

WATER LICENCES

746. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Water:

I have a supplementary question. Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you for your answer, minister. How could it possibly be, as it is outlined in the minister's discussion paper, that it will cost the same to renew the licence for the irrigation dam on the Ord River as it will to renew the licence for a farm irrigation dam in Manjimup?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

Thanks for the question. I am glad the member raised that, because one of the points he said was that issuing or renewing a water licence for the Ord River Dam might end up, under one scenario, costing the same as a much smaller dam in the south west—that is, of course, if it is a dam that is covered, not one of the 96 per cent that are not covered. A water reference group was set up under the previous government that has on it all the industry parties—horticulturalists and a whole bunch of people in the water industry. One of the issues that it raised with us, when the issue of water licences was raised with it, is the strong view of the group that the licence arrangement should not be based on a volumetric charge. It should not be based on how much water is involved in the licence, because then it is not a charge based on the true cost of administering the licence; it is a de facto charge on the water itself. Does the member understand what I am saying? The fact that the Ord River Dam has a lot of water in it, as I am sure the member is aware, compared with a dam of much smaller size, they said they did not want it to be based on the volume of water; they wanted it to be based on the true cost of issuing that licence.

The cost of issuing and assessing that licence varies according to the complexity of the water allocation plan that that water comes from. In an environment in which we have a water allocation plan that is in great demand, subject to changes due to climate change and under great stress, the complexity and cost and the work that needs to be done to ensure that that water licence can be granted or renewed might be the same as the work involved in administering a licence for a much bigger water allocation.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! Minister, I am sure the other minister wants a question and he is looking very closely at the clock.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I am trying to finish the answer. I keep getting interjected on.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members, please. Let us get it over and done with.

Mr D.J. KELLY: As I said, member for Cottesloe, we have not made a decision as to what we might do or how any fees would be calculated.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr D.J. KELLY: No, we have not made a decision to change it —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr D.J. KELLY: All I am saying to the member for Cottesloe and other members opposite is that if they are true to their principles of accepting that people should not get government services for free—industry should not be, in effect, subsidised by the mums and dads out there who would otherwise have to pay for it—they would sensibly engage in this issue. If we do it right, we can get a fair result for everybody, including those in the community who want us to fund men's sheds and those who want to fund domestic violence and mental health services.