

Legislative Council

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LAKE EYRE BASIN (INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT) (RATIFICATION OF AMENDMENTS) AMENDMENT BILL

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (17:03): The Lake Eyre Basin covers much of the north and north-east of South Australia, the south-east of the Northern Territory, the south-west of Queensland, and a small portion of the north-east of New South Wales. That there should be an agreement between these different jurisdictions on matters concerning the difference appears to make good sense.

While appreciating that the essential purpose of this legislation is to make the Northern Territory a full partner to this agreement, I believe that several matters need to be raised at this time. As the Hon. Mark Parnell stated, the basin is sparsely populated and is largely pastoral country. It contains South Australia's major known reserves of natural gas. Recent exploration suggests that it has considerable potential mineral deposits and may be a source of energy from hot rocks. It is also an area with expanding tourism. There are proposals that this may be an area chosen for carbon sequestration. In short, it is an area of vital economic importance to this state, with the prospect of becoming much more so.

My concern is that South Australia needs a broad strategic plan, but this does not seem to be apparent in some of the legislation that is passed through this place at times. It is apparent to me that the basin should be the subject of broad community discussion on the best policy for this state to follow.

My inquiries of sources in the area reveal that many residents of the basin are not even aware that this legislation is before parliament. We simply cannot make good legislation if our people are not involved from an early stage via the public consultation process. Due to the lack of such discussion, I am uncertain at this moment about the best way to manage this very large and important part of our state to the best advantage for our people. I notice that, although the area of South Australia covered by the agreement is to be expanded, the entire southern part of the basin is not. Lake Eyre South is excluded in its entirety.

As water flow is key to this system, I have two observations. Small, non-perennial creeks in the Northern Territory are included in the expanded area, although they lose their waters into the sands of the Simpson Desert, and it is doubtful whether any water from them ever reaches the lakes. Yet, here in South Australia, the highest rainfall in the basin falls on the northern Flinders Ranges. None of this area is covered by the agreement.

This area seems to provide the only catchments that feed directly into Lake Eyre South. One suspects that the inclusion of this more economically active area at this time may have been the stimulus for more debate than was desired by the ministers and bureaucrats who put this agreement together in the first place.