

Chairman; Mr John Day; Mr John Kobelke; Dr S.C.THOMAS; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr John Quigley; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Terry Waldron; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Tom Stephens

Water Corporation -

Mr M.J. Cowper, Chairman.

Mr J.C. Kobelke, Minister for Water Resources.

Mr P. Moore, Acting Chief Executive Officer.

Mr R. Hughes, Chief Financial Officer.

The CHAIRMAN: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard staff. The daily proof *Hansard* will be published at 9.00 am tomorrow. Members may raise questions about matters relating to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. Off-budget authority officers are recognised as ministerial advisers.

It is the intention of the Chairman to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next Assembly sitting week. For the purpose of following up the provision of this information, I ask the minister to clearly indicate to the committee which supplementary information he agrees to provide, and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the committee clerk by 8 June 2007 so that members may read it before the report and third reading stages. If the supplementary information cannot be provided within that time, written advice is required of the day by which the information will be made available. Details in relation to supplementary information have been provided to both members and advisers, and, accordingly, I ask the minister to cooperate with those requirements.

I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice with the Clerk's office. Only supplementary information that the minister agrees to provide will be sought by 8 June 2007.

It will also greatly assist Hansard if when referring to the program statements volumes or the consolidated account estimates, members give the page number, item, program and amount in preface to their question.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: My question relates to the new water sources allocation in the capital works program, and in particular to the recent decision not to go ahead with the extraction of water from the Yarragadee aquifer and instead to go ahead with the second desalination plant. When did cabinet make that decision? Who prepared the cabinet submission for that decision to be made? Did consultation occur with the Water Corporation board and residents in the Binningup area in relation to the decision?

[Mrs D.J. Guise took the chair.]

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: To answer the last part first, there was no consultation with the residents of Binningup until the decision had been made. Once the decision had been made, we entered into that. Consultation with the Water Corporation goes back many, many months, as we were carrying forward two proposals. Clearly, the south west Yarragadee was far more advanced six months or so ago than a second desalination plant proposal. The Water Corporation was looking at a range of sites for another desalination option, and the Binningup site firmed up a few months ago as being one of the preferred sites, if not the preferred site. My office and I were responsible for the preparation of the cabinet minute. That decision was taken at cabinet just a few days before it was announced.

Dr S.C.THOMAS: I refer the minister to the seventh paragraph on page 457 that reads -

\$30.0 million will be spent on the Infill Sewerage Program as part of the Water Corporation's efforts to reduce the health and environmental impacts of septic tanks.

Can the minister start off by telling me the health and environmental impacts of septic tanks?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Septic tanks in some areas are quite aged; therefore, the issue arises that they cease functioning and collapse. I grew up in a home in which that happened all the time. We emptied out the tanks. When a tank was too bad, a new one was built. We find in some suburbs with great density and larger houses that issues can arise that make replacement with a new tank very difficult, and, in some cases, not possible. The issue of septic tanks and the environment I think has been grossly overstated. The data regarding eutrophication and problems in the Swan River indicate that the contribution from groundwater enriched from septic tanks is quite small. There is no hard and fast data. From my inquiries, the septic tank matter could be in the order of 10 per cent of the total contribution. Of course, it takes many years for the water from septic tanks to move through the groundwater and into the Swan and Canning Rivers. Removing all septic tanks is quite a minor issue among the environmental effects on the Swan and Canning Rivers. The big advantage that has flowed from the infill sewerage program has been with planning, which clearly also has environmental impacts as the

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program allows greater density. This relates to travel and all the other things that impact on the environment. There are advantages. However, these are really secondary advantages to the infill sewerage program.

I have stated the program's criteria before, but I will state them again. The priorities set for the \$800 million project, which is well towards completion, are based on protecting water sources, health and the environment - it is third - and matters such as planning come well behind those priorities. The program's priorities have largely stayed in place since its inception in 1994. Delays have occurred in the program's rollout, which I am happy to explain. A review some months ago looked at reconfiguring the priorities a little, but the changes were not major.

Dr S.C.THOMAS: The minister basically said that there are not really any environmental impacts from the program, but the main aim of the original 10-year, \$900 million program was to protect waterways because of the potential environmental risk. Does the minister not see a problem or dichotomy in his argument?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I would prefer it if the member did not seek to misrepresent me. I did not say that at all. Ask another question.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Dear, oh, dear!

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It is a complex issue. The member is an intelligent person; he can understand the issue, and we can have a rational discussion. He does not have to misrepresent what I say.

Dr S.C.THOMAS: Does the minister acknowledge then that the lack of infill sewerage in a number of places is stunting growth, particularly in rural country towns? As areas have no access to sewerage infrastructure, they are unable to release smaller lots. The minister talked about density and acknowledged that higher density housing is one issue. In effect, the government is strangling the growth of regional country towns by not providing this infrastructure. Is the minister somewhat embarrassed by the cutting of that program? Some country towns will not get deep sewerage in place until about 2025. Plans for places such as Boyup Brook and Donnybrook in my area have completion times in the 2020s.

[4.10 pm]

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The member's question is misdirected. I will explain why. Smaller country towns were never part of the infill sewerage program. There is no delay in them because they were never on the program. When the Court government initiated the program in 1994 they were not part of the infill sewerage program.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: They were obviously part of a program, because I had a veterinary clinic in Donnybrook, which I have since sold, and I received a letter from the Water Corporation in 1998 saying that Donnybrook was about to have deep sewerage and I needed to spend \$3 000 to pre-lay the pipes so it was ready to go. A couple of months before it was ready to go in 2001, I received a letter saying that, by the way, the program was being deferred. The words were to the effect that there was no idea when deep sewerage would be attached. Bear in mind that that is Donnybrook stage 1B, which would take the Donnybrook coverage from five per cent of the town to 10 per cent. It has now started, at last. There were indications at that point that it would be the 2020s before a town like Donnybrook would receive its full coverage.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The infill sewerage program that was started in 1994 will be completed in 2012-13.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: The member for Wagin has just informed me that Boyup Brook will start its infill sewerage program in 2018.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: We have to keep in mind that the infill sewerage program, which kicked off in 1994, is not the only sewerage that is constructed; there is a range of other programs as well. That was the infill sewerage program. There was also a small country towns scheme, which was mooted by the previous government; nothing was done on it. We came to government and started on a trial basis. It was always said to be a trial. The member for Wagin has made representations to me on that. I am happy to talk about it but that is not the infill sewerage program.

I have just been advised that Boyup Brook 1A and 2A will be completed by 2010-11.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: That is news to the local member but we appreciate it and we will hold the minister to it.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I refer to the fourth paragraph at page 457 of the *Budget Statements*. It states -

... \$153.0 million will be spent on the Alkimos Wastewater Treatment project as part of a \$420.0 million commitment to northwest urban corridor development. A portion of the costs is for the relocation of the planned wastewater treatment plant. A key outcome of the plant relocation will be enhanced urban design, better planning outcomes ...

The people of Quinns Rocks were promised sewerage reticulation in 2001 by the Water Corporation. They were then given a promise by the Water Corporation in 2004 for water reticulation. Prior to the election they received

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another promise from the Water Corporation of sewerage reticulation by 2006. They are devastated to learn that it will not happen until after the building of the Alkimos waste water treatment project. Quinns Rocks is the only community on the north coast that lacks reticulated sewerage. With what confidence can I now - given that the people from the Water Corporation are in the chamber - inform the people of Quinns Rocks that they are going to get reticulated sewerage? By what date will they get it?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I appreciate that the member for Mindarie is a very strong and effective advocate on behalf of his electorate. Quinns Rocks is a problem area.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: He is a member of the government; not the opposition.

The CHAIRMAN: Member for Darling Range! I want to hear the answer; it is an excellent question.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: This is my seventh year in estimates as a minister and I have always found that questions from government members are tougher than those put by the opposition!

The member has a gripe on behalf of his constituents that has some basis. Clearly, there was an understanding that Quinns Rocks could have infill sewerage. Part of it is being done. The expectation that the project could be brought forward to finish Quinns Rocks has not been delivered on. It is still a bit of an open question because the growth in the northern corridor has meant that the capacity of the waste water treatment plants to treat the sewage is pushed to the maximum. Waste water from the area is brought south to Beenyup. A major program in the budget is to enhance Beenyup simply to meet the demand of the huge growth of new housing in the northern suburbs. We had hoped that the plant at Alkimos would be brought on stream earlier. It is a priority for us in the budget, as members can see. It is a major project to which we have allocated \$420 million. Having that in place is essential before we can guarantee being able to sewer those additional areas. I would like to see whether we can bring those areas on earlier but the balance is that we may have to put some controls on new urban development and the demand it creates with sewage treatment if we were to bring the Quinns Rocks area on earlier.

Although it is very important for local residents, it does not get a priority according to the criteria of protecting water supply, health and environment. The planning advantages are considerable. I am not underestimating them; they are very useful and important for individuals and the wider community. On that basis we would have difficulty. It is not the priority based on that criteria; it is more the problem we have with the huge growth in the northern suburbs and the extra demand for waste water treatment and the plant at Beenyup being stretched to capacity.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: I require further information. Residents were told that the Alkimos plant would have to be built before they could be connected. With what confidence can I tell them that it will be built by 2011? Can the community be confident that they will have a hook up by 2011?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Our target is to have it ready by 2010, but it is a major construction. People may run into engineering or other problems. Some of the tenders have not yet been let.

Mr J.R. QUIGLEY: If the target for completion is 2010, can people look forward with confidence to a hook up by 2011?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The acting chief executive officer indicates that that is correct.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I refer to the third paragraph at page 457, which refers to the investment of \$5.9 million for a drinking water supply in Coral Bay. I use this example as a lead in because some strong parallels can be drawn between Coral Bay and the community of Walpole. The points that have been highlighted for this investment include that there are significant numbers of tourist groups that go to Coral Bay and that it is surrounded by a marine park. Indeed, the community of Walpole has similar circumstances. There is a soon to be proclaimed marine park and there is a significant influx of tourists at various times of the year. As the minister is well aware, there was a requirement to cart water into Walpole due to a shortfall in the capacity of the Water Corporation to deliver water to the community. What was the cost of delivering water to the Walpole community? What confidence can be given to the community of Walpole that the problem will not occur again? I note that in the budget there is no commitment to capital works - at least I have not been able to identify any commitment - for the enhancement of the provision of scheme water.

[4.20 pm]

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I am not sure if there is much of a basis for comparison between Walpole and Coral Bay. They are very different environmentally and have totally different rainfall. Although local communities feel that the carting of water is something that is unusual and creates concern, it is sometimes a very good management option. It would be a huge cost to roll out the level of security required across all our small rural towns. We already provide a subsidy on rural water and sewerage of well over \$200 million; that is, people in Perth pay

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more so that we can make sure that there is not a huge disadvantage for country people, who tend to pay more because of the huge cost. It makes sense in these towns, particularly when last year was the driest year ever, and the reliance of Walpole on that local supply has been a problem. We have been carting water to a number of rural towns for a number of years. At some stage the decision will be made to upgrade the water supply and bring in a whole new system, but that will be based on judgements about whether there is growing demand that is not likely to be met and whether the existing supply is no longer reliable. I will ask Mr Moore in a moment to make some more comments on that, but the situation in Walpole is not the same as that at Coral Bay. Coral Bay is part of a whole regional tourism development scheme in a very pristine and fragile environment in which we need to make sure that we provide services to a burgeoning tourism industry. Therefore, a one-off decision was made based on the particular elements in that place. The issue of Walpole has clearly caused concern to local residents.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Is the minister suggesting that Walpole is not pristine and fragile?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It is not, from the same water perspective. There are environmental issues in most of our coastal towns, but I do not think a comparison can be made between the environmental issues being confronted at Coral Bay and the situation at Walpole. I have been involved since the 1990s with the sewerage issue and the growth around Walpole. There were a whole range of issues when I was in opposition, but they were not related to water supply. Mr Moore might like to make some comment about the water supply for Walpole.

Mr P. Moore: There have certainly been issues because of the very dry summer we have just had and the available resources. As the minister said, we reflected on that and planning is being undertaken with the local community to identify other sources of water for Walpole. As soon as that is available to us, and we can get agreement on it and get the necessary approvals in place, there will be new sources of water, as there will be an expansion of the waste water scheme in Walpole. We have been working with a community group down there for a number of months and, as the member is probably aware, a number of sites are being looked at for both water and waste water uses. All of them have some difficulties because of the environment down there.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: One of the questions we have not answered is the actual cost of carting water in the past year. We will be happy to provide that by way of supplementary information.

[Supplementary Information No A51.]

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I refer the minister back to page 457, and the same point as that raised by the member for Capel regarding the infill sewerage program. I know the minister stated that some of the small towns are not part of that program, but I have met with the minister about the small town sewerage programs, particularly for Hyden, Kondinin and Kukerin, and I have a letter from him about that. Can the minister advise if the review he referred to is actually proceeding? Can he give an update on the progress of that review, and when it may be completed, so that we know what is happening in those areas and can make other plans if necessary?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Once again, Mr Moore may wish to give more detail when I finish. It was simply a trial that we took up when we came into government. The issue was how we could provide sewerage in a cost-effective way. There was a fear that the cost would just be too prohibitive. That fear is still there. I think the member is aware of the high cost per lot in the two towns that have been done. When I first became the minister responsible, the Water Corporation came to me asking whether it should proceed with Tambellup. We were under pressure because of the huge demands for extra water infrastructure, but we did go ahead with Tambellup. That has been completed, or is very close to completion. The issue then is to do a proper assessment of the costs and whether we have learnt things that will help to get the cost down, through the construction and engineering or the way in which the cost is shared with the various partners. I understand that the review will come to me in about August. I think the member is well aware that there are underlying drivers of that cost structure that should be looked at, such as health and environmental standards, and whether a different way can be found to do it, with a different cost structure that would mean that we could go ahead and do more towns at a quicker pace. That is not part of the primary review that is taking place, but I have given an undertaking to a number of members that, on that review, we will look to see if we need to do more work on those environmental and health standards. Mr Moore might like to add just a little to that.

Mr P. Moore: I think the minister has covered it very well. That is the context of the review, and the minister indicated the issues to be considered in looking for other ways of doing it. We did that from day one, but we really need to look at it now to see if it will be economically viable to do those towns.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: Can the minister advise, either today or via supplementary information, what the cost of the Tambellup project ended up being?

Mr P. Moore: I can give a broad scale figure on a per lot basis. The out-turn cost is in the order of \$26 000 a lot. I cannot give the total cost today, but we could supply that by way of supplementary information.

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Mr J.C. KOBELKE: We will provide, by way of supplementary information, confirmation of Mr Moore's figures on the per lot cost, and the total cost of the project.

[*Supplementary Information No A52.*]

Mr P. PAPALIA: I refer to the line item on page 458 for the Perth seawater desalination plant. I had the pleasure of attending the opening of the Perth seawater desalination plant. I note that this year's budget includes estimated expenditure of a further \$2.7 million, rolling down from higher levels in previous years. Can the minister provide a briefing on the operation of that plant, and what that money is for?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: In a moment I will defer to Mr Moore for the details of that expenditure, but I will first make a comment on the outstanding success of the plant. I congratulate the Water Corporation people and their partners, Multiplex and Degrémont. The plant has been an outstanding success, and people are now coming from all around the world to inspect it. It has really set benchmarks for environmental standards and energy efficiency. It is incredible that we should have such an outstanding success when opposition members and others were bagging the project when the government committed to it. The foresight of this government, particularly when it was led by Premier Gallop, drawing on the expertise and advice of the Water Corporation, enabled us to produce an outstanding facility producing water at a time when we need it because of our drying climate. I will ask Mr Moore if he is able to shed some light on the extra \$2.7 million expenditure.

Mr P. Moore: In the completion of the plant and its commissioning, one of the things we did not do was place noise abatement around the high-pressure pumps and the energy recovery units. That is still being done, and will flow slightly into the following year. The allocation is just for completing some of the minor finishing touches to the plant.

Mr P. PAPALIA: In relation to the noise abatement, when I was touring the plant it was pointed out to me that if the doors were shut, it was almost completely silent and it could not be heard from a very short distance away. Noting some of the concerns raised of late about the proposed Binningup plant, it might be worth getting that on the record as well. Is it not the case that if the doors can be closed, the system is virtually silent outside?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: We are concerned that noise should not be emitted from the plant, which may be an issue for those in the neighbourhood, but there is also the issue of the people who are employed there. If people are working for extended periods within the building, reducing the noise is also an occupational health and safety factor.

[4.30 pm]

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I have a couple of questions about water re-use and water recycling. What proportion of the water that is consumed in the integrated water supply system is currently re-used; that is, treated and re-used as opposed to being treated and pumped out to sea?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I think about nine per cent of the water in the integrated water supply system is re-used, and it is about 13 per cent overall.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Is that across the state?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It is 13 per cent overall and it is about nine per cent in the integrated scheme.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: It is 13 per cent across the state?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Yes, it is 13.6 per cent.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Is that 13 per cent of Water Corporation supplied water?

Mr P. Moore: Yes.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: That is nine per cent of about 270 gegalitres in the IWWS.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It is about 285 gegalitres; it changes from year to year.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: My specific question is about the Alkimos waste water treatment plant, which is referred to on pages 457 and 458 of the budget papers. First, can the minister tell us more about why the plant is being relocated, and what is the additional cost of that? Secondly, what proportion of the water that will go through that plant will be re-used or recycled, and in what way will it be re-used?

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Darling Range has asked an excellent question. I could not have asked a better one.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: First, on the issue of the relocation, the Water Corporation acquired land in the area many years ago for a waste water treatment plant, but the land was right on the coast. When the town planning scheme was put in, there was a clear benefit in having residences right on the coast. I am told that there is a very good

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beach there. That meant that it could recoup value on the land and move the waste water treatment plant inland. That resulted in a range of problems, and it has been an ongoing issue in terms of the Water Corporation and LandCorp coming to a financial agreement and also in terms of the environmental approval. The environmental approval has not been totally finished. There is still ongoing work to ensure that odour ponding will be managed.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: How far inland will it be, roughly?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It will be about 750 metres inland from where it was previously proposed to be located. I do not have a figure for the cost. Although it is getting fairly close to being certain, because some of the details have not been tied down, I do not have a final cost. However, it is hoped that the extra cost will be met by what can be captured from the improved value of land; therefore, it will become a business transaction between LandCorp and the Water Corporation to cover that additional cost.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: The second part of the question was about the re-use of water. What proportion of water is expected to be treated and reused, and in what way will it be re-used?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The plans for water re-use from the Alkimos plant will have to follow through on what is happening at Beenyup, which is a \$30 million trial project. It is in the initial stages, with holes being drilled. We have a very large waste water treatment plant. It is well situated on part of the underground aquifer where there is good quality water. Therefore, there is potential to purify that water to a very high level, inject it into the aquifer at Beenyup and then extract it as drinking water. That plan has been announced and we are happy to explain it. I do not have the details of the exact quality of the aquifer underneath the Alkimos plant, but we hope that it will be similar. There are two issues. First, we cannot commit to major recycling when these plants start up because the initial flow through them is quite small, and we need that flow of water to make its re-use economical, whether it is re-injection or some other re-use. We are very optimistic that the aquifer recharge that will be tried at Beenyup will be useful. We will then wait for the outcomes of the trial over a couple of years before we start the detailed work on how to recycle the water at Alkimos. Clearly, we are setting fairly high targets for recycling. I will seek to ensure that a large amount of that water will be able to be recycled at Alkimos.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Does the minister have any idea of the ultimate proportion of water that will be recycled?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The current level of technology indicates that we should be able to recycle 80 per cent of water from those waste water treatment plants.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I want to confirm that the minister's intention is to use it through the managed aquifer recharge process; is that correct?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: No, but we are putting \$30 million into the current trial. We certainly see that as the frontrunner. If we can get the technology right and there is public confidence in it, which is very important, that water will potentially be put back into a potable supply, and that is the highest value for that water. Clearly, there could be other uses, but on an economic basis, they are not likely to give the same return as the return we could get if the water were available as a potable source.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Is that the only one that the corporation is focusing on at the moment?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: As I have said, we are looking at a range of programs. Water from the Shenton Park waste water treatment plant is re-used. That water is used on ovals, and I think there is a plan to use it to replenish a lake. There are certainly uses available. However, when something is planned that far ahead, we must try to capture the best possible value, and that would be done by recycling water for potable use.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I commend the minister for that recycling project; I think he has nearly got it right. It is good work. I would hate to get into a habit of commending the minister!

I refer to page 458 and the water programs and the desalination project. I have one question on desal 1 and one question on desal 2. The minister may need to provide the answer to my question on desal 1 by way of supplementary information. Can he tell me what levels of total dissolved solids and bromide are coming out of desal 1? Would the minister be willing to provide that information by way of supplementary information?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I understand that the levels are very low, but I am happy to provide that information if it is available. I am sure that the TDS level is available. I am not sure whether the bromide level is checked. I am told that the bromide level is checked. We can provide that information.

[*Supplementary Information No A53.*]

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I thought that that information would be provided by way of supplementary information, and that is fine. I refer to desal 2 and the decision not to tap the Yarragadee aquifer, which I applaud. However,

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will the government rule out building the second desalination plant on land owned by the Water Corporation at Binningup, as originally intimated by the government? Does it intend to use, or will it rule out using, the limestone quarry owned by B. and J. Catalano Pty Ltd as a site for desal 2; and, if it does intend to look at that site, has the Water Corporation spoken to the owners about any of the details?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The Water Corporation is in discussion with the owners of that old quarry site. We are very confident that the land owned by the Water Corporation is more than adequate. It is quite a large piece of land. The advice given to me is that we could build desal 2 for 45 gigalitres, have ample space for a further 45 gigalitres and, in addition, have buffer space around the site. Part of the site is currently used for ponds for waste water treatment. However, if the quarry site is available, there may be less earthworks involved and there could be some convenience in doing that. That is why the Water Corporation is in discussion with the owners of the quarry.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: That is very preliminary at this stage and the Water Corporation is in discussion at this point.

[4.40 pm]

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: No detailed planning has been done for the actual footprint and the engineering requirements. It is still early days on that. Therefore, the issue of whether it is shifted a few metres one way or the other does not affect the level of planning that is currently in place. There could be some advantages in going back to a site that is already cleared and levelled. If that offsets some costs for the Water Corporation, it would be happy to look at that as a minor modification to the site it uses. The Water Corporation is in discussion with the owners. However, we are on a tight time line. We want this water to come through as soon as possible. If there are difficulties in acquiring that land from the owner, I suspect the Water Corporation will go ahead with the more detailed planning required, dedicated to the existing land owned by the Water Corporation.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: I have just sent across to the minister a page from a local newspaper, the *North West Telegraph*, highlighting the raw sewage running down Gatwick Street in Port Hedland again this week. This is the article in the local paper by Ben O'Shea that I sent to the minister yesterday. It follows on from strident representations that I have been making to the minister and to the government about infill sewerage needs in the town of Port Hedland and the response that the priority must be health and environmental impacts. At what level or at what ankle height would the sewage have to be before the Water Corporation could elevate Port Hedland so that it received priority? This is a town in which the hotels are full and being hot-bedded. I think the Cherry Blossom Motel in Darwin operates on an occupancy level of about 300 or 400 per cent, and that is because it is a brothel. The hotels in Port Hedland operate at a lower occupancy level than that, but they are effectively full. The sewerage systems are collapsing around the hotels. The houses are now overcrowded with extra people because of the development pressures on the town. There is no opportunity for additional land release because nobody can go to the town to do the jobs that are needed to be done to expand the town's facilities. At what point does the minister think we would have a chance of raising this issue to a level of priority? I know it is a safe seat, but now that the sewage is running down the street, might the economic needs, health needs and environmental needs get us there?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Clearly, there are a range of issues in Port Hedland, for which the member is a very strong advocate, given the huge rate of growth and all the pressures and tensions that causes. Although the Water Corporation is a fantastic organisation, in my view, and does a good job, it is not its responsibility to fix the problem for every private company or owner who runs into difficulty. Quite often, we receive these complaints, and although the Water Corporation goes in and helps, we find that the matter is totally within the responsibility of the owner. I do not have all the facts of this case. However, it appears to be one in which the waste water treatment facility has been put in by the owner. It is not something that the Water Corporation has any responsibility for. The solution is a straightforward one that the owner is responsible for; he can fix the problem. If there are other advantages to the community in going to a reticulated sewerage scheme, so that we can get greater density or a more efficient system, clearly the Water Corporation would go in and assist, and we have funding mechanisms by which we help to carry some of the cost. However, it has not been established to my satisfaction that this is an issue that is other than the responsibility of a particular company or a particular owner. As I said, it is quite easily within their ability to fix the issue. If there is a broader issue, I would be very happy to get the detail of it.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I go back again to the seventh paragraph on page 457 regarding the infill sewerage program. The last sentence of that paragraph states -

Other wastewater programs totalling \$24.9 million include overflow risk management, main sewer refurbishments and a host of minor works.

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Can the minister perhaps detail for me today some of the major works that will be carried out under those programs, where they may be and what the time line is for them? I refer to the other waste water programs totalling \$24.9 million.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I will ask Mr Moore to provide a bit of detail on that.

Mr P. Moore: Most of that project is related to what we call the overflow risk management program. In Perth, we are refurbishing a lot of the sewers, relining sewers, relaying some of Perth's main sewer and making provision in a number of the pump stations close to the river for overflow storage and things of that nature. A lot of work is involved in that, and most of it is in the Perth metropolitan area - in that zone - and in some of the larger country towns, with pump stations and overflow storage, and security of those.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: Does Mr Moore know any of those major country areas, or can he not tell me offhand?

Mr P. Moore: I cannot tell the member off the top of my head, I am sorry.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I refer to the \$30 million for infill sewerage that is mentioned on page 457. I will use that as a lead-in. My question relates to the enthusiasm of the Water Corporation to look at alternatives for dealing with sewage. This is something that is raised quite often in my neck of the woods. One of the areas that is highlighted is Walpole and its needs, and there has been some discussion about Walpole today already. Some of the criticism from the community is that there is only a handful of options. I guess they are options which have been proved up and which the Water Corporation is happy with, and we know that they deliver from a health perspective. I understand all that. However, does the corporation have the enthusiasm, if one likes, to look at some other options and to try to perhaps use some of these communities as a case study for another way of looking at it that might not only be cost effective, but also deliver on a growing community concern that we need to look at reusing some of the resource that in the past we have been wasting?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I certainly think it is very important that we try to be innovative, because there are real advantages in coming up with new schemes. Although our reticulated sewerage scheme is very efficient and absolutely crucial to good health in built-up areas, in areas that are remote or that have a less dense residential pattern, reticulated sewerage becomes very expensive. In the case of Wiluna, where there is very heavy, hard rock, the cost is prohibitive. Wiluna is an example of a town in which the Water Corporation was very innovative. It came up with a different scheme, rather than deep sewerage. The Water Corporation is open to considering alternative schemes, but it must also make sure that they meet health standards. Some of the stand-alone treatment systems are well proved, but they require at least a minimal amount of maintenance. Therefore, there may be a situation in which someone who is a great advocate of these systems puts one in for his own use. However, that person may then sell the property. Someone who is not so sure about the system may purchase the property, and that person may not carry out the maintenance that is required. We could then end up with a major health problem. Perhaps that is why the Department of Health sets very high standards. We regularly have complaints that the introduction of these more innovative schemes is hampered by the health standards that are set. Of course, the Water Corporation does not set the health standards; it just has to comply with them. However, the Water Corporation is open to looking at innovative ways of dealing with sewage in areas in which the cost or environmental factors are prohibitive in providing a decent waste water system.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: But is it proactive in doing so? In other words, rather than saying, "We have an issue here. Let's go and look for something", does the Water Corporation put in resources to actively seek other ways of doing things?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: When the Water Corporation has a problem, it tends to take a very professional engineering approach and say, "We have a problem. How can we solve it in a way that minimises the risks and optimises the outcomes?" It is very open to doing that in what is quite a complex area, and that is not just because of the systems, the science and the engineering; more often the complexity arises because of the approvals that are required through the Department of Health and local government. The Water Corporation then makes sure that there is a supervision or management system in place to maintain those standards. I have just been advised that I left out environmental approvals, which are also a very important part.

[4.50 pm]

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I have three fairly quick questions on water sources, the first going back to the desalination plant and the second on the Yarragadee aquifer. Will the minister ask the commonwealth to contribute anything towards the funding of the second desalination plant?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: We believe that because of the amounts of money that the commonwealth has handed out to other states for water - in some cases for building pipelines - a desal plant that is at the forefront of water

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technology is worthy of some assistance from the federal government. We will certainly be approaching the federal government to see whether it is willing to provide those funds.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Does the minister have any idea how much he will ask for?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I am always optimistic. We are currently trying to engage the federal government to see whether it will be sympathetic to such a request.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Secondly, on the potential use of Wellington Dam, which the minister has argued in the past is some years away, has the minister considered the possibility of mixing the water with water from other dams so that the diluted result could improve health standards?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I have sought advice on that matter. Such a scheme appears not to offer a solution. It could potentially cost hundreds of millions of dollars because water would have to be piped to Serpentine etc. A ballpark figure for piping simply from Wellington Dam to Serpentine is about \$200 million.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: There are dams closer than Serpentine.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It would need to be a major dam because it might have to be a 50-50 mix, and with water from Wellington it might have to be less than that.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Of the two Dandalup dams, which is the larger? One of those is larger.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Yes, that is the figure I was given in a briefing note some time ago. That is why I am not actually clear on the figure.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: But \$200 million is a lot less than \$1 billion.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Yes, but I am saying that that is just one component of the cost. It would be far more than that. The schemes that have been worked up in some detail put it at about \$800 million but those schemes do not rely on a mixing option. There is a range of problems with the mixing option. However, let us say that bromide stays at the current level, which is sometimes three times the acceptable limit, we would have to use four parts other dam water to one part Wellington. In our drying climate, that ratio of water may not be available from other dams. Although it may be doable, there would be a higher risk factor in the way we could do it. We must bear in mind that while the capacity of Wellington Dam may be of the order of 85 gegalitres a year in total available flow, which of course has been de-rated in our drying climate, a large percentage of that is already allocated to Harvey irrigators. Harvey irrigators are very innovative and cooperative.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: They do not use a lot of it, though, do they?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: No, but they have rights to it. The Water Corporation has rights to about 17 gegalitres. However, we would have to enter into discussions with Harvey irrigators to make that water available. Even if we got it from them at a fairly cheap rate, we would have to pay for piping to get efficiencies. We cannot just assume therefore that we will get the large volumes that we want, to the order of 40 or 50 gegalitres. The problem then is if we engineer a scheme that moves it up to another dam, the pipe cost alone would be a couple of hundred million dollars. Do we build a pipe to take 40 gegalitres or do we build a pipe to take only 10 gegalitres? The general engineering approach is that if we build a bigger pipe, the cost per kilolitre would be much lower. We would therefore get into all those risk factors and we would be unsure of how much we would get. If we went ahead with a scheme that took only a small amount, the cost per kilolitre of water would be very high. I hope in the next few weeks to release a report on the use of Wellington Dam. There have been delays in getting it printed and I was told today of another delay. Although it may seem an attractive option to take a small amount - between 10 and 15 kilolitres - straight out of that dam and put a treatment plant on it, it is my view, because of the potential in the Collie basin to use water in a range of ways, we should try to get the best out of the basin, as we already have a program to reduce salinity that is showing success but is some years off. There is a large amount of water from mine dewatering; there is also a large industry demand from power stations there; and there is irrigation demand. The idea is to put together an integrated package so that we can consider the interests of all those demands - that is, the potable industry and agriculture - in a way that uses water in the most efficient way. If we took out only a small amount, we would perhaps jeopardise industry or agriculture in other ways.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I would say: if there is a will, there is a way. My final question is about the Yarragadee aquifer itself. I understand that drilling is going on to provide additional water supplies for the local area in the south west. Can the minister confirm whether that is the case; and, if so, how much extra is expected to be extracted for those purposes?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: There is only one bore. We announced that scheme some time ago, and it is for the seven towns around Bridgetown-Boyup Brook. Relating back to an earlier question about Walpole, that means that water is being carted on and off there. Some of those towns have had severe restrictions for a number of years

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now. An integrated scheme will go through those seven towns. It is planned to rely primarily on the dam storage but also to connect it up so that the water can be moved around.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Where is the bore?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The bore is near Nannup, and it is for 0.6 of a gigalitre.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Is the total amount 0.6 of a gigalitre?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The licence being sought is for 0.6 of a gigalitre to supplement that seven-town scheme.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Given the short time, my question will be very quick, and the minister may have to provide supplementary information again. Can the minister tell me the highest readings of total dissolved solids in water going into people's homes supplied by the Water Corporation; and in how many places TDS of more than 500 milligrams per litre have been supplied?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I am advised that this information is published on the Water Corporation's website as part of the water quality report, and that the website is updated regularly.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: I thank the minister. I will leave the rest of my questions.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I refer to the last dot point on page 457, which refers to "Water Programs' Water Other category" and further states that work in 2007-08 will be focused on Stirling and Wellington Dams. What is the nature of that work on those two dams?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I will ask Mr Moore to answer that in a moment. As a backdrop, there is clearly an issue there. A failure in a major dam could be quite catastrophic. The issue then would be the standard we would set to minimise that risk. There is always an issue of risk. We can never be absolutely certain that there would not be some form of failure. There are certain Australian standards - I will ask Mr Moore to explain them in a moment - which the Water Corporation looks to maintain.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I am fine with that. I just wondered what the Water Corporation was doing.

Mr P. Moore: At Stirling Dam we have to widen and deepen part of the chute of the spillway. We also have to load the downstream tow of that dam, so that there is some additional loading on the tow, and raise the dam wall, all to accommodate the maximum probable flood environment for the dam; so most of the expenditure is in that.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: Is it actually to raise the dam wall?

Mr P. Moore: Yes, by a couple of metres. This is the starting year for the work on Wellington Dam leading into additional works similar to the works at Canning Dam some years ago. We now need to tie down that dam to its foundations. Effectively, we will be putting rods down into the foundations and stressing down the dam so that it does not have any toppling moment on it in the future.

The CHAIRMAN: I advise the house that that completes examination of the Water Corporation.

[5.00 pm]