

WATER FOR FOOD PROGRAM — SOUTHERN FORESTS IRRIGATION SCHEME

178. Hon COLIN TINCKNELL to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, under the Water for Food program, ran several public forums promoting the southern forests irrigation scheme.

- (1) Did state government representatives make it clear at any of those forums that 12 gigalitres of water was going to be re-allocated away from self-supply water users in the eight sub-catchments of the Donnelly River to favour the southern forests irrigation scheme?
- (2) Does the minister think there would have been as many expressions of interest in the irrigation scheme from food producers if they had been told that now up to 15 gigalitres of water for the irrigation scheme would be taken from the allocated self-supply water of food producers in the eight sub-catchments of the Donnelly River, now closed to new water licences for farm dams?
- (3) Does the minister appreciate that denial of rights to self-supply water can halve the value of a farming property and deny income potential?
- (4) Has the state government sought advice from the State Solicitor's Office regarding potential claims for damages by food producers in the eight sub-catchments of the Donnelly River closed to new water licences for farm dams, and what did the advice say?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question.

- (1) I am advised that in all public forums it was clear that the underlying premise of the southern forests irrigation scheme was to ensure the limited water available could be delivered to where there was greatest need. The industry-led project seeks to maximise economic growth in the region and provide greater water security for the agricultural sector while ensuring appropriate environmental water provisions.
- (2) No allocation has been taken away from self-supply users and many catchment areas are already fully allocated. I do not consider this issue would have influenced the expression-of-interest process.
- (3) The rights of self-supply users have not been denied and there has been no change to current water licences. The only impact is on those speculating that licence applications would be awarded in the future and many areas are fully allocated, irrespective of the scheme proceeding or not. The steps taken to date have been made to support economic growth in the region and provide greater water security to all in the agricultural sector, especially against the backdrop of a drying climate and balancing the water needs of our precious natural environment.
- (4) No.