

## WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

### *Motion*

**HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural)** [10.26 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house recognises the importance of irrigation schemes in Western Australia, the concerns some growers have with allocation limits, the impacts on private property rights and the failure of successive governments to implement a workable water resources management bill for Western Australia.

I rise today to highlight the importance of irrigation schemes in Western Australia. Given that water is the most important factor for plant growth, irrigation schemes have a multitude of obvious benefits. People in areas that have uncertain rain patterns can be given guaranteed access to water, which can then lead to an increase in productivity. The importance of irrigation is only going to increase, not decrease. The population also continues to rise across Western Australia. Last week we debated a motion on population increases in the state. The 2016 census recorded 11 per cent growth in the state's residential population, which is currently sitting at 2 567 788 people. These people all have to be fed, and irrigation schemes help support food security.

According to the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, horticultural production in WA was valued at \$909 million in 2015–16, with an estimated export value of \$119 million. Vegetable production was \$380 million in 2015–16, with an export value of \$81 million. WA is responsible for exporting from Australia, in value terms, 81 per cent of all carrots, 92 per cent of all truffles and 78 per cent of all seed potatoes. Carrots are WA's largest horticultural export, with over 70 per cent of the total production exported. They are grown all year, mainly in irrigated production areas. Truffles are grown in the south west. I think we have the Truffle Kerfuffle going on in the south west fairly soon. It has become quite famous. WA now produces 80 per cent of Australia's truffles and has a 92 per cent share of the export market. The value of truffle exports in 2015–16 was \$3.4 million. Fruit and nut production value was \$412 million in 2015–16, with an export value of \$36 million. WA exports 85 per cent of all strawberries exported from Australia, in value terms, making them our second largest horticulture export after carrots. The 2015–16 value of strawberry export was \$22 million.

The need for water equity in WA is further shown with the 30 April 2018 announcement that the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation will investigate how much water is available between Gingin and Moora, via a \$5.1 million project. The investigation will run for eight months and see up to 21 new exploration bores constructed across Dandaragan plateau. The information will be used to establish whether more water can be used for agriculture and industry, and where it can be accessed. The investigation will also assist with the management of water use around Gingin Brook, which has experienced a decline in streamflow of up to 40 per cent since 2010.

There are a number of irrigation schemes in Western Australia across a variety of projects, including Water for Food, the southern forests irrigation scheme, the Kimberley–Ord irrigation scheme and Wellington Dam. These projects have my support, but they are not without public concern. These concerns have been raised by local farmers, and I will highlight them for the benefit of the chamber.

I will begin by providing some background information about the Water for Food program. Water for Food is a \$40 million royalties for regions investment as part of the \$300 million Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture initiative. Water for Food aims to enable development of new irrigation areas and increase the size and water efficiency of existing irrigation districts. The program extends from the Kimberley to the great southern, and includes six projects. Stage 1 comprises four projects in the West Kimberley with a total investment of \$15.5 million—namely the Mowanjum irrigation trial, the Knowsley agricultural area water investigation, Fitzroy Valley groundwater investigations, and the land tenure pathway for irrigated agriculture project. Stage 2 of the program, with \$24.5 million of royalties for regions backing, was launched in February 2015. Stage 2 projects include the Bonaparte Plains–Ord East Kimberley expansion, the Knowsley agricultural area water investigation, the La Grange–West Canning Basin groundwater for growing opportunities project, the Midlands groundwater and land assessment project, the Myalup–Wellington water for growth project, and the southern forests irrigation scheme.

Today I wish to focus on the southern forests irrigation scheme. Self-supply water users in the Manjimup–Pemberton region have an issue with the southern forests irrigation scheme, which has been established to improve water storage and distribution for the Manjimup–Pemberton region, which is referred to as the “food bowl of the south west”. This region has a gross agricultural value of \$127 million per annum. The continued importance of this area is highlighted by the fact that pumpkin, squash, apples, baby beetroot, carrots and other heirloom vegetables used at Optus Stadium are being sourced from Manjimup. The people of Perth need to be assured that these vegetables will continue to be supplied into the future.

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Manjimup has also been identified as a prime location for Western Australia's fledgling hemp industry. A 300-hectare crop is planned for 2019. Rob Edkins, the managing director of Food, Fibre and Land International Group, was quoted in the *Manjimup–Bridgetown Times* as saying —

... we're focusing on Manjimup because it's got a unique growing condition, there are good farmers and there's land with irrigation equipment ...

Hemp is also grown in Kojonup and Nannup, and trials are expected to be held in the Kimberley and Pilbara this year. The number of hemp growers in Western Australia is expected to double this year to about 40, up from 19 last year and about five in 2016.

I turn now to a report dated 15 June 2016 and titled "Proposed Southern Forests Irrigation Scheme: Land Capability and Water Demand Assessment". The report states —

The Warren–Donnelly Surface Water Allocation Plan ... describes irrigated agriculture as the largest user of water in the area occupying around 4,000 ha of land and using up to 33GL/y, stored in over 480 licensed private farm dams.'

The southern forests irrigation scheme plans to include a 15-gigalitre dam on Record Brook and around 250 kilometres of pipeline and pumping infrastructure. The scheme will be owned and operated by SF Irrigation Co-operative Ltd, which was established to be owned and controlled by southern forests irrigation scheme water users. Water for the scheme will be supplied from peak flows in the Donnelly River, with water being redistributed year round to irrigators who have purchased a water entitlement for the scheme. The water from the scheme will be used by sites that do not have access to high-quality water or do not have the capacity to capture water. The scheme needs a 9.2-gigalitre quota to make the 15-gigalitre dam viable. In order to satisfy this quota, in 2016, landholders in the area were requested to express their interest in purchasing irrigation water through a letter of intent process. On 27 April, a media statement said that a total of 68 submissions were received, representing 92 properties being potentially serviced by the irrigation scheme, and requiring a total of 10.3 gigalitres, which exceeded the required 9.2-gigalitre quota to make the project viable. The letters of intent were then used to create a conceptual design for the scheme, along with costings and a business case.

Following that process, SF Irrigation Co-operative Ltd asked landholders to become members of the cooperative and enter into binding water entitlement agreements. Water sales closed on 28 February this year. During the water sale period, irrigators could apply for a water entitlement, with the cooperative assessing all applications based on compatibility with the scheme's terms and conditions. The cooperative has until 30 May this year to complete this process. Applicants will be advised of their application's outcome once the scheme's design has been confirmed. As per a southern forests irrigation scheme media release issued in December 2016, the full cost of the project was estimated at \$80 million. On 9 December 2016, it was announced that the southern forests irrigation scheme had received state government support, with \$19 million funding from the royalties for regions program. A further \$10 million was registered by local growers who wanted to be part of the scheme. Further funding of \$40 million was sought through the commonwealth government's National Water Infrastructure Fund. That application was rejected by the commonwealth government in August 2017.

Growers in the Manjimup–Pemberton region raised concerns when, on 16 November 2017, the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation stopped issuing new water licences for families to build their own dams in eight sub-catchments of the Donnelly River and in six sub-catchments of the Warren–Donnelly Rivers. Land in this area is zoned "priority agriculture". The department claimed the changes were an interim measure as further investigative work was to be undertaken for the southern forests irrigation scheme. The department claims allocation limits are set by measuring how much water is in the system and how much can be used sustainably without compromising the environment. After word spread about the department's decision to stop issuing new water licences, a number of growers in the region voted to reconvene a representative group—Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners—in an effort to address their concerns about water allocation limits. Growers in this region have constructed their own dams without subsidy from the state or federal governments. Their source of contention is that water now planned to be pumped from the Donnelly River into a 15-gigalitre dam to be located on Record Brook was originally to be available to farming families to construct farm dams in eight sub-catchments of the Donnelly River. The group claims that loss of water rights has halved the value of their farms. Food production in the Manjimup–Pemberton area is based on self-supply water in farm dams, and farmers in the region feel they are being forced into a piped irrigation scheme.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Member, can you just clarify this? My understanding is that it is not that they are losing what they have got; it is just that they are not being issued with any expansions. Is that the case?

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Yes, and they are also being asked to divert some of their run-off.

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There is no guarantee that self-supply water users will not be impacted if the southern forests irrigation scheme goes ahead. In the future, some farmers may not be able to capture water from streams that run through their properties but will be able to buy it back through the southern forests irrigation scheme.

A 28 March 2018 letter by Jamie Nicolaou to the *Manjimup–Bridgetown Times*, written on behalf of west Manjimup farmers, states in part —

Just like members of the SFIS wanting to secure their future, self supply water users want the same, for generations to come.

It states also —

At no time have the farmers in the Donnelly catchment been opposed to the project, but self supply water users’ ability to have access to water into the future should not be compromised.”

Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners points to a 4 December 2015 media statement issued by the then Minister for Water, Mia Davies, in which Ms Davies stated —

The \$3.6 million project targets an extra 12 gegalitres a year of sustainable irrigation water to meet expansion plans of the Warren–Donnelly irrigation district.

This is extra water, not water to be redirected.

The “Warren–Donnelly surface water allocation plan” of April 2012 states on page 31 —

Consideration of future large scale irrigation schemes is beyond the scope of this allocation plan.

Therefore, this declaration means that the allocation plan makes no provision for the extra 12 gegalitres of water announced by Ms Davies in 2015. Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners claim a 29 January 2018 letter to federal member for O’Connor, Rick Wilson, received a reply stating, according to my notes —

In my discussions with the various agencies and proponents of this scheme I was not made aware that there would be a closure of catchments for self-supply users.

In a letter to Premier Mark McGowan on 19 February 2018, Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners convener Neil Bartholomaeus not only called for water rights to be restored in the 14 sub-catchments, but requested a water resource management committee to be appointed to manage water allocations in the Warren and Donnelly River areas, along with appointing a water resources council for the state under part 2A of the Water Agencies (Powers) Act 1984. The letter also called for a local area management plan for the Warren and Donnelly River areas in accordance with part III, division 3D, “Plans for management of water resources”, of the Rights in Water and Irrigation Act 1914. In his letter, Mr Bartholomaeus wrote that these changes —

... are having an immediate negative impact on commercial plans for food production and are causing frustration and anxiety for farming families.

He also claimed that none of the water plans in WA is statutory. A December 2013 document titled “Securing Western Australia’s water future: Position paper reforming water resource management” states —

Western Australia’s water legislation is some of the oldest in Australia and was originally developed at a time when demand was low and water was relatively abundant. The situation in the 21st century is very different.

Water resources legislation is spread across six different acts, with one having been in place since 1914. The report states —

These Acts were developed at various times to deal with specific water issues but do not adequately integrate with one another and create inefficiencies in management. ... It is time to stop patching the existing Acts and rebuild the legislative framework for water management.

Allocation limits are not mentioned in the Rights in Water and Irrigation Act 1914. Limits are defined though policy, which means they can change without following a legal decision-making process. A statutory water plan would provide growers with a greater sense of security, with plans not being amended without being subject to due process. Current legislation does not readily facilitate the establishment of statutory water allocation plans without the establishment and consideration of a water resources council.

In March 2018, in frustration, Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners escalated its concerns by writing a letter to the federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Michael McCormack, asking him to hold back a \$40 million grant under the national water infrastructure development fund until rights to water of farming families had been restored. The national water infrastructure development fund gives funding priority to projects that are subject to

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statutory water resource management plans. There are no statutory plans in WA. The letter to Minister McCormack also asked for the development of a statutory water resource plan providing for stakeholder consultation at peak and local levels.

In March 2018, the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation began the process of updating its modelling for the Donnelly River catchment. The south west region manager at the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, Adam Maskew, was quoted in the *Bunbury Herald* as saying —

“The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation intends to use the new information from the Water for Food studies in the Donnelly catchment to review and potentially revise the allocation limits in the water allocation plan area,” ...

...

“It will also help us answer the question whether there would be any additional water for additional self-supply take in the Donnelly River sub-areas.”

Members, as time is getting away, I thought I would touch on the funding recently announced by the federal government to assist with the Wellington Dam project. Wellington Dam is the second largest reservoir in Western Australia and holds about 185 gigalitres. When we consider that Record Brook is proposed to hold 15 gigalitres, we realise that Wellington Dam is a massive water source. I am very pleased with the initiatives that are taking place to utilise Wellington Dam. It is a very large dam that has almost turned into a recreational dam these days because of the salt levels that are found within it. Some of the proposals to deal with the salt are quite innovative. A lot of salt run-off is going to go into an old mine void near Collie where it will be desalinated. I think something I read stated that they would use the old Harvey diversion channel to get the water to Myalup to be redistributed as drinking water, which is quite a good use of some very old infrastructure.

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** There is a proposal for piping as well.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Yes, they are going to use the channels and put in pressure pipes for that region. I grew up in that area and, in the early days, irrigation channels were a natural part of farmland being irrigated, but those channels now are pretty much decommissioned. Water does not run down too many of them and a lot of that water is suitable only for stock. The fact that we will do a lot of work to bring down the salt level in Wellington Dam so that we can irrigate vegetables is a very good thing and will improve that area.

With my last few seconds to speak, in summary, irrigation schemes will always be important for Australian food growers because they allow for greater agricultural production. However, these schemes must be economically viable and not at the detriment of existing water users. Do we want to rob Peter to pay Paul? Community concern must be addressed and, by speaking before members, I am helping to fulfil that function on behalf of people living in the agricultural areas of WA. For more than 10 years, successive governments have failed to implement a workable water resources management bill to amalgamate the six acts that relate to the management of the complex water resources portfolio. It is time to move forward with purpose on this front. The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation website stated that the drafting of a water resources management bill had commenced and significant progress was expected by mid to late 2017. If any progress exists on this front, we would be glad to hear about it.

**HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA)** [10.47 am]: I thank Hon Rick Mazza for bringing this motion to the house. The management of water resources and allocation of water is also an important issue in the Mining and Pastoral Region. Today I will touch on a few issues that we had in managing the horticultural area in the Gascoyne region. Water for Food and irrigated agriculture was at the forefront of the Nationals WA 2013 Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture policy announcement as we headed into that election. We have come a long way with Water for Food and the development of irrigated agriculture since that time, but certainly there is still a lot of work to be done and issues that still need to be managed for current growers as we move towards how we engage with new growers in the agricultural sector.

The Leader of the National Party of WA was the Minister for Water and oversaw the Water for Food project, which was one component of that Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture policy. As Hon Rick Mazza said, it was a \$32 million program through royalties for regions and it is talked about the length and breadth of the state, but we need to see that program move forward. There is no doubt about that. The program extended from the Kimberley to the great southern and captures some really unique areas of the state and some unique challenges for current growers and the diversity of the sector moving forward. As outlined in the contribution of Hon Rick Mazza, there are certainly some synergies with water allocation issues that growers are experiencing across the state.

Water for Food is a new diverse program to allow agricultural expansion. Western Australia must embrace irrigation as we move forward in the agricultural sector. This program is a means of trying to diversify agriculture and learn how to use better irrigation systems. Pastoral areas in the Mining and Pastoral Region, the Kimberley, the Pilbara

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and the Gascoyne overlay large water resources throughout the state. There are massive crown land areas in those regions and an untapped source. This definitely provided an exciting opportunity and still does because the government has expressed some support for the Water for Food program, and I am very happy about that. There is so much opportunity in the state of Western Australia, particularly with agriculture, but it requires a state government being committed to that development and reducing the barriers around environmental assessments and capital investment. Land tenure is a really big issue along with water allocations. People are prepared to invest privately in pastoral leases and the development of agriculture in the state, but there are many barriers to that. Somehow, we need to be able to work closer together while being responsible for managing the asset of the state's land, particularly its water, but also be able to capitalise on the window of opportunity that presents itself. I, too, am pleased that the state government has continued to commit funds to the key Water for Food project in Myalup–Wellington, which, despite being outside my electorate, still adds to the agricultural diversity of the state. I absolutely support that.

The water resources management bill is a massive undertaking. As Hon Rick Mazza outlined during his contribution, the existing legislation around water management does not work. The lack of flexibility and diversity in how we manage that resource does not assist the agricultural and horticultural sections or the pastoral industry in their attempts to diversify, say, a pastoral lease or go into a horticultural area. When we were in government, as a local member for the Mining and Pastoral Region, that was a frustration for me. Former water minister Mia Davies progressed the drafting phase of the water resources management bill. It is a very, very important bill for the development of agriculture in the state. We have to get it right and I recognise that that takes time. There is a fine line between the sustainability of water resources and water allocations for industry. When we get down to the grassroots level of how we manage the water allocation for industry and the overarching vision of the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation to manage the asset, in my experience it is hard to line up those two things. It requires the real nitty-gritty of getting down to understanding growers' needs and requirements and maintaining and fulfilling the objectives of an employee on the ground working for the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and working with growers. Obviously, every bill requires extensive consultation, a review and draft papers before it is presented to Parliament, because there are very unique circumstances for different areas of the state and how they manage their water allocation.

I am going to run out of time as well. I turn to a really important issue for my electorate. I will raise some of the concerns about allocation limits that growers have raised with me over time. There is no doubt—I have said this previously—that the government has a responsibility to ensure the sustainable management of water resources, but I also think that it needs to use those water resources for regional development. There needs to be a change in the thought process about how to manage that water resource and how to work hand in hand with regional development in that space. The Gascoyne region is obviously the principal horticultural area and precinct for the state at the moment. It produces between 75 per cent and 85 per cent of Perth's winter vegetables. It is a really important area for the state. When we were in government, we established the Gascoyne master plan, the overarching framework that maps the actions needed to double the value of food production in the Gascoyne area. That was a big task. We consulted widely and lots of people had input into it. There were some key recommendations from the Gascoyne master plan. I look forward to the Minister for Agriculture and Food's contribution so that she can enlighten the house on where that is at.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Where what is at?

**Hon JACQUI BOYDELL:** The Gascoyne master plan.

It is very important. Growers had a lot of input into it and they are really attached to the development of the Gascoyne food bowl hand-in-hand with the Gascoyne master plan. It is about managing the water resource and the allocation limits for growers. Water allocation is an asset for growers. It is a very important asset in how they grow their business and also the value of their property. At the moment there is a unique issue in the Gascoyne of an over-allocation on paper of the water resource in basin A, which is the lower aquifer level in the Gascoyne River. Growers in that region have been managing that asset naturally through salinity levels for more than 100 years. If a grower in that area tried to sell their property, the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation could, if that person had not utilised their full allocation—there could be many reasons why they have not done that, including a natural disaster, a flood, off-farm income, disability, illness and families situations—take that water allocation off them. That would do two things. It would lower the asset value to sell and it would lower the person's opportunity to develop their business further. There are major issues. I thank the member for bringing the motion to the house.

**HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West) [10.57 am]:** I thank Hon Rick Mazza for bringing a very important motion to the house to discuss water resourcing and water management. We could spend hours on this,

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Hon Rick Mazza. This could be a very significant debate but, unfortunately, we are limited to 10 minutes. I will have to go through this fairly quickly.

One of the issues about getting old is that we end up with a corporate knowledge and a corporate memory of things that happened some time ago. I will run very briefly through where we started this process —

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** That's why it's important that people like you and I are in Parliament.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** That is very important, minister, because you and I were both in another place that shall not be named when this issue hit the forefront.

Members need to be aware that both federal and state water licensing and water management initiatives really started to peak under the John Howard federal government and the Geoff Gallop state Labor government. It happened because effectively John Howard managed to negotiate with the Democrats to get a thing through called the sale of Telstra in the late 1990s. When that occurred, hundreds of millions of dollars—billions in some cases—went into some projects. Some of it went into natural resource management, but a huge amount of it went into something called the National Water Initiative, for those members who are old enough to remember exactly what that was. A massive amount of water was put aside. I accept that a fair proportion of that went into the Murray–Darling basin system. That is the big brother, if we will, of water management in Australia. Plans were also in place in the early 2000s for some of that money to be set aside for the development of the sorts of things that Hon Rick Mazza talked about in Western Australia; that is, a National Water Initiative with a focus on licensing water entitlement and attaching that to the land title so that a water entitlement was attached to a land title. In the Murray–Darling basin, they progressed this a lot more quickly than we did. I still have some concerns about the outcome of that and where that ended up, because I think they over-allocated the Murray–Darling system and the response to that was ultimately to give those people with an entitlement a percentage of that entitlement each year based on flows into the system. I think that built an expectation of entitlement that is not necessarily there. I do not necessarily think that that is the best option available for water management. I think it was over-optimistic, a bit like some of the government's projections for the domestic economy in the next few years. However, it is at least a step in the right direction. Those with corporate knowledge will remember the government of the day and the then Minister for Water Resources, John Kobelke, who was quite a decent fellow even though he and I had some pretty significant debates across the chamber, as I did with the minister for primary industries at the time. That government initially tried to do two things. The biggest and most problematic issue was the proposal to take water from the southern Yarragadee aquifer up to Perth for domestic consumption, which some of us were opposed to because our politics probably allowed it. Some of that opposition perhaps happened behind the scenes for the members now sitting on the government benches, as they were in government at the time. I remember marching at the appropriate time, and the then government members were probably doing it on the inside. But the reality is that that was knocked back, and most appropriately so. As part of that great debate, the debate about water licensing and the attachment of a water title to a land title got thoroughly beaten down, and that is probably to our detriment. That was not the most mature or educated of debates from either side of politics. We have come a long way and we are much better at it now than we used to be. But the reality is that there was a need, even at that stage, for some form of licensing that delineated an allocation and an entitlement. Even in my south west electorate at the time, the big scare campaign was that the government was going to license private dams and, pretty soon afterwards, charge owners a licence fee for a private dam and a volumetric usage fee. Many people in the agricultural and regional areas were very concerned that, effectively, the government was going to take the dam that they had paid \$100 000 to build and charge for its use. There was an incredible backlash. I remember going to public meetings at which people were outraged that their individual rights were being impinged upon. In some cases, that was probably true. Unfortunately, as a Parliament, we were not able to have a mature debate at that time about what might be the good outcomes of that process.

I can tell members that even at that time, as the shadow Minister for the Environment, history repeated itself. We had some very significant discussions with people in the south west land division who were on the negative end of that campaign. Some farming families had been on their dairy farms for decades. Those of us with corporate memory will also remember the managed investment schemes and how that started in the vineyard industry. Suddenly we had vineyards springing up everywhere. Some of those managed investment schemes would build a dam on a catchment that would effectively remove 50 per cent of the dam catchment of the dairy farming family who had been there forever. Even at that point, there was a need for water licensing that conferred an entitlement, but we got bogged down in the “We hate government” response. The Department of Water did not cover itself in glory at that time because it was intransigent. Its presentations basically stated, “We need to do this and we're going to do it irrespective of what the community thinks.” Its performance, I have to say, was not good.

But there is an opportunity for us going forward to try to engage in that mature and educated debate about what better water management and a better water licensing system might actually deliver, because it will deliver. If we

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do this right, we will deliver some certainty to landholders by delivering both the land and the water required to work that land as an entitlement that can be passed forward. We have to be very careful with it. We have to ensure that it is not simply another bureaucratic licensing of private property. That is an issue that scared farming producers 13 or 14 years ago—a long time ago—and it still scares farming communities now. We have come a long way. We are a little more mature in this debate and it would be an opportune time for the government and opposition to discuss how we might do this better and, to some degree, have a foot on the neck of bureaucracy to make sure that it serves the community and provides that certainty without simply becoming a bureaucracy that charges a farmer for using their resources in which they have invested. There is a good way to do this and a dumb way to do this. Last time, we got bogged down in the dumb way to do this. We may well go down the same path. If the government and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation decide that now is the time to introduce licensing for all water catchments and place on it a volumetric charge, I imagine that we will be going to the same public meetings and have most of the same people—some of them have passed on now—doing the marches that we did 10 or 12 years ago. There is an opportunity here to do this better.

I could spend hours on this topic, but I would like to finish. I have lived this issue for decades in the south west land division, but let me finish with Wellington Dam. Not long ago, I said in my budget debate contribution that Wellington Dam is an asset. I would like to get the recreational powerboat users off Wellington Dam, and I think the member for Collie–Preston and I have been in agreement on that for years. Although it is a very big resource of around 180 gegalitres—depending on how much catchment is measured—that is not the dam’s inflow. That dam does not get 180 gegalitres in it every year that can be harvested. In a good year, Wellington Dam might get 100 gegalitres that can be taken out, but in a dry year, on average it might have 20 or 30 gegalitres that can be harvested whilst still leaving some water in the dam. Wellington Dam looks full because its usage is very low due to high salt levels. The last time I checked it was at 1 100 milligrams per litre, which means that it cannot be used for too much agriculture. I wish I had another two hours to talk about this. I will make a final statement on Wellington Dam.

Several members interjected.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** Shush! The money for Wellington Dam is not coming from the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund. On behalf of the sitting member for Forrest, Nola Marino, who worked her backside off—God bless her—to get \$140 million for that dam, I will tell members that the National Party meetings made no contribution to getting the money that went into that dam. A week after those meetings with Barnaby Joyce, they were calling for him to be sacked. If members want to thank somebody for that money, they should thank Nola Marino it is an election commitment.

**HON DIANE EVERS (South West)** [11.07 am]: I really appreciate this motion put forward by Hon Rick Mazza. We really need to discuss this, but going back previously to where we look at —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Matthew Swinbourn):** Order! If other members would like to have a discussion, there is always the opportunity to have it behind the Chair.

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** We need to go back to before we allocate the water. We have to realise that things have changed and are continuing to change. Land use changes have occurred and more water is running off before it can be absorbed into the soil. We have cleared a lot of forest that would normally have created more rain for us, and there is climate change. Rainfall levels are dropping. We do not have the water supplies that we used to have 50 to 100 years ago and rainfall is more uncertain. The rainfall patterns are also changing. We are having summer rains when we never used to and we are having fewer winter rains. Significant changes are happening and we need to address that and see what we can do to mitigate those changes. In addition, the environment still needs water. We cannot just keep taking water out of the environment and hope that it will look after itself. Our flora has developed with certain rainfall levels over the past several million years, and it will change dramatically. We do not know what those changes will be, so we need to make sure that the water first goes into continuing those environmental flows. It is important that we keep our forests. Forests take rain out of the sky and have it drop on our farming land. They create the oxygen we need, so it is important that we maintain and manage the forests as well. On top of that, humans are using the water. We have rights to it, we have need for it and we want to make profit from it, and that is all good. I appreciate the fact that we can use it, but we have to use it and manage it better. We cannot just keep taking it out and putting it into large dams. I am not talking about the dams that have been talked about today, but there are dams all over this country that could be called “evaporation ponds”. The problem with evaporation ponds is that not only is water lost, but also we are left with more salt as the water evaporates. Ideally, we want to recharge our aquifers. Finding possible solutions to get more water absorbed into

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the ground and down into our aquifers will mean it does not just evaporate. It is a much bigger question than just who gets the water.

We have to look at where rain is falling, where it can be collected and who has access to water. Who does it belong to? Once rain hits the ground, regulations are in place to say people cannot collect water from the ground and that rainfall must be diverted because water cannot be taken out of streams. However, as far as I know, water can be collected off a roof. When I imagined what I was going to say today, I thought about how great it would be if we could put up large solar panels that would also divert water. They could collect rainwater because it would not have yet hit the ground. I understand that the cost would be prohibitive but it is just a dream.

We have to look at where water is needed most and who is making the best use of it. As Hon Jacqui Boydell said, we have to look at industrial, agricultural and domestic water uses. Through regulation, it is up to us and others to work out who has first priority, but best use should always be rewarded. Maybe we need to promote and support the use of good agricultural methods that take rain out of the sky and get it into the soil to recharge the aquifers below someone's land. That will mean water is not running off and we do not have to put it into dams, where it then evaporates.

I am not going to speak against desalination plants completely but looking at the \$3 billion it costs to build one, would it not be better to put even half that money into something that would mean we use less water and less water evaporates to make better use of it? Can we not clean up the water we have and make better use of it instead? We can do other things. This also goes to the mitigation of climate change. Having more forests keeps it cooler and increases rainfall and oxygen. We have to recharge our forests to retain them, which will increase the possibility of recharging our natural aquifers.

I will now take some time to talk about the southern forests irrigation scheme. I thought about this quite a bit. I do not want to say that it absolutely should not happen, but \$80 million is being put into a project that will benefit 68 people who have put in a submission and they have contributed \$10 million. Those 68 people who have the resources to do the project have been able to put in \$1 and get \$7 back from the government. Is that fair and equitable? It is something that deserves to be thought about. In addition, although the proponents want to take water out of the scheme, for which they are paying an eighth of the price, they are taking it for land that they purchased knowing that there was not enough rainfall and no water supply. In order to make sure the recharge happens into the dam that would be created, other people who bought land knowing what the rainfall was and knowing that they had space for dams are being told that they may not be able to use it. I do not understand why we are supporting those 68 landholders who want to take water from another area, when other people may have use for the water where it falls. When the program was originally released, I heard that 1 500 jobs would be created if the dam was built. I then heard that about 548 jobs would be created by the southern forests irrigation scheme to bring water to those 68 properties. The last I heard, around 350 jobs would be created.

I often hear about jobs being created by different projects. Sometimes it refers to any jobs—they might last for just two weeks, they might be construction jobs, or they might be planting avocado trees. It could be a number of jobs, such as 100 jobs for three years, which can be counted as 300 jobs. We have to look at these statistics and see what will happen. We need to look at the southern forests irrigation scheme. Sure, we will get a lot more avocado trees in the northern area of that district, but what will we be stopping in the other areas? I have also heard from the people who have put money or submissions into the scheme. They are also concerned because, as we have already heard, the proposed dam is supposed to hold 15 gegalitres of water. I think at most that they would possibly be able to take out 12 gegalitres if the dam was full in a good year. In a not-so-good year when the Donnelly River is not flowing so well and the proponents are not able to take out that much, and if they uphold their commitment to not take water away from the environmental needs and needs of the people downstream from Donnelly River, there may not be enough water. As rainfall rates decrease, the estimate of how much rain falls now may be completely different in 10 years. We may be left with \$80 million worth of infrastructure that is not meeting anyone's needs. If rainfall halves, how much will they be able to take out of Donnelly River? It is going to be a problem and I do not think that this project is going to solve it. It makes sense to allow self-supply users to take what water was there originally.

I agree with the statutory water plan. We need to have some way of managing the water resources we have. First, we try to mitigate climate change and a bit more rain might eventually fall. We try to mitigate the evaporation of water and the poor use and management of water, which includes allowing water to get saltier by not carrying out good management practices. Then we will take what water we have left and work out who should get it, where and when. I believe that when people buy a block of land, they should be able to take all the rainfall from that block, but that may not be the case anymore. It is a difficult question for people who have bought land with that in mind. This plan adds a new thing.

It is a bit of a shame about Wellington Dam. I have heard we may currently be desalinating water and putting it in there for storage. That information may be out of date because I have just heard in here that the dam cannot be

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used for drinking water in any case. Every time we talk about desalination, we really have to think about why that is our answer. Will it solve the problem or is the underlying problem our lack of restraint and forethought in how we manage the water we have?

**HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development)** [11.17 am]: I thank members for raising this issue, particularly Hon Rick Mazza for bringing forward this motion. It is vastly important and, as I think all members have reflected, vastly complex. This is a major challenge and every time there is an attempt to deal with this issue, there are people who consider themselves to be adversely affected by that change. I think that we have to accept there will have to be significant change in this area. Climate change models throughout the world show one area of the globe is going to become hotter and drier; that is, the south west of Western Australia. This is happening and it is happening quite quickly. If we are going to continue to have a thriving horticultural sector, then we need to get the irrigation right.

Hon Diane Evers asked why we have to look at desalination as an achievement, when we should just cut back on our water use. The world's climate patterns are changing and the water is not where the people are, so it makes sense to me that desalination has to be very much part of the ongoing solution to that problem. More and more water is going into the sea and sea levels are rising, so, for me, desalination has to be the way forward particularly when desalination plants can be fuelled with wave power, wind power or solar energy, which will not exacerbate the problem that has led to the drying climate in the first instance. .

One of the things that we need to —

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** When's the government going to initiate planning for another desalination plant?

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN:** We also need to look at some alternative smaller scale desalination plants. For example, there is water in the area where carrots are grown that Hon Rick Mazza referred to. Some salination is occurring in that area, so we need to respond to that. We need to explore various desalination measures.

Both Hon Rick Mazza and Hon Dr Steve Thomas spoke about the need to review the Rights in Water and Irrigation Act 1914. We could not agree with them more. I assure the members that Minister Kelly has made this a real priority. He is refining a new model for that legislation. He has been conducting a great many discussions and has engaged with the industry. The Minister for Water has met with irrigation cooperatives, the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of WA, WAFarmers, Irrigation Australia and vegetablesWA to work through these issues. We need to prepare people for the fact that there will always be a degree of unhappiness when change occurs. I remember some changes that the Liberal government attempted to bring in in the late 1990s and how difficult that was. This will not be a pain-free environment, but we need to get everyone on board and understand that we need a much more planned water allocation process. We are hopeful that that new legislation will be introduced. We will certainly be signing off on the notion of the package in the next few months and then, obviously, comes that very massive task of drafting that legislation and getting it through. We are absolutely on the same page. It has to happen and it is a top priority of Minister Kelly once he has finished with the shark issues.

A number of very specific issues were raised by members. In particular, Hon Rick Mazza and Hon Diane Evers were concerned about the southern forests irrigation scheme. In recent weeks, we have learnt that the federal government will not be making a financial contribution. That scheme is on hold. We need to go back to the drawing board and look at it. I was very interested in Hon Rick Mazza's documentation. It is quite clear that this scheme has been sunk at the behest of the local federal member, which no doubt will be of interest to other people in that region, including the very many farmers who have been supporting the scheme and see it as positive.

I am told that the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation—as I said, with any water program, there will be those who consider themselves losers and those who are winners—met with those who were not happy with the scheme, the current water users. It met with concerned individuals and has agreed on a way forward with the Warren–Donnelly water advisory committee and the Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners group and has planned further direct engagement in Manjimup and Pemberton. Hon Rick Mazza did not specifically mention this, but I have not yet received further information on that agreed way forward. We have a bit of time to look at this again. I think Hon Adele Farina has also been involved in this matter. We need to look at it now. We have a bit of time to do that because the federal government, obviously at the instigation of its local member, has sought fit to not fund that program. We will continue that dialogue. We would certainly like all interested members to be involved.

Of course these complex schemes will have their challenges. As the climate dries, what will be the environmental impact on the areas from where we are taking the water? I was very interested in the comments made by Hon Dr Steve Thomas. I will go back and read those remarks. Perhaps the potential complexity of this scheme has been underestimated. I recognise the member's great esteem and affection for Hon Nola Marino. I always love a bit of blue-on-green war raising itself in this place. As far as our department can tell, those funds for Myalup–Wellington have come from the National Water Initiative, which is managed by the National Party. That

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is the interaction that we have had with the federal government department. It is a bit more than an election commitment; it appears in the budget. The advice that we have received from our department is that it is under that scheme. I have no doubt that it would appear that Nola Marino was in there fighting for that, unlike Rick Wilson, who was fighting against the one in his electorate, which is a very interesting piece of advice.

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** The remaining funds in that fund wouldn't cover the cost of the Wellington Dam proposal as funded by the federal government.

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN:** When the member says that it is an election commitment, what does he mean? Has it happened yet? In which election was it committed?

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** Upcoming, it requires additional funding to be put into that fund by the government—the Prime Minister and Treasury—to fund what it has committed to in that dam. It is far beyond the funded scheme.

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN:** It is in the current federal budget. A party might make an election commitment but it is already in the current federal budget. Can the Libs and Nats work a little closer together to get their stories right?

Putting that aside, very serious and complex issues have been raised in this place. We do not have all the answers. I do know that when we come to this Parliament with a new piece of legislation that deals with that systemic problem of operating under a piece of legislation that is over 100 years old, some commonsense is brought to bear. Not everyone will be happy with that. People will come to us and plead their case. When we deal with this, we have to look at the greater good for this state and not just be picked off by small interest groups if we are going to make progress. I have seen it time and again in this Parliament—trying to deal with changing the water legislation and getting a more contemporary, rational and sustainable plan just falls at the first hurdle every time because small interest groups get into the ear of particular members and sink the thing. We really need to take a great deal of responsibility for this. I look forward to being part of bringing this legislation forward sometime later this year.

I forgot to mention the progress on the Gascoyne. We have put another \$400 000 into equipping the bores. We signed off on that earlier this year, and in the budget we have committed another \$500 000 to help solve the native title issue there, so that the whole 400 hectares of new irrigated land can be released.

**HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [11.30 am]:** I thank Hon Rick Mazza for bringing in this motion in non-government business today. It is a fantastic motion, and it is so important because water is Western Australia's second most important resource. I say the second because people come first. It is an issue for Western Australia particularly because of the lack of rain over quite a few years. If we really are to solve the water issues in Western Australia, we need to take the politics out of it. We have heard the bickering going on in this chamber today between the Liberal Party, the Nationals WA and the Labor Party. We need to forget about the politics of it all. It is the only way we can solve major issues like the availability of fresh water for drinking and farming. It needs a balanced view.

There is plenty of fresh water in aquifers and other places in Western Australia. One of the problems is that it is in places where there is no farming activity. We need to continue to look at that. We need to take the politics out of knocking all these different schemes that come up, because without those schemes we would not have solved half the problems that we have solved since. Desalination is a good thing, but it is not the only answer. I am glad that it is here; it provides 70 per cent of our water. It is a very good thing, and we need it to continue, but it is not the be-all and end-all.

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** When you talk about the other aquifers, are you referring to the Officer Basin, or are you thinking more —

**Hon COLIN TINCKNELL:** There are aquifers in the desert. As we have heard before, there is water in the Fitzroy Valley, but there are places around Western Australia where there is available water, and we have not yet worked out how we get to it and use it. I suggest to all members in this house and the other place that we continue to look at that scheme and keep our minds open to new ideas that will be put to us. As I said, I do not think that desalination is the only answer, but it is working well for now. Hon Diane Evers made some very good comments. We need to get better at catching and retaining our water. How many people in WA have a water tank at their home? We would probably find that most farmers do, but a lot of people in the metropolitan area do not capture their own water and do not use it; they just get it out of the scheme. We need to be better at that. We need water to be available for all different purposes, including industry, farming and any future mining. It is a major resource that we need to use.

We have had discussions about Wellington Dam. Although I support further dams being built in certain areas, we need to look at the major problem that is resulting in us having a lot of water that we just cannot use—that is, salinity. That is one of the answers to a problem. We have not done enough in the area of solving the salinity problems in Western Australia. Hon Alannah MacTiernan has the soil committee going at the moment, so some

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work is being done. We have people like Mr Peter Coyne, who put his canal program to me before the election. I am always interested to hear what he has to say. He has been pushing a certain line. We know that the canal system works, but it needs investment so that it can be improved to go to the next level. If we are going to have productive farmland, salinity is a major problem. We need to look at those issues and solve the salinity problem in Western Australia. Whether we solve it or make inroads into it, it will result in more fresh water and create more productive farmland.

Even allowing for substantial improvement in our water use efficiency and for technological fixes, our drying climate, linked to increasing population and lower rainfall, means that serious structural shortages of water will occur in not only Perth but also Sydney and Melbourne. By 2050, if not much earlier, that will be an issue. We know that; we have a long time to fix it, but we need to get rid of the politics and work together in a bipartisan way. The crossbench does that every single day in this Parliament, on every single issue. Although we have differences, we sit down and try to work them out. I suggest that everyone from every party here needs to the same when it comes to water. It is an important issue, and I support the motion.

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** What precisely were you saying about desalination, then, in terms of water security?

**Hon COLIN TINCKNELL:** It is a part of one of the answers. We cannot deny the fact that it is providing somewhere near 70 per cent of our water now. That is a good thing, but it is not the only answer. We do not want to just be building further desalination plants. We need to look at other options as well.

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas** interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Matthew Swinbourn):** Order, member! No debate across the chamber, thank you.

**Hon COLIN TINCKNELL:** I commend Hon Rick Mazza for his motion. It is a great motion, and we need to have further debates on this and take the politics out of it.

**HON COLIN HOLT (South West) [11.37 am]:** There is not much time left, unfortunately, due to a few interjections. I will just place on the record that I agree with the sentiment of the motion moved by Hon Rick Mazza. Irrigation schemes are important to Western Australia and will be even more important into the future. That is why we worked very hard in the time of the previous government to create a project around Wellington Dam. The former water minister, Mia Davies, took up the debate strongly to ensure that we had a project that people could advocate funding for. I am not going to deride advocacy at any level. I am glad that we have had an opportunity to advocate for a project that will deliver outstanding outcomes for the south west.

Unfortunately, I have run out of time, but I will continue my remarks in members' statements.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.