

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: LEVY PROPOSALS 2010-11

Mr BROCK (Frome) (11:53): I would like to say a few words on these reports. First, I, too, commend our presiding member, the member for Ashford. The member, as chair, is doing an excellent job, and this committee, as the member for Stuart has already indicated, is a very bipartisan committee. There are no politics in there, and we all have free opportunities to debate and put our views across. We did have input into the increased levies and, as the member for Stuart has just indicated, and the Presiding Member previously, we agreed to the increases. They were very modest, and they have been consistent with the previous increases.

The member for Stuart has also indicated that there is not enough money out there to do lots of things, and that is a very true issue because we can only go about with the money we receive from the levies we impose on landowners. Just recently, we had the opportunity to visit the North, and we went to places like Prominent Hill and Coober Pedy to look at the issues and the fauna around there. We also went to William Creek, where we had the opportunity to speak to the landowners in the stations to gather first-hand the issues and the challenges that are facing these areas out there.

The member for Ashford, our presiding member, has indicated that the capping of the bores up there has now resulted in lots of the natural streams or springs coming back into existence. This is where we rely on the people working for the boards up there for their local knowledge. We were driving along and suddenly we would see mountains or great large hills and they would say, 'We are going to stop here,' and when we had a walk and on top of these large mounds we found these natural springs coming up into the environment.

I think that is something we need to bring back into existence. In the days when I used to travel those areas as a manager for BP Australia, the bores were running untapped and you would see massive amounts of water going to waste, and that does not help the artesian basin at all. We looked at Lake Eyre covering the whole area and saw all the rivers entering from Queensland. It was a massive sight and very impressive to see it firsthand. I will not say who had a little bit of air sickness on the planes, but we certainly appreciated that view.

We also have to look at the funding up there. Some of the staff are so dedicated that, during their annual leave, they assist other government agencies to do the work. This is what they do with their annual leave, and people do not realise this. They do not get paid for this extra work and, while they are assisting their fellow colleagues in other government agencies, it also saves money for the government and gets more work done. That is something this state needs to take on board.

The other issue is that, because the boards are trying to keep down their costs, some people are utilising their houses as offices, and that is something we need to take up. We need to make certain that these people have a decent office with facilities and not have to use their lounge room or kitchen table for their operation.

I find this committee very informative and challenging, and I think it is a very important committee. In my role as the member for Frome, I go to all the regional NRM meetings in my electorate on a regular basis. The reason I do that is to get firsthand knowledge of the issues facing each of the NRM boards. The discussion that comes out of that is intriguing, and you understand exactly where the boards are going and how they are operating.

I would also like to voice my concerns about local governments having to collect the levies. I think that is something this state needs to look at because, as the member for Stuart has indicated, those councils need to justify it to their ratepayers, and it is also another impost on local government to collect it and distribute it to the state government. I will close there. I am

very appreciative of the opportunity of being on this committee, because I think it is great, and I commend these reports to parliament.

Motion carried.