

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Wednesday 26 September 2007

WATERWORKS (MAKING OF RESTRICTIONS) ACT AMENDMENT BILL

The Hon. A.M. BRESSINGTON obtained leave and introduced a bill for an act to amend the Waterworks Act 1932.

The Hon. A.M. BRESSINGTON: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

These amendments to the Waterworks Act relate to restrictions and how those restrictions can actually be implemented in the future. Although I do not want to have a shot at minister Maywald for the 'bucket rule' a few weeks ago which instigated the need for a lot of these amendments that are being put forward and the Hon. Nick Xenophon's recommendation that the constitution of SA Water be changed, it was an example of how information coming from the corporation directly to the minister may not be in the best interests of the residents of South Australia and is not actually in the best interests of water conservation measures for this state. The people who vehemently opposed the bucket rule included the Nursery Industries Association and Dr Schwertberger from Flinders University, who is a prominent water expert. Mr Colin Pittman, who is the project manager for the Salisbury wetlands project, was critical of that, and many others saw that it was a useless regulation to bring in.

This bill merely proposes that, when restrictions or water conservation measures are needed because of a water shortage or this one in 1 000 year drought or whatever it is, the parliament has the opportunity to debate the restriction itself to make sure that when information goes out to the people of South Australia it has actually been well thought through and it is not just a recommendation from the corporation, which seems to be quite reluctant to implement or adopt any water conservation measures at all that will be effective for this state.

I will ask the council to contemplate the need for a stakeholders water advisory committee, which would sit between the corporation and the minister to hand to both houses a report based on its expertise so that we have information in front of us to make a well balanced decision on behalf of the people of South Australia. People who would be included in this stakeholders advisory committee are those with knowledge and experience in water management in an urban or regional setting; practical knowledge and experience in the protection and management of the environment; practical knowledge and experience in water conservation; practical knowledge and experience in the plant nursery and garden industry; practical knowledge and experience in the storage and supply of bulk water; practical knowledge and experience in community affairs; and practical knowledge and experience in industry, commerce or business.

One of the main gripes, if you like, that are coming forward in this debate about water shortage is that business, commerce and industry are not required to take any measures at all to recycle or collect stormwater and that what they are being asked to do is minimal compared with the sacrifices that normal, everyday citizens are being required to make. Given that it is 1.7 per cent of the water coming out of the River Murray that people are consuming, it seems quite unreasonable that they should bear the entire brunt of conserving water in this time of drought. What we need to do is basically get this right.

One of the other provisions in this bill, contained in clause 33B(4)(a), is that the minister must consult with a City of Salisbury consultant—a technical adviser, if you

like—on the water conservation and wetlands projects to see whether there is a better way to actually implement a restriction or whether a better system could be established in the long term to prevent tough measures like the bucket rule even needing to be contemplated.

It was also during this debate that we saw some 15 000 people who were prepared to march in a rally against the bucket rule, for the simple reason that it was not going to conserve much water at all and that many people had gone out and had dripper systems installed last summer because they were told that drippers would be acceptable, and a great way of watering gardens.

The Hon. R.P. Wortley interjecting:

The Hon. A.M. BRESSINGTON: You did that? I did that, too, Mr Wortley; good on you.

The Hon. B.V. Finnigan interjecting:

The Hon. A.M. BRESSINGTON: Shame on you! People did go to some expense also in buying tanks. They took measures to conserve water, to catch water and to be able to utilise and recycle water which has been quite amazing. It shows that the people of South Australia are taking this seriously and are prepared to behave in a responsible manner where and when they can afford to.

Then, of course, the next summer the bucket rule comes in and drippers are out. There was no explanation and we were basically told, 'This is not negotiable and this is what you have to comply to.' That enraged, as I said, about 15 000 people who were prepared to rally against it.

Salisbury has a wetlands project, which I have been to see twice now. Mayor Tony Zappia and Colin Pitman took me on a tour about 11 months ago and explained how it works. Really and truly, the science behind this is so simple but so effective and I believe that councils should be encouraged, where possible, to introduce wetlands and wetlands projects at every opportunity. I believe Salisbury council is now in a position where it is storing water in an underground aquifer that it has harvested from its wetlands project, and it estimates that the amount of good water that it has is about a four-year supply.

I believe that in the long term, if the state was to adopt this project amongst various councils, we could go part way to solving the water shortage in South Australia. I have asked parliamentary counsel to include this as a stipulation in this amendment whereby a person of Colin Pitman's knowledge and experience (or some such person) be included in the Stakeholders Advisory Committee and be a direct adviser to the minister, to work with the minister and SA Water to ensure that the minister receives the best possible advice in times of crisis.

This is a pretty simple bill. The report that the Stakeholders Advisory Committee would hand down would include information such as the efficiency of the water conservation measures, environmental, social and economic impacts associated with the restriction or the variation, and various strategies or practices that may be adopted or applied to promote or achieve greater efficiencies in the use of water.

This environmental study also has social impacts which need to be included in the report. One of the major concerns for a lot of people was not only the fact that they were going to let parts of their garden die but that their houses were going to crack and there would be damage caused by not keeping the ground around their homes moist enough. That was quite a concern to people. I know that during last summer we restricted the amount of water that we were using to water our garden quite a bit. For the first time in many years we now have cracks appearing inside our home that are going to take quite a bit of money to fix, with no guarantee that those cracks will not

return again next year if we continue to lessen the amount of water we put on our garden. Also, for older people, gardening is sometimes a great outlet. People take pride in their homes and invest a lot of money in their homes, and they should be able to have water conservation measures which also allow them to care for their plot in the world and make sure that their investment is looked after to the best of their ability.

I present this amendment to the council. I do not believe that it is complicated, and I do not believe that it is not do-able. I think the formation of a Stakeholders Advisory Committee, with people from industries involved with gardens, water conservation and whatever else, would be of great assistance to the minister in making decisions and could possibly help to avoid any embarrassing situations, such as that experienced a couple of weeks ago. I await hearing members' contributions.

The Hon. R.P. WORTLEY secured the adjournment of the debate.