

Hansard 10-9-2008 - Matter of Interest

WATER SUPPLY

The Hon. R.L. BROKENSIRE (16:23): I want to talk today about water, especially the lack of water in the Lower Lakes and the River Murray. Nothing is more crucial in South Australia at the moment than water supply, and I do not apologise for one moment for spending a lot of my time and energy on arguing about what needs to be done with water. We have heard and seen a fair bit of spin, but we are not doing the essential things that we need to do in this state to ensure that we have a critical water supply ongoing for the community.

At the moment, the truth of the matter is that we are running out of water for human consumption if we are not serious about it. That is how desperate the situation is. That is not alarmist; that is how desperate the situation is at the moment. If we are to have this plan where the government wants to build a bigger population, we have an even more critical need for guaranteed water and a permanent water supply.

Soon we will be talking about stormwater harvesting with some legislation that I am about to introduce. I will not go into that at the moment. I will put it this way: if you fill a bottle of water, you have to fill the bottom of the bottle with water before you get any water in the top.

The problem with the River Murray system at the moment is that before the water can get to the bottom it is all being siphoned off at the top, and the bottom is dying—and it is very serious. In all the time I have been down on the Fleurieu Peninsula, I (and the community) have never seen anything like the devastation of the Lower Lakes system at the moment. Economically, environmentally and socially it is a catastrophe.

I have been privileged to go to the Denver property, and I congratulate this state government for buying it and putting it into part of the Ramsar international agreement. That shows how important the particular ecology is down there. The government purchased it but now they are letting it die, which is very sad. However, there are solutions. Mr Ray Najjar from the Murray-Darling Association has put up a commonsense proposal. Let us forget the spin, the excuses and statements such as, 'If you let water come from way up it is going to evaporate and it is going to seep away.' Of course it will. We have a small window of opportunity before algal bloom destroys the bottom end of the river, the lake system and the acid sulphates, and we will not have potable water for Adelaide. By simply dropping the weir pools 150 millimetres (or about six inches) from lock 9, you can get fairly good quality water right down there, with a shandyng through the Tauwitchere barrage, within 30 days. That is how quickly it could be done if we had a Premier and a Prime Minister with a will to deliver.

The community deserves this. They are asking for it, but all it gets is a quick press conference, with no consultation with the community and then off go the Premier and the Prime Minister leaving the community to deal with the dying Lower Lakes system. I want to congratulate the Alexandrina council on the leadership that it has taken. However, I understand why the community is starting to divide down there: millions of dollars of business revenue has been lost and people are desperate when they see their own environment literally dying more each day.

I am asking the Premier to raise the stakes on this and to declare, under the emergency management legislation, a state of emergency on the Lower Lakes. As I read that legislation (a fairly new act), it clearly has the capacity to incorporate the problem down there. If the Premier went across to Government House immediately, he could initiate a state of emergency on those lakes, raise the debate, get additional funding to come through and put absolute pressure on the commonwealth government to put through an emergency water flow.

I do not understand why the Premier was not at the rally of 5,000 people at Goolwa, when many of us were. I do not understand why the Premier and the Minister for Water Security were not out here on the steps of Parliament House. The community would embrace them if they championed this desperate situation. At the moment they are running away from it and they are losing community support. In this council today I call on the Premier to use the relevant sections of the emergency management legislation and declare a state of emergency on the Lower Lakes.