

House: Legislative Assembly- Premier's Statement

Date: Tuesday, 27 February 2007

Member: Carpenter, Mr Alan; **SPEAKER; SPEAKER; Omodei, Mr Paul; DEPUTY SPEAKER; Radisich, Ms Jaye; DEPUTY SPEAKER; DEPUTY SPEAKER; Waldron, Mr Terry; DEPUTY SPEAKER; Castrilli, Mr John**

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Another area I want to touch on is the **Yarragadee** aquifer. I was delighted to read recently in *The West Australian* that Premier Carpenter had given his promise that the **Yarragadee** project would not proceed if it would do damage to the environment. Given that promise, I call on the Premier to announce today that the Water Corporation's proposal to take 45 gigalitres a year from the **Yarragadee** to be used in Perth will be scrapped. I am sure that the Premier's advisers have had time to read the Environmental Protection Authority's report into the **Yarragadee** proposal. The report contains sufficient uncertainty and concerns about the impact of the project on the environment of the south west to lead the Premier to make good his promise and scrap the project.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Are you going to acknowledge that that report gave approval to the project?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: It did not give approval; it gave conditional approval, subject to a whole set of criteria. One area that needs to be raised again is the recharge rate of the **Yarragadee**. In October 2005, the peer review panel appointed by the state government made a submission on the **Yarragadee**. The panel used the "best science available" - a term the Water Corporation loves to use - to make its determination that the net recharge rate for the **Yarragadee** is 374 gigalitres a year. A little over 12 months later, the recharge rate, again using the best available science, has been determined by the Environmental Protection Authority to be only 150 gigalitres a year. The difference between the two figures is quite astounding. The fall in the known recharge rate would in itself be sufficient for the Water Corporation to reconsider its proposal.

The **Yarragadee** aquifer sustains a number of very important ecosystems in the south west through open discharge into river systems, such as the Blackwood River, and wetlands. The maintenance of the region's watertable is very strongly influenced by the **Yarragadee**. Playing with the natural balance between recharge and discharge into the environment through direct recharge and maintenance of ground water levels is a looming environmental disaster, with the potential to dwarf any tragedy foisted on the environment since Federation. We need only consider the numbers to realise how fragile an environment the **Yarragadee** is.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: It is reported to hold over one billion gigalitres of water, yet its net recharge is only 150 gigalitres a year. If the actions of the Water Corporation damage the aquifer, how long will it take to repair? Will it be one, two, three or 100 lifetimes? If this catastrophic event takes place, what

does the Water Corporation intend to do about it? It intends to rape and pillage the already strained river systems of the south west. It cannot do this by tapping some of the larger and less utilised rivers of the south west, because they are already too polluted and high in salinity. Every year, in excess of 100 gigalitres of useable water pours out of Perth into the ocean. There has been a lot of talk about recycled water, and this has focused on the disagreeable thought of drinking our own waste. As we know, sewerage is known as black water. However, the 100 gigalitres of grey water that is currently being wasted deserves to be given attention. Many people would resist drinking recycled black water. However, there would be little resistance to drinking recycled grey water. We need to be more diverse in our thinking about water solutions. One solution would be to have multiple pipe systems, with one pipe to deliver drinking water and another pipe to deliver water for use in commercial businesses, gardens, sporting grounds and nature strips.

The problem of restricting access to water sources will not vanish over the next few years or decades. We need to engage in long-term planning. However, we are not about to run out of water tomorrow. Our environment is too precious to this state and to Australia to make a misguided and pre-emptive move to further develop a water resource that we simply do not know enough about. Perhaps one day **Yarragadee** water will flow to Perth. However, that decision does not need to be made now. We have plenty of time in which to conduct a more in-depth study and to further improve the science and explore other alternatives.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Are you aware of how much research has been done over the past four years?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am, minister. I have had discussions with departmental heads. The problem is that the people of the south west - the minister can talk to his members about this - do not believe the minister. Figures are being bandied around all over this state about recharge rates and how much water is available. The problem is that no-one believes them.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Perhaps that is because there has been too much science and everyone has become lost in it.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: The minister should not make light of a very serious situation.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: I am not. I am saying that is part of the problem.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am saying that people do not believe the figures that are being bandied around. Those figures are changing every five minutes. The recent debate about whether the price of water should be increased has yet to run its course in the public arena. I believe a more logical approach can be taken to water management than simply increasing the price of water. That argument is similar to the argument that the price of sweets should be increased to prevent obesity. The price of water may well increase in this state. However, that should be because hard decisions have been made about how to utilise our existing water resources. The **Yarragadee** may be the cheapest option for the supply of water to the metropolitan area - even that is debateable - but that does

not make it the best option. There are other options, such as processing the water in Wellington Dam. That has been mentioned today. Concerns have been expressed about the government's claim that it will cost \$850 million to process that water. I have yet to see why the cost will be so high. However, if that is the case, it will lead to a natural increase in water charges. That will mean that the people who are calling for water prices to be increased to reduce consumption will get their wish. It will mean also that we will be utilising a water source that is currently being wasted, and we will be removing the risk that the south west's natural beauty will be destroyed.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr J.C. Kobelke (Leader of the House)**.

House adjourned at 9.58 pm