

MOUNT LOFTY RANGES

16 November 2006

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the Minister for Environment and Conservation questions about the Mount Lofty Ranges water prescription.

Leave granted.

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: In October 2004, the then minister for environment and conservation proclaimed the Mount Lofty Ranges to be 'under stress'. This reason was given for the immediate implementation of a two-year prohibition on water use and the intention to prescribe water resources in the Mount Lofty Ranges. During the past 18 months, the Mount Lofty Ranges Existing Water Users Group has become increasingly concerned about the implications of these measures. Given the specific nature of these questions, I expect that the minister will have to bring back an answer at some later stage. My questions are:

1. Will the minister explain the specific scientific data the state government used as a basis for its determination that the Mount Lofty Ranges are 'under stress'? Will the minister provide copies of this information to the Mount Lofty Ranges Existing Water Users Group?
2. Will the minister advise whether those who have paid for their full allocation of water will receive that total amount of water and, if not, will the minister consider payment of compensation, as has been done in New South Wales as a result of capital loss due to the reduction in water entitlements?
3. Will the minister consider providing landowners with a three-year water rollover period, given that SA Water has a five-year rollover period in which it can carry over unused water from one financial year to the next?

4. Will the minister look into compensation for any landowners whose means of earning a living may be taken away by any reduction in their water entitlements?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO (Minister for Environment and Conservation): I thank the honourable member for his important questions. The water resources of the Mount Lofty Ranges are vitally important socially, economically and ecologically to South Australians, and the increasing demand for domestic, industrial and agricultural water supplies is placing these water resources under pressure. A risk has been identified that they may not meet future demand if increased use is not managed. The water resources of this area were prescribed on 20 October 2005, following extensive consultation.

In relation to the work done, I am happy to bring back the details but, broadly speaking, monitoring of the ground water occurs on what I believe is a regular basis. The water quality is measured. I understand that the volume of water available and various aspects of its quality, particularly salinity, is looked at, and these are measured and monitored over periods of time. I am happy to bring back the specific details. The prescription establishes a framework for the sustainable management of water resources, and this will provide more secure access to water for all users and recognise that the environment as a legitimate user of water.

Water allocation is now being developed by the Adelaide and Mount Lofty NRM board with extensive consultation with landholders, industry groups and the broader community. The plan will ensure sustainable allocation, transfer and management of water in this region. The notice of prohibition and notice of intention to prescribe has been placed in that area since 2004, and notice was placed in relation to a temporary moratorium on new commercial industrial irrigation water use and stock and domestic water use from large dams to prevent further degradation, while the long-term management measures are developed through the water allocation planning processes, as I said, in consultation with the community. New water extractions from the Fleurieu Peninsula swamps are also included. As I have outlined, this prescription

process has been deemed to be necessary to ensure the long-term future of that water supply.

In relation to water allocation, the information I have is that the water levy associated with the access or licence to obtain underground water is moneys that are paid, not for the particular quantity of water but, rather, it is a water levy that goes to the NRM boards to help them manage that asset, if you like, and also to assist them in the design and implementation of their water allocation plans. My understanding is that the NRM water levy is payment for that, rather than for a particular right to access a particular quantity of water. In relation to some of the other questions, I am happy to bring back a response.

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I thank the minister for her answer. Will the minister provide access to the scientific data upon which those decisions were based to the Mount Lofty Ranges Existing Water Users Group?