

WATER LICENSING FEES

262. Mr P. PAPALIA to the Minister for Water Resources:

Can the minister please advise the house why the state government is implementing water licence administration fees?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE replied:

I thank the member for his question and his interest in making sure that we secure our water future. Water is a key component in agricultural areas in particular but also for many businesses. Many farmers spend a lot of money putting infrastructure in place so that they can collect and use water for their businesses. Licensing will guarantee the security of that water that companies, farmers and irrigators need. If we are to guarantee that security and give it greater certainty in a changing climate and in an area of growing demand, we need to ensure that the monitoring and managing of that precious resource is improved. I receive regular complaints from farmers, for example, who say that someone else has built a dam or is diverting water that they should be able to use. We need to manage disputes when they arise based on the information we have. Therefore, we are putting in place a licensing system under which the beneficiaries, the holders of the licence, are required to contribute to covering the cost of the licensing through a licence administration fee.

Mr D.T. Redman: So who is picking up the half a million dollar shortfall for your backflip on the issues with those domestic bores?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: We are endeavouring to make sure that that is covered; we are doing our best to do that. As the member is aware, we have given an indication that the Economic Regulation Authority will assess this process after two years to see whether we are getting cost recovery - whether we are recovering too much or too little - and it can be adjusted after that. We really need to make sure that we have cost recovery. In keeping with the national water initiatives, we should be ensuring that the benefit that is going to these companies means that they will contribute to the cost of providing that extra licensing.

I have a real issue with the Leader of the Opposition, who is suggesting that we could just charge a flat rate of \$220 a year. That totally abrogates our responsibility under the National Water Initiative that when that benefit accrues to irrigators, they will pay the cost of it. If there was a \$220 flat rate, as the Leader of the Opposition suggested in his press release, would he benefit from that personally in terms of his holding or his own dam or companies that he is a director of that have an interest in water?

Mr P.D. Omodei: Didn't you get a submission from a group of farmers the other week? I gave them a commitment that I would leave you alone until you made a sensible response. Have you done that yet?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I have spoken to them. I have written back to them. The question I am asking - I do not know whether the Leader of the Opposition is willing to answer - is whether he put out a press release that would clearly benefit him financially, but it did not actually show that. Is he still a director of Koorian Olives?

Mr P.D. Omodei: No, I am not.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Did he get rid of that directorship of Koorian Olives, which obtained a gigalitre of water when he was a minister, knowing that it would be worth a lot of money?

Mr P.D. Omodei: That is nonsense.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: It is interesting -

Mr P.D. Omodei: Why don't you say that outside? I will take your house off you, minister.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I assume that in a few months the Leader of the Opposition will update his pecuniary interests file to show that he was not a member of Koorian Olives, which would have had a benefit of thousands of dollars through a proposal being put forward by the Leader of the Opposition, who, on the last evidence available to me, was a director of that company.