

Legislative Council

Thursday, 16 October 2008, Page 347

WATER SUPPLY

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (14:45): I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the minister representing the Premier a question about water.

Leave granted.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: When the Rudd government was elected in November last year, all Australians were promised a higher level of cooperation between state and federal governments. This morning the Hon. Greg Hunt, federal shadow minister for climate change, environment and water, informed South Australians via the Leon Byner show on FIVEaa that the federal government had voted down a \$50 million rescue package for the Lower Lakes and the Coorong. Shame!

The health of the Coorong is a barometer for the sustainability of the entire surrounding areas and the water systems that sustain the local community as well as wildlife and local businesses. Last week I spoke with Gary Hera-Singh about the challenges that face these areas, where dairy farmers have literally walked off their land, and now the cockle industry is in dire straits as well.

One has to wonder just how important it is to the government to take proactive measures to ensure the well-being of the people who elected it to do their bidding. Instead, we are seeing a government that has adopted a crisis management approach rather than a government with a long-term vision and solutions for the future challenges that face the state.

These communities are facing annihilation if something is not done, and done quickly. We have tourism destinations at risk, and we have the fact that the Coorong is an environmental World Heritage-listed sanctuary that is also protected by the UN Ramsar Convention. This convention was signed in Ramsar in 1971 and is an intergovernmental convention that provides a framework for international and national cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

If the international community can recognise the importance of the Coorong and the ramifications of its demise, surely our Premier must ensure that this valuable and well-recognised icon is protected no matter what. My questions are:

1. What steps is the Premier taking to ensure that the federal government is morally and politically bound to provide money to rescue the Coorong and Lower Lakes areas?
2. When will the Premier meet with the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, to pursue this matter on behalf of all South Australians and inform us all of the outcome?
3. What will the Premier do if the federal government continues to ignore the plight of the South Australian Lower Lakes and Coorong?

4. Does the Premier support the federal government's decision not to support the Liberal opposition's amendment to increase funding for the Lower Lakes and Coorong, given the \$10 million rescue package that has been announced in an effort to stimulate the economy?
5. Can the Premier estimate what the demise of the Lower Lakes and Coorong communities will cost the South Australian community?

The Hon. P. HOLLOWAY (Minister for Mineral Resources Development, Minister for Urban Development and Planning, Minister for Small Business) (14:47): Of course, this so-called \$50 million rescue package was something concocted by the former leader of the Liberal Party, Dr Nelson, during the Mayo election campaign. It was a stunt.

What this government and this Premier have done is negotiate a \$600 million package—not a \$50 million package—for this state that will provide new infrastructure, a significant proportion of which will be spent specifically to assist people in the Lower Lakes region. This Labor government, both state and federal, is about substance; it is not about stunts.

Members interjecting:

The PRESIDENT: Order!