

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: DRAFT MURRAY-DARLING BASIN PLAN

Mr BROCK (Frome) (11:15): I take this opportunity also to speak on the Natural Resources Committee's report, which is before the Parliament of South Australia for discussion and to look at the Murray-Darling Basin draft plan. As the member for Stuart has already done, I also thank in advance all the members of this committee. It has been a committee that has worked very well. It is a bipartisan committee, and we get on very well. The Hon. Steph Key, our chairperson, has been a great leader and an inspiration to us, and she has guided us very well. I also thank the staff of our committee—Patrick Dupont, David Trebilcock and Dr Mark Siebentritt—for their work. The staff have worked tirelessly to complete this report and the recommendations for us. The report has been very well received by the community. As the member for Stuart said, we wanted to make certain that we did not just do a desktop audit. We went out and talked to people, and we also had submissions coming in.

One of the issues I have is that Port Pirie is reliant 100 per cent on the River Murray. So, I am very passionate about this committee, and I am very passionate about the health of the river and the Murray-Darling Basin. Before I go into discussing the issues, I want to say that I am very disappointed in terms of the local government's point of view. We asked for local government to forward recommendations. I specifically asked the councils in my region, and out of all the local government councils in South Australia, only three put in a submission to the committee, two from the Murray and one from outside, and that was the District Council of Barunga West. We need to be very clear that, if we have a concern, we need to put in a submission outlining that concern, no matter how small it may be, to ensure that when people higher up look at this to make a decision, they will see that there are concerns out there; otherwise, if they do not put in a submission, people will say, 'There were no issues; the status quo is quite okay.'

The River Murray is the lifeblood of this state, with its health underpinning much of the state's economy, history and ongoing prosperity. As well as supporting communities in the basin, as I indicated, the River Murray is also a critical source of water not only to Adelaide and the communities across the vast areas of South Australia but, in particular, the cities of the Upper Spencer Gulf, the Copper Coast and also around the Clare Valley, which has a mixture of bore water and mains water. Very clearly, we rely on the health of that river. People say to me, 'Why are you concerned about the health of the River Murray; you don't live on the Murray?'

As the member for Stuart has indicated, and as other people have said, 'We live off the River Murray. If it goes down and it does not survive, we are the ones who suffer.' In fact, the majority of the members seated in this chamber, except perhaps for the member for Finniss and the member for Mount Gambier, would have at least part of their electorate serviced by water from the river. In times gone by, South Australians argued passionately to protect the river system, and now we in this chamber, and that includes all political parties, and we as a state need to do this again. I can vividly remember, as a councillor in the Port Pirie Regional Council, attending a water conference at UniSA—

Mr Venning: As the mayor?

Mr BROCK: No. I was a councillor at the time; it was before I became the mayor. This was when my wife was alive. It is a long time ago. Member for Schubert, if you can be a bit patient, I will explain to you how it turned out.

Mr Venning: I will.

Mr BROCK: You will? Thank you. I attended this conference on water. It was on a Saturday morning. I went to North Terrace, and I sat in there. The speaker talked about the salinity of the River Murray and the viability of the river, and he talked about the reduced opportunities for selling wines to Europe and so on because of the quality assurance that would not be there in the future.

He also mentioned that there would be wars between the states and that there would be water trading happening. I looked at it, and I thought, 'This is a comical show.' I sat there for the whole conference. When I got back home, my late wife said, 'How did it go?' I said, 'It was just a comical show. It is a far-fetched thing, and it will never happen.' It is happening today. The issues are there. We are not at war, but each state does not agree. There is an issue with salinity, and the health of the river and the Murray-Darling Basin is at risk. That conference was held over 20 years ago. We should have listened, but we did not. Now is the time to get this right.

The basin planning process provides the best opportunity yet to deal with the root cause of all these problems. However, the committee believes that, in its current form, the basin plan fails to meet the objectives of the commonwealth Water Act 2007 and does not meet the social, economic, cultural or environmental needs of South Australia and South Australians. Significant amendments are needed and key pieces of additional work are still required.

Whilst the terms of reference for the Murray-Darling Basin plan were very concise, it is my belief as an individual that we need to look outside the square and bring extra water in from other under-utilised locations to better utilise our precious resource to achieve the fullest economic outcome for not only South Australia but all of Australia and, very importantly, to improve the health of the river system.

The Hon. Steph Key has put the three recommendations of the committee forward, and I agree with those. In closing, I reiterate that we need to start acting as Australians and not as individual states. This is our time. We need to get this plan right. As a country and as a state, we need to get it right. I commend the report to the house.