular of New Zealand, where the good soils and high rainfall enable farmers to get a very high level of production. Farmers in New Zealand are running one or one and a half dairy cows to an acre. In much of Western Australia farmers are running one dairy cow to three to four acres. The difference lies in the use of natural water supplies. The farmers in this state are not irrigating to a large degree. They are irrigating a lot of small crops, such as lucerne, if they are growing it over the summer, but they are not really wasting a lot of water for agriculture. Therefore, I am amazed that the Water Corporation would suggest that we will triple our water usage in 25 years because of agriculture in the south west, because we are already running very close to the bone as to how much water we can consume to produce what we are producing now, so there is not much more that we can do to increase that water saving. Some of these schemes are good. The potential to increase the farm water grants scheme is a positive thing. Also, there are some federal schemes that should be made available. I would like both governments to get more involved in saving water, both on farm and for domestic consumption, because we could make some further ground there.

One of the things that probably should be talked about at some stage, because we have not had a full and frank debate on this yet, is the catchment of water from roofs. A lot of the rain that we get hits the stormwater drains and heads out to sea. We also have the ridiculous situation in which on the one hand we have floods, but on the

other hand we do not have enough water. There seems to be some illogicality about that. We are not collecting a lot of water. I recognise the occupational safety and health issues with the collection of rain water from tanks and the aged-old argument that birds defecate on tanks and cause contamination. People in rural communities seem to survive on water from rainwater tanks without too much trouble. It could be argued that people in rural communities who were raised on water from rainwater tanks have some problems. However, I suggest they are no worse than people anywhere else. Probably a large number of members of Parliament were raised on water from rainwater tanks, as I was. There is a fair chance that both the member for Collie and the member for Vasse had a rainwater tank in their backyard. Most of the people who were raised on water from rainwater tanks have turned out to be normal human beings and positive members of society. I will not touch on the member for Bassendean, but that is certainly the case for members on this side of the house! I suggest that we are still not making adequate use of rainwater tanks for the collection of water, because a lot of that water is still running downstream. At the moment I have a 20 000 gallon water tank, but we are in the process of moving house and will be putting in a 30 000 gallon water tank. That will be for a family of five people, and we will still have water to spare. The use of rainwater tanks has the potential to make a big difference to the amount of water that we use, because when people put in a rainwater tank it makes them realise how much water they actually use. The classic example is that when people first put in a rainwater tank, they continue to follow their normal lifestyle, but six months down the track, or when they get to Christmas, part way through the summer, they run out of water, because they cannot believe they had this massive reservoir of water but they have thrown it all away. Therefore, one of the bonuses of having a measurable amount of water is that people actually think about it and look to see how much they are using. I can tell members that people can use a fair volume; 20 000 gallons goes a long way when it is refilled over the winter or autumn - depending on the break of the season - and the spring months. Generally during summer my water tank is never less than about a quarter full. As I said, I do not think we use water particularly sparingly. With a young family, the washing machine is going continuously and, as they are always dirty, we are always bathing them and we use a fair bit of water. However, it gives us an understanding of how much water we are actually using. Therefore, I certainly think that saying how much water is available will encourage people to acknowledge the amount of water they use. That would be a very positive thing.

I am up to subparagraph (h) of the motion, catchment thinning as an option to increase stream flow into water reservoirs. It is a somewhat controversial method. I have received inquiries about whether or not this policy is wise. I think it is a good idea. A lot of catchment thinning that takes place is actually the removal of small weed species and weedy regrowth, which are of very little use in our native forests. Native forests have changed over time because of our harvesting styles and the way in which we harvest them. I suspect that 200 years ago the forest in the south west was, for the most part, much more mature than the forest there now. It would have had larger trees, greater spaces between trees and much less undergrowth, as over time the larger species tend to knock down the undergrowth. That undergrowth sucks up water, and clearing it should not be regarded negatively in conservation terms; it should be regarded positively as returning those forests to some degree to the state they were in before European settlement in this state. Therefore, there should be a greater use of catchment thinning, even to the point of removing, as we did at the Gngangara mound, the upper storey of trees themselves. For example, there should be no hesitation in doing that with a mass of pine trees. Pine trees are a foreign species. I know they have a use but they are still a weed, effectively, if the definition of weed is interloper. Pine trees are still interlopers. Thinning pine forests should be no issue in catchment thinning to increase flow into the reservoirs. I think this will be an important issue around Perth itself, as Perth has very few other ways of increasing its catchment in places such as Mundaring Weir. Perth has no way of increasing the rainfall and has very limited ways of increasing the actual water flow and its catchment. One of the few ways that the Perth region itself has to increase its flow is catchment thinning.

I am up to subparagraph (i), research into innovative water conservation measures. I will not stand in this place again and say that the government is doing nothing. I would not like to fall into that trap. Again, as I said, with the reuse of grey water, I still believe that more could be done for water conservation. Obviously we could do more to reduce the flow in all the things we do. Unfortunately, it is not the role of government to implement a lot of water conservation measures; it is the role of the public to take up that role. Although government plays a role in education and letting people know what measures to take, much of what can be done depends on the community making a decision. The community of Western Australia itself must be more involved in water conservation measures.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: In support of that, many industries have cooperated very fully with government agencies. There has been wonderful cooperation.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Absolutely, as with water used by industries in my electorate. Minerals Sands, for example, has cut back its usage in a number of areas. Therefore, I think it requires a community decision. Obviously, the community itself will decide exactly how important water is. The pricing of water probably

needs to be put into one of those areas. We talk about the price of water being a disincentive and that we should raise the price of water. It would be nice to have an absolute figure showing that that would occur. It is my understanding that the price of water would have to be very high before it would impact on the way people use it, much like the price of petrol. It would be nice to see how high the price of water could go before it impacted on the way people used it. Of course, the reverse side is that if the price were to rise, more money would be made out of it and the government could reinvest that money elsewhere, such as in deep sewerage for the south west, which would be a good place to put back that money.

I turn now to paragraph (j), the social, economic and environmental impacts on the south west as a result of using the southern Yarragadee aquifer. I will go out on a bit of a limb here. I suggest that the end result of the social and economic effects of using the southern Yarragadee aquifer in the south west would be good. I have questions about the environmental impacts. At some stage in the future in this debate, we would like reinforcement of the commitment that, if there are environmental impacts and damage as a result of the use of the water from this aquifer, in particular its interaction with both the ocean and the upper aquifer at Leederville and the superficial aquifers, use of that water would cease until those protections were in place. I think we have done that sufficiently.

I now refer to paragraph (k), the level of research undertaken. Again, I think there would be a fair profit for the government from potential funds from the use of 45 giganlitres from the southern Yarragadee aquifer. Probably also the time will come when the volume of water taken from the Yarragadee will get closer to 100 giganlitres. The forward projections of the Water Corporation show that there will be demand for 100 giganlitres. According to some of the far-out discussion papers I have read, the demand may well end up being 140 giganlitres. If that is the case and no other water source is prepared, money will be made from that demand.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Wellington) [6.26 pm]: I want to add to the debate tonight. In my electorate there are the Wellington, Harris, Logue Brook, Drakesbrook, Munglinup, Stirling, Harvey, and Waroona Dams, and probably one or two others, although I am not sure of their location. However, I have certainly been around most of them with a scoop net. With the understanding that the problems have been around for some time, it is quite pleasing to see that there is a chance for recharge. We need only look at the Wellington Weir, which was scoured extensively earlier in the year to a point at which a lot of people thought it would never again fill up. However, its overflow at the moment is a spectacular sight. We had to take traffic lights out there on the weekend so that people could go through it. The tourism industry has certainly benefited from that. However, in saying that, I must take my hat off to the government in some of these areas. The coal companies and the government have put a shunt in at the top end of the east side of the Collie River where the early saltwater runs into an old mine void. As the rains come further on into the season, the fresh water is then run into the Wellington Weir. I make that point, as in only a couple of years that water will be potable again. Of course, the demands are for not only domestic use, but also irrigation on the flats. I certainly get an earbashing from the dairy farmers down there about the quality of the water in recent years; it has not been of sufficient quality for them to grow clover from which they get a good return, yet they are still expected to pay the same price for it. Hopefully, that will be one of the quick fixes of the Wellington Dam area. Although there is a long way to go, a lot of the work that is being done around the place has certainly been instigated by this government. Covering the drains and putting a pipe in the water in Harvey has saved 30 per cent of the irrigation water there, which has been allowed back into the system that then goes back to Perth.

I do have some concerns in some areas. It is like looking at the fresh water that goes over the top of the Wellington Dam today. To me that should have been put back into the Harris Dam in a round robin strategy, as water from the Harris Dam is then pumped back to the Stirling Dam. The Harris Dam is only half full, yet there is water running out to sea. That concerns me greatly. The integrated system is not hooked up, so that we can use all the water that is available and not have some of the problems that we have today. That would go a long way to drought-proofing the state. As most members know, the Wellington Dam is one of the biggest dams in the south west, certainly not anywhere near the size of the Ord or anything like that, but it is a major dam that was allowed to drop off the scene. The work done at the back of that dam must be seen to be believed. A great number of native species have been planted. Not too many blue gums have been planted because they create problems. They take up so much water that they do not allow a great deal of run-off. That was one of the downfalls of the previous blue gum planting. Since that time, a lot more of the flat, swampy country that had become salty has become covered in native bush, which is working very well. A problem could result from the wet winter that we have just experienced, because the recharging of the ground water brings the salt to the surface again. After dry years, the salt is washed away with the first flush of rain, but with more rain the water table rises and with it the salt, which means the process will start over again. We were lucky in the Collie basin in some ways, especially as 100 millilitres of rain fell earlier in the year - this brought the salt levels down in one hit and allowed the salt to be flushed straight out to sea, which was then replaced with fresh water from rain that fell later.

I urge caution because, as has been mentioned by the member for Capel, country towns will face penalties as a result of water that is needed in the city. Those penalties will arise in many and different ways. At the moment we are talking about a review of the marron industry, which is also a tourist industry in Collie. Wellington Dam is the biggest fishery for marron in the south west, with 70 kilometres of bank. At the same time there is talk of shutting access to that area. No economic study of the towns in the area has been undertaken. Burekup, Dardanup, Collie and Brunswick certainly receive an economic benefit from the marron season, whether it be from people purchasing a tank of fuel, a carton of beer or using nearby accommodation. Plenty of overnight accommodation is available in the Ferguson Valley and the vineyards. That has not been taken into consideration, which is of concern to me. Just recently, Logue Brook Dam and the associated caravan park were shut down, which were a major waterskiing facility for people between Harvey and Perth. Many people who turn up there will be disappointed, because it has not been widely publicised that it is no longer a waterski area. Thank goodness that Harvey Dam is still open for redfin fishing and marroning. Those dams will be of benefit but that benefit will not be sustained as other dams are taken offline.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Open Harvey Dam for skiing.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: There has even been talk of stopping people going to Glen Mervyn Dam, which is an irrigation dam. In my travels on the east coast I found that some of the major tourist resorts were based on drinking water dams and rivers. I cannot see why we cannot use both to supplement the water for the city and also to keep income coming into the town. The marron season is short, but large numbers of people drive into town so that they can shop at Coles and places like that. People are also camping. There are a few things I wish they would do, one of which would be to bring their rubbish back into town. They create their own problems. The Wellington Dam could be used to top up the Harris Dam, and the Harris Dam the Serpentine Dam, and it would still allow recreation there. It is a question of timing. I do not believe that from Easter until around December anyone would swim in that dam or attempt to do so because the water is bloody cold and they just do not go in there. Why could there not be a three-month no swimming, no water interaction zone in that area? The water could then be pumped out when the three months were up, so that it went into the other dams to fill them up, and then water could be sent on to Perth. I believe that would allow a lot more water to be harvested and put back into the system.

We must remember that the desalination plant that will be commissioned need not be on all the time but only during dry years. People tend to think that it will be on all the time, but that is not necessarily so. This year has not been the wettest by a long way, but certainly some people who had not seen rain for a while think that it has been really wet. However, it is not a really wet year. The situation could be improved if the weather conditions were right. However, as we have enough water now the matter tends to go off the radar a bit. We cannot afford not to carry on with these improvements. As I have said about Harvey Dam and the piping of water, it represents a huge saving. Along some of the channels are major wooded areas that birds and animals have moved into. Some people in the region are worried about what will happen to those birds and animals when the water is shut off. Shutting the channels will create a major problem, especially in small communities. In Yarloop, for example, the dam backs up during the summer and keeps swans and other wildlife in the region. Those little areas will be affected. People are concerned in those little areas. Water for environmental purposes should be found for such a dam, which could certainly not be called a swimming hole, because that would be wrong, although the locals certainly have a swim in it. They regard it as their own, and we must be careful of that. However, further down the line, we must integrate the whole system. I am sure that with water from Yarragadee coming on line, we could do it in such a way that not only Perth but also the south west would get its share.

One of the concerns of shires and individuals who have approached me is the strangling of the south west due to the lack of water because the water has been committed to the city. We do not want to go down the path of the Darling catchment problem, where the water was overcommitted and now the states are having to have a buy-back program. States are arguing against states about whether they will get their share. River gums were dying in that catchment because they had not been flooded for many years. The water had all been harvested and stored on different properties by huge levees. There were miles of them. The water was taken out of the system and stored there for irrigation. As the river approached the sea, not a trickle of water was going out to sea. I think we have been quite good until now, but we must ensure that does not happen here.

I have spoken of the Yarragadee area. People wonder where the water comes from that keeps the Blackwood River running all the year round - even in the hottest, driest summers. It is there as a result of pressure from the Yarragadee aquifer. I am concerned that if we are not vigilant and we do not watch what we are doing, the pressure could be taken off and then fresh water would not flow. Again, we would degrade another system that is under extreme threat at the moment. No-one could deny that. The threat is not just in the Yarragadee area but way back to the wheatbelt. We must be very careful that the pressure is kept up. We must watch that we do not over-pump the aquifer and allow inflows of salt that would ruin a resource that we will certainly have to use in the future. I urge caution. When we get to that stage, the desalination plant should be looked at and really

cranked up to make sure that we are using water properly instead of taking the easy, cheap option of pumping out of the aquifers. Pumping out of aquifers is easy and cheap. That probably brings in the issue of licensing bores, how much people can pump out with them and regulation of them. It saddens me sometimes when I drive down the highway from Collie when it is raining to see sprinklers going in the vegie patches, because that is a sheer waste. Why is the water wasted? It is because those people do not have to pay for it by volume. We need to have a really good look at that because it is a sheer waste of a resource that we need and we will need if we are to expand our agricultural and other industries.

Another issue relates to the arguments that have gone on for quite some time between federal and state governments. I certainly support our ministers in their efforts to get the money due to our state. I attended a couple of conferences at which one would think that the only river in Australia is the Murray-Darling River, which has increasingly been allocated money because it runs through the eastern states. We have a major problem in Western Australia, which has been recognised. I was glad to hear in this chamber the other day that the government has not given up on rivers north of Perth and that work continues to be done despite a report in the press that said that it was too hard and we were moving away from that option. Some rivers in the south that are recovering in both mechanical and natural ways should be looked at, such as the Collie River. I believe that some lakes in that area could be used as holding ponds, such as the mine lakes in Collie. That would help in the future, because we would run our salt in those mine lakes in the first instance. From that, we may create an industry based on dried salt ponds. The volume of salt from that area may become larger than the amount currently derived from the Speaker's electorate. That is certainly an opportunity. It would be a long-term and slow process and the volumes needed would be huge; however, we could utilise that opportunity by draining the water into one area when it rains. I remember in my younger days when the Dumbleyung Lake was fresh and when the top end of the Blackwood River in Duranillin, where I lived, was also fresh.

Mr P.D. Omodei: How old are you?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I used to catch all the perch in that river.

When I think about it, the degradation has happened in a short period of time and in our lifetimes. We have been very slow to react. We cannot sit back on our haunches and allow the situation to continue. We must get on the front foot and work with farmers. It saddens me when a farmer pits himself against another farmer and when a shire pits itself against another shire. We need an overall integrated plan so that people at the top do not decide to pump all the salt down the other end because the results of that do not matter to them. That happens. It is the same with the damming of the gullies, which has now come under regulation. The bloke at the top of the hill with the most money keeps the water from those at the bottom of the hill. I am sure that the member for Capel has had a few complaints about that issue since he has been in the job. I was glad to move out of that area and to let him carry on with dealing with that issue. It is a problem. We must consider utilising our resources in a fair and shared way. I believe that the government is doing its best in that area. Legislation was recently introduced to ensure that that happens.

While keeping the cities going, there are social issues for the smaller towns. If compensation is not paid to those communities, the water bodies should be left open. In some cases I doubt whether compensation will be enough because the issue is also about traditional rights of a different sort. Over the years, three or four generations have recreated in those areas, and they will not be willing to let it go because of commercial and recreational aspects. The plan we have in place is moving towards that. However, more work should be considered and carried out. Based on that, I am able to say that work is being done in my electorate and that it is progressing quickly, although I urge caution when considering the direction in which it is headed. I do not support the motion on the table.

MR T.R. BUSWELL (Vasse) [6.45 pm]: I rise to make a brief contribution to this debate given that my electorate of Vasse stretches around the shore of Geographe Bay and that the water drawn for commercial, residential and agricultural purposes in my electorate is predominantly drawn from the Yarragadee aquifer or the Leederville aquifer which, of course, sits above the Yarragadee aquifer. I am particularly interested in paragraphs (j) and (k) of the motion. Before I talk to those, I thank the Minister Assisting the Minister for Water Resources for attending the opening of some floodgates in Busselton last week. The minister discovered at the time that it is not wise to open floodgates and that they exist for a purpose. The minister acknowledged the floodgates, which was very nice. We had a lovely cup of tea on the banks of the Vasse River. Of course, I enjoyed his company before he went to Manjimup, which is in the deep south.

It is also worth acknowledging that in my electorate and in the neighbouring electorate of Capel, the government spent money in recent years addressing some of the issues associated with water, particularly the disposal of rainfall through the drainage system. Some years ago, the drainage system was threatening my town and it would have continued to do so had the government not been prepared to invest money to upgrade the drainage system that protects my town through the use of compensation basins. I also thank the member for Collie for

letting us know this evening that the government only intends to turn on its \$350-\$400 million desalination plant in dry years. I suspect that that will not be the case. In fact, I would be very surprised if the minister has committed between \$350 million and \$400 million of state government funds to provide a piece of infrastructure on the shores of Cockburn Sound that will only be turned on to save us all in dry years. I do not think that that will be the case. The member for Collie highlighted a good point; that is, members on this side of the house have many unanswered questions about the desalination plant. Sadly, we are having a bit of trouble getting answers to some of those questions. Of course, one must wonder why. I want to understand the true costs of the water that will come from the desalination plant on the shores of Cockburn Sound, which will be owned and operated by the great Western Australian institution, the Water Corporation -

Mr J.C. Kobelke: That is not actually true; it will be operated by the private consortium.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Notwithstanding that, the indicative costs of water indicate that the cost of water from that plant will be significantly higher than has been suggested. In fact, during a briefing we had last week, we were told that the costs may be twice as much as the costs of water provided by similar desalination plants that operate in other parts of the world.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Who told you that?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It was not the government. We were given independent advice by people who have a particular interest in the taking of water from the southern Yarragadee. It is important to note and to state in this house that the drawing of water from the southern Yarragadee - albeit in the initial quantity of 45 gegalitres - does not have the broad support of the community that I represent. I tend to support the position taken by the combined shires water committee, which comprises representatives of the Shires of Busselton, Margaret River, Nannup and Capel. Since the project was initiated, that group has insisted on a level of transparency and on the provision of information from the government so that decisions about the southern Yarragadee could be effectively monitored. We must remember that this all started when the Waters and Rivers Commission spent \$6 million on a study about drawing water from the southern aspect of the southern Yarragadee. Of course, that \$6 million study posed more questions than it answered. As the member for Collie rightly pointed out, the unanswered questions relate to the significant concerns about the impact of drawing water from the southern area of the southern Yarragadee on the environmental water flow of the Yarragadee into the Blackwood River. We were concerned about the impacts of that from an environmental point of view which, of course, is very important. As a person who likes to waterski on the Blackwood River - albeit very poorly - I know that that has huge social and broader economic impacts on the quality of life in that area. The Water Corporation came along and, thus far, and to the best of our estimates, it spent something like \$12 million on a scientific analysis of the southern Yarragadee project, the employment of all sorts of public relations consultants and wonderful glossy brochures with lovely literature that have been used to try to win the hearts and minds of people in my community. Of course, we are reluctant to be conned, drawn in or sucked in or to close our eyes to the facts. We want answers. It is interesting that there is a fundamental level of concern in my communities about the process; that is, essentially the Water Corporation is the proponent to draw the water - initially 45 gegalitres - out of the south west, and is also responsible for the development of the groundwater model and the gathering of the data for that groundwater model. I hope that at the end of the day the peer review process that will be undertaken shortly will help address some of the concerns of my community. We are concerned that, on the one hand, the Water Corporation is the proponent and, on the other hand, it is giving out information to try to justify its proposal. A person who was 100 per cent behind the Water Corporation would see that communities that are concerned about their future water supplies would be concerned about that process.

That brings me to the concerns my community has about the Yarragadee proposal. The first concern is the quality of the groundwater model that the Water Corporation is using to provide us with the information contained in these wonderful glossy brochures, which feature a wonderful picture of the Premier. He is standing in a lot of greenery with a bit of water behind him.

Mr R.F. Johnson: There is an action shot further in.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I hope he is not having a shower! Here he is and I do not know what he is doing. It looks like a natural act. It is an action photo.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Are you talking about fresh or waste water?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The minister raises a very good point. I do not know what he is doing, but whatever it is he has two hands on it.

We are concerned about the quality of the data the Water Corporation is using and, therefore, the quality of the results of the groundwater model it has developed.

The test bores put in by the Water and Rivers Commission were initially near the Blackwood and Margaret Rivers. The results indicated that the bores should not go there and it was suggested that the bore field be shifted. Last week the minister visited a place that often is regarded as the hub of the south west - that wonderful town Jarrahwood. The proposed bore field is close to the town of Jarrahwood, which has a population of approximately 10. It has a wonderful history as a timber town.

Mr P.D. Omodei: That is why they called it Jarrahwood.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Very good. I thank the member for Warren-Blackwood for that. Despite the quality of the member's advice, the problem is that the number of bores sunk in the Jarrahwood area to provide data for the Water Corporation groundwater model is minimal. People are concerned that the quality of the raw evidence supplied for this model is not sufficient to deliver effective outcomes. That is a genuine concern. There is hope in my community that the peer review will clear up this issue.

There are other issues. What will be the impact of drawing water from the Yarragadee aquifer on the Leederville aquifer, which sits above it? What is the relationship and the flow between the Leederville and Yarragadee aquifers? The general feeling is that that issue has not been addressed. The Leederville aquifer is important because a number of users in the agricultural industries in my electorate and the member for Capel's electorate draw their water from that aquifer. There is concern that if there were to be a drop in head pressure in the Leederville aquifer, the pumps and equipment used to draw up the water to meet their allocation would need to be upgraded. How much of the Leederville aquifer discharges by way of natural flow into the wetlands that ring my home town of Busselton? How much by way of environmental outflow feeds the tuart forest, which is a sensitive part of the natural environment in the south west? The underlying relationship between the Yarragadee aquifer and the Leederville aquifer is an issue.

Another issue of concern is the nature of methodologies used by the Water Corporation to determine the future water requirements of the south west. Historically, state governments of all political persuasions have unfortunately underestimated the rate of growth in the south west. There is a real concern that the attempt to model the future water requirements of the south west will be premised on information or assumptions that underestimate the rate of growth in the south west. Also, new areas and industries are opening up - I refer to the agriculture occurring on the Scott River plain, which activity was not thought of 10 years ago.

Mr P.D. Omodei: There are three 1 000-cattle dairy farms there.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I have given up on what the member for Warren-Blackwood has to say and I ask him to leave me alone. There are a lot of cows and a lot of udders on that Scott River plain, for those of us who have an interest in those matters.

Another concern is the extent to which the modelling has captured the impact on the recharge rates on the Yarragadee brought about by the declining rainfall and the environment in which we live. A solid argument has been put forward that that has not been accurately accounted for. It is a serious concern. At the end of the day, the amount of water that can be taken out of the sponge, the aquifer, is directly impacted upon by the amount of water that nature puts back into it.

Mrs J. Hughes: I am interested in the way the debate is going. You don't want to take water from the southern Yarragadee and you don't want a desalination plant. Is the idea to continue to take it from the Gngangara mound, which has been suffering?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: With due respect, the member for Kingsley's assumptions on my argument are not correct. I did not say that I do not want a desalination plant and I certainly did not say that it is not acceptable to take water from the southern Yarragadee. I am trying to say that there are sufficient community concerns that need to be thoroughly addressed and understood before consideration is given to that moving ahead. It is an absolutely fair position and I think the government acknowledges that.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Are the communities you represent having their concerns listened to through this process?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: To be honest with the minister, there is a strong body of thought that says that this process is designed to deliver an outcome that was determined before the process was initiated. I do not think that is the view right across the community. It is true that the Water Corporation has put in a good effort.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: It is my view as the minister responsible for the Water Corporation that it has arranged that process in a very open way and is listening to the people. You are the local member and I am simply asking you whether you have formed a similar opinion or have some concerns that the process is not being run well.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I think the process is being run a lot better now than in the initial stages. There is an increasing level of community acceptance, but there is still a body of opinion that says that there are concerns that need to be addressed.

Mr P.D. Omodei: It depends on whether the Water Corporation reacts to the concerns.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: I accept the member's statement that there are concerns. The point I am making is: is the process giving due consideration to those concerns and seeking to answer the community's questions in an open and forthright way?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is answering the concerns, but I am not sure they are addressing the concerns. There is still a fundamental lack of trust in the process and that is why the peer review and the Environmental Protection Authority review are so critically importance. It is completely unacceptable to expect the residents of the south west to give up their water resource if the environmental aspects are not guaranteed.

Mrs J. Hughes: The people on the Gnangara mound have given up their resource and growers in Wanneroo have dropped their bores several metres to try to be accommodating, because the water from there is pumped as far as Kalgoorlie.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am trying to represent my community and to stop similar problems occurring there. I realise time is short, but I will refer to the issue that if we get to the scenario where it is environmentally proven that our water resources can sustain the draw down of water from the southern Yarragadee, in what format and what structure is that water to be traded. I do not like using the word "traded" but I prefer it to the word "taken", and this is an area of concern. What guarantees, either through a framework or legislatively, will be put in place to make sure that if in the future we need the water back, that will happen?

Mr R.F. Johnson: It may not be the same water.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It probably will not be the same water; that would have gone through the internal filtering system quite a few times, member for Hillarys. That may be perfectly suitable and acceptable in the member's household, but in our part of the world we like fresh water. Is that not right, member for Warren-Blackwood? Busselton is renowned for having a magnificent water supply. Many people often attribute the good looks of the people of that town to the quality of the water supply.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Of course, I was brought up in Bunbury.

Mr M.P. Whitely: You would look better through a glass of water.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: A muddy glass of water!

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm
