

**NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ARID LANDS NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT BOARD REGION FACT FINDING VISIT**

Mr BROCK (Frome) (11:21): It is a great privilege to be able to follow the member for Ashford, who is a great chair of our committee, and also the member for Stuart, who is right—member for Ashford, you do lead it very well. The 48<sup>th</sup> report indicated that this committee had a tour of the north of South Australia. We visited Prominent Hill, which gave us a better overview of what is happening up there. As the member for Stuart has indicated, it is a little known fact that uranium is mined at that mine and I have no issues with that either.

We also had the opportunity to visit Coober Pedy, and it gave us an opportunity not only to talk to some of the locals but also to talk to the council and to understand the pressure they are under, especially with the power supply up there, which is run by the local council. That is something that we all take for granted down here, but it is definitely a big issue up there, as with the water.

We also had the opportunity to visit William Creek and talk to some of the landowners there, the pastoralists, and to understand more about the issues that are confronting those people. At the same time, we did have the great opportunity of going in three small aircraft to have a look at the lake system up there, Lake Eyre, etc., and to get a better understanding of where the rivers are coming in and the feeding into that from Queensland in particular.

As the member for Stuart indicated, I am also going to touch on a few of the findings and recommendations from this report. One of the things that concerns me is the NRM boards. The staff members up there are very, very good. That does not concern me. They have a lot of knowledge and the experience to be able to guide the parliament going through, but those staff need to have improved conditions. They need to have better security for their tenure; there were a couple of occasions when they were not too sure whether they were going to have a job within two months. So, the staff themselves need to have better security, greater direction going forward for their own commitment.

The member for Stuart also touched on the water issue. We talk about water in South Australia and we worry about it in Adelaide in particular. You have some reservoirs here, but the outback of South Australia is 100 per cent reliant on the River Murray, and from the Great Artesian Basin in the north there they do not have opportunities for the River Murray water. They have to take it out of the Great Artesian Basin. As the member for Stuart has indicated, the draining of that extraction is greater than that going into the basin, so we as a state need to look at alternative or extra water coming in so we do not do any more damage to the Great Artesian Basin. The resource opportunity for South Australia is all in that area, and without security of water and power those conditions will not improve or go forward.

As to the outback roads, whilst there are thousands of kilometres of road system up there, I would suggest (and it is one of the reports) DTEI needs to meet with the South Australian Arid Lands NRM boards up there and also the pastoralists. These are the people who have firsthand knowledge of the condition of the roads and who understand far better how we can maintain those roads to a higher standard.

We also understand that, no matter who is in government, we need to control our expenditure. However, at the same time, those roads up there are the lifeline of not only tourists but also pastoralists. There are times that these people cannot get their product or their stock down to market. When they cannot get their stock down to market, they do not have any finances to continue operating their facilities.

The member for Stuart has also referred to the feral animals in that region. The feral animals up there include camels. Camels are great and are a beautiful animal, but they do a lot of damage up there. As the member for Stuart has indicated, I also hope that the export camel abattoir, which will also process animals other than camels, is established at Port Pirie. It will not only assist with the economic development of that region but it will also rid us of some of the feral camels that are in the outback.

Foxes are another issue that was highlighted up there. Again, we need to control those, because they are also doing damage to the natural resource. The dingo fence, which is a very large fence up there, should keep all of the dingoes away from the stock down in the south. There was talk about there being evidence of dingoes south of the dingo fence. That is another issue because, whilst the dingoes are okay and are a great animal, they do lots of damage to sheep and the environment.

The member for Stuart has indicated that this is one of the best committees in the parliament. I will go one further: I say it is the best working committee in the parliament. The membership of this committee is widespread, and it has bipartisan support. There is great support, great indications and great discussions within this committee. I am very proud to be part of the Natural Resources Committee of the parliament and am looking forward to more trips away. Whilst people might say we should not go away because it costs money, the only way we can find out what the issues are—whether in the outback, the Riverland or wherever—is to touch that firsthand in order to get a better understanding. I certainly have great pleasure in commending this report to the house.