

WATER CORPORATION — FEES AND CHARGES

**935. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Water:**

Given the \$ 4.7 billion GST windfall from the federal Liberal government, will the minister outline to this house whether he will continue his \$400 water tax on struggling Western Australian families; and, if so, how can he continue to justify this unjustified attack on households?

**Mr D.J. KELLY replied:**

I thank the self-confessed member for Struggle Street, the member for Cottesloe! The Treasurer has asked me to make a point and I agree with him. This is not a windfall. The GST top-up payments that we will receive under this new arrangement are not a windfall. A windfall is something that is undeserved or unexpected. What we have got out of this deal that this government has negotiated, that members opposite could not get, is a fair share for Western Australia. It is not a windfall; it is simply righting a historical wrong that Eric Ripper and Geoff Gallop pointed out in this chamber would occur when members opposite signed up for the GST deal 20 years ago.

Members opposite really need to temper their language around the GST issue. They are saying it is now money that we can just squander on whatever project comes to their mind first. We have already seen the press releases put out by the Leader of the Opposition in which he said it should be spent on debt recovery. Almost every member of the frontbench opposite has given another spending priority. The National Party, the partner in crime, has already come up with a different agenda for where that money should be spent. If the member for Cottesloe really cares about the people of Western Australia, he should rethink what he is saying.

The increases in water prices that we have implemented in the first two budgets are less than the increases in water charges that were in the budget that we inherited from members opposite. Had the member for Cottesloe been the Minister for Water—heaven forbid—he would have increased water charges more. Within the constraints, we have done our best to moderate the impact on low-income families. That is borne out by two statistics. The number of Western Australians who have had their water cut off because they cannot pay their bills under us is down 60 per cent on what it was when you people were on the government benches. The number of Western Australians who are paying interest on their water bills is down by over 10 per cent in the last two years. Notwithstanding that we have had to increase water charges, we have made it easier for people to pay their bills. People who are having difficulties paying their water bills can now contact the Water Corporation and the Water Corporation will engage with them and offer them a range of options to make it easier for them to meet their bills. We have done much more to make it easier for Western Australians to pay their water bills than the Liberal–National government certainly did in eight years.