

DESALINATION PLANT

554. Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE to the Minister for Water:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's investment in infrastructure that will set up WA for the future, including the \$1.4 billion that has been set aside for a new desalination plant. Can the minister outline to the house how this investment will help secure the future of Perth's drinking water supply?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

I thank the member for the question. We on this side of the house accept that climate change is real. The south west of Western Australia is one of the places on the planet most impacted upon by climate change causing declining rainfall. We have seen about a 15 per cent reduction in rainfall in the south west since the 1970s. For Perth, that has meant a drastic reduction in the amount of water running into our dams. We used to get each year on average in winter 400 billion litres of water running into our dams due to rainfall. Now, if we get 50 billion litres, we think we have done well. This winter people think we have had a lot of rain. So far we have had 110 billion litres run into our dams—not the 400 that we normally got, but 110. Because of that, we now rely very heavily on desalination. Forty-three per cent of our drinking water for Perth comes from desalination. It was the Gallop–Carpenter Labor government, of course, that commissioned Australia's first large-scale desalination plant in 2006. In this budget, we have continued that work. We have allocated \$1.4 billion for the next source. Through the Water Corporation, we are investigating one site in the northern suburbs and one site in Kwinana to determine a final location for the next source.

The amount of \$1.4 billion is a very significant investment. Incidentally, it will not cover the full cost of that project. I understand that through the great advocacy of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, for the first time, Infrastructure Australia has given a high-priority rating to securing Perth's water supply. For the first time, the federal government, through Infrastructure Australia, has recognised the need for this project. We look forward to the federal government in due course making a contribution to this project. This is because of the sound financial management and good budgeting that the Premier; Treasurer has done to get Perth's water supply on a secure footing.

Some people think that climate change is not real. Some people think that if it is real, it is a problem for some time in the future. Here in Western Australia, climate change is costing us money now. I note that a few weeks ago the federal government announced a \$1.4 billion fund for water infrastructure, but it is available only to states that share part of the Murray–Darling Basin. That is \$1.4 billion that Western Australia will not be able to access —

Ms M.J. Davies: You won't sign up.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The Leader of the Opposition actually does not know what she is talking about.

Ms M.J. Davies: You are able to sign up to that program and you refuse to.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Will you just listen? This is a \$1.4 billion fund that is accessible only by states that share part of the Murray–Darling Basin. Unless we move the state of Western Australia over to the Murray–Darling Basin, we cannot access that fund.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: That is true. Geography is not the Leader of the Opposition's area. Leader of the Opposition, it is a \$1.4 billion fund for the Murray–Darling Basin states. We cannot access it. We have said to the federal government, "Fair enough—provide all that money to the eastern states for water infrastructure, but we should get our share." This particular project, the next desalination plant for Perth, is one project that the federal government could contribute to. We understand the impacts of climate change. We understand that to deal with these things requires significant infrastructure investment. The fact that we have delivered such a stellar budget this year means that we can put a significant down payment on Perth's next water source.

The SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition with the final question.