

## Water (Commonwealth Powers) Amendment Bill

28<sup>th</sup> October 2008

**The Hon. R.L. BROKENSHIRE (16:50):** Before speaking on this bill, I put on the public record (as I always do when there is any potential to question anything I say) that I own a property on the River Murray, but we do not irrigate with water from the River Murray.

I was hoping that today would be a joyous occasion and that I would speak for only a couple of minutes to say, 'Well done, everyone. A great bill and a monumental occasion for South Australia which guarantees a healthy, vibrant and economically strong Murray-Darling Basin for the future, particularly for South Australia.' But, unfortunately, the fact is that I do not have the confidence to say that with respect to this bill and the way in which it has been negotiated.

I say at the start that I find it very difficult to come into a democratic place which operates under the Westminster system and, effectively, be asked to rubber stamp the most significant legislation I have ever debated in this chamber—that is, to rubber stamp something that has been drafted and put forward 100 per cent by COAG and the ministerial council—and to be subjected to threats, potentially, if I try to amend this bill in any way at all to make it a better bill for South Australians. That is a matter that concerns me.

When I attended ministerial council meetings, whenever there was any national agreement (and I was involved with some of them with respect to firearms and such things), you always ensured that you fought for the very best possible legislation for the state you represented. That has not, in fact, occurred on this occasion, and that is a great pity for the future. As I noted in *Hansard*, a member in the other place said that, in 50 years people will look back at this legislation and say that it was not a good piece of legislation for South Australia and it did not guarantee the healthy, strong and vibrant river system we had the opportunity to provide.

I know that, once this bill has passed both houses, the Premier and the minister will issue a press release saying, 'It took 100 years, but we did it! We achieved it!' A lot of smokescreens will be raised about this issue, because the focus of this legislation is about making a million people—the key voters in this state—think that the government has done a grand job for them in saving the River Murray. The government hopes that this legislation alone will ensure that the vote in the marginal seats will be sufficient to return it to government. However, I say that this bill does not guarantee a sustainable future for the Murray-Darling Basin and that it especially does not guarantee a sustainable future for the water supply, environmental flow and the health of the river system from the border east of Renmark through to the Lower Lakes.

Having said that, I again say that I see this legislation as an affront to parliamentary democracy. That is why I have put forward an amendment, and I ask all members in this chamber to have a close look at this amendment in the interests of their constituents, because this amendment will at least help to secure a sustainable food bowl for South Australia.

I will speak more in the committee stage about the issue of states opting out, but I am very concerned about clauses 5 and 6 of this bill, which effectively allow a state to opt out. I did not think that would happen with this legislation. I thought that, once locked in, they were locked in for good. That is the only way this bill will succeed to its full potential. To be fair, there may well have been a lot of genuine intent from a number of people in the government in South Australia and in other states. However, the fact of the matter is that some people were much smarter and more clever, and they were able to manipulate and negotiate a far better deal for their state.

We do not have a level playing field with this legislation. In the briefing, I raised the issue that a state can veto what is going on, and I am advised it can effectively opt out of this agreement. I was told at the briefing that money was involved in this, and I acknowledge that there is: part of the package for this scheme involves a sum of approximately \$13.9 billion. By the way, that is over 10 years, and I think that in itself is far too long. I cannot understand why, with

the surplus and the fact that we need to spend on infrastructure, there is not an acceleration of infrastructure projects for more efficient water use, particularly in the Eastern States, which have not done anywhere near what South Australian food producers and successive governments have done over a long period.

The water buyback should be accelerated and a proper price paid, not doing over the irrigators or the food growers when the banks say, 'No more! We're not giving you any more money for temporary water. We are going to come in at bargain basement prices as a government, drip-feed several million dollars a year, and pick you off grower by grower.' How outrageous and how undemocratic!

The bottom line is that, when the 10 years are up and that money has been spent, if there is a federal Labor government and all the states have a Labor government, except one, and that state starts to be put under enormous pressure, what will the Liberal government do in that state? Alternatively, if there is a Liberal government both federally and in every state but one, and that state is under pressure in relation to water supply for that state, it can opt out and say, 'Sorry; we hung on for 10 years, but it didn't work. It was pathetic legislation, and I'm going to stand up for the rights of my state.'

They will destroy the system, and they will never get a chance like this again. This is not about spin doctors. This is the main artery to the heart of South Australia. This is the water supply we need for our future. We should get it right, and we should have fought for a better deal. I say to the media: do not buy the lemon; have a very close look at this legislation and highlight to the community and the taxpayers of this state the weaknesses in this legislation.

As for the ministerial council, I ask: where does the real control lie? It can comment on the basin plan and send it back to the authority. In fairness to the officers, I will put some of this on the public record now so that they have a chance to come up with some answers in the committee stage. Who will ultimately decide what will happen in relation to the basin? We do not have an independent authority. There is no real independent authority as this legislation stands. In one of the Premier's media releases before the last federal election on 7 February, he stated:

My stance has now been vindicated with Greens Senator Bob Brown [and his party, the Green Party] from around the country, publicly endorsing my call for an independent authority...

The Premier said that he wanted an independent authority, that he wanted to remove the politics from this issue and that never again did he want a situation where politicians could muck it up. That is what has happened in the past, and we all have to take responsibility for it. However, here is an opportunity. The Premier said:

...endorsing my call for an independent authority made up of people with science, environmental and community expertise.

On 7 August, the Premier said that he 'remains committed to the River Murray rescue plan, including the establishment of an independent authority to oversee the river'. He also said:

Earlier this year, I negotiated with the Prime Minister for an expert-based authority to manage the river.

I took that statement to imply, in part, that it would be absolutely independent, that it would look at the health and wellbeing of the river from the head of the catchment to the Lower Lakes, and that it would also look at equity and fairness, which has never been in the system.

South Australia is allowed only about 6 per cent of all the water in the basin. I thought that this was our chance, and I agreed with the Premier. I was going to back him 150 per cent, but then I got this legislation—only a few weeks ago, by the way, although we are supposed to pass it by 1 November. This situation has been 100 years in the making, yet we are forced to rush this bill through the parliament. My experience in the parliament is that, when you rush bills through, you get a dog's breakfast of a bill—and this is one of those bills.

On 27 March 2008, Mr Rann said that he was delighted that an independent authority would be established to manage the Murray-Darling Basin and that it would spend the next few years consulting with the states to develop a basin plan which will have final sign-off by the

federal water minister and then be managed by the authority whose decisions will be made on the basis of science and not political considerations. On 3 July 2008, the Premier said:

This is a stunning result for South Australia. South Australia has lobbied for an independent authority to manage the Murray-Darling Basin. I asked what persuasive powers does the minister have—that is, the state minister—with the commonwealth minister. Will there be transparency in how the minister makes her or his decisions in the future? What exactly is meant by 'the final sign-off by the federal water minister' in the 27 March release? Is this now not the case, or is the new authority not really independent but, rather, subject to the federal minister's veto?

I do not know, because the legislation is not detailed and extensive legislation; it is a few pages, and I am talking here about both bills at once. They are just a few pages. But the devil is in the detail, and we never even had a chance to look at the devil in the detail of the bill. This is something that I have not experienced before in the years I have been in the parliament whereby it is called a text—368 pages of text. What does it mean? What are the legalities around that text? I have not spoken to a colleague anywhere of any political persuasion that actually understands the legal ramifications of the text. It is massive and it is complex, and we have less than two weeks to go through it.

Under this agreement, on the question of independence, is it the case that in absolute real terms—when it is all boiled down—nothing changes? Maybe that is a bit harsh. Maybe they are steps in the right direction but, if we really look at it and analyse it, the truth of the matter is that little or nothing changes.

Let us talk about the 1,850 gigalitres minimum allocation. Growers are asking me whether we are getting this now. The answer is: no, we are not. I want to put on the public record my appreciation, and that of Family First's, of rural and regional South Australians along the River Murray in South Australia. Only about 15 years ago, when the state was on its knees, these people had the intestinal fortitude of best practice food producers. They had the intestinal fortitude (between tourism, horticulture and viticulture) to go out there and invest significant amounts of money along the whole of the River Murray system—dairy farmers below Lock 1, right down to the Lakes.

Having had the privilege of sitting around the cabinet table and being briefed by the treasurer and the premier at the time, I can say that it was investments like that and people who were absolutely committed (to this day) that got this state's economy going again. Then it came into the city and flowed from there.

It is a difficult situation for those people at the moment, and they need to know their sustainability and they need to know that the legislation will, as best as possible, subject to mother nature, guarantee them the opportunity to continue to produce food for South Australia, Australia and to export. We do not want to have to import the sort of food that we are importing at the moment. If we do not get this legislation right, our fruit will come from Chile, Argentina and China, and we will lose more social fabric. We will see communities without proper opportunities in the future, and I will talk more about that in a moment. I do not have any confidence in food coming from China, and I do not think that anybody else in this parliament, or in this state for that matter, has any confidence in that.

If we get the 1,850 gigalitres of water, will it be a situation where we would have any real concern for permanent planting survival and cropping from those plantings? In what circumstances do we actually get more than 1,850 gigalitres? I would like to know about that, too. If we see floods and good water coming through the river system, under this legislation, in what circumstances can we get more than 1,850 gigalitres?

Exclusion of the tributaries really frustrates me. In fact, it beggars belief that this is a Murray-Darling Basin deal. When one looks into the details, it does not include the whole of the basin; it does not include absolutely all of the catchment of the River Murray Darling Basin. These are, I believe, a few fairly straight questions for the minister, who should be willing to not spin and cover up for the deals done to keep Victoria happy. In fact, really, I should not put these questions to the minister but to the Premier.

It is incredibly unprofessional that a lot of this stuff was done only after *The Advertiser* had front-page stories and COAG was coming to Adelaide. I would love to see the agenda. In fact, I would love the Premier to table the agenda of COAG so that all my colleagues can see it and see whether or not the Murray-Darling Basin matters were even on that agenda, or whether it was actually rushed through that night or the next morning.

There was only one clear winner out of that—and, wow, what a Premier he is. They might not realise it in Victoria, but sit here and have a look. He did far better than Prime Minister Rudd or Premier Rann. He did far better for his state.

I have some questions. The scientists all say what the basin includes, but does this agreement include all the tributaries in the basin? If it does not, which tributaries are not included? What were the terms of the agreement by which those tributaries were not included? Should the Premier have fought for irrigators, food producers, environmental flow and the Lower Lakes as hard as Premier Brumby from Victoria fought to get these exclusions? We have missed out. It is a cop-out.

Mr Brumby received \$1 billion, just like that. We ended up with \$600 million. We have had that for a while now, by the way, but most of the people living along the whole of the River Murray system do not understand the detail of the \$600 million. I do not know whether or not I was asleep (I do not sleep much), but I have not been invited to a briefing that gives me, as a member of Parliament, absolute detail to know where all the dollars of that \$600 million are going and how this \$67 million is being spent—how much is being spent on taking the water from Jervois to Currency Creek and Langhorne Creek and across to Meningie and the Raukan community and the Narrung peninsula. I have no idea.

I also do not understand why, for crying out loud, at the same time all this is happening, private investors are building a pipeline from Jervois down to their irrigation properties. Where is the coordination, the management, the planning and the transparency? It is not here. And we are just supposed to accept the government's word? Come on!

I want to talk about the environment—in respect of which I believe the Premier should have played absolute hardball, with no negotiation. The Premier had an opportunity here and, in my humble opinion, this Premier has failed with this bill and he has failed regarding the future opportunities of South Australians with respect to the river. I would be happy to debate this with the Premier anywhere at all.

The trump card the Premier had, as I see it, was that before the last federal election Prime Minister Rudd told all Australians that he would fix the River Murray; that whatever was needed, if they voted for him as Prime Minister he would fix it. South Australians voted for him in droves, and now they absolutely and categorically expect it to be fixed 100 per cent—I am talking about this from the point of view of fairness. There is this nonsense about them saying, 'Well, I can't make it rain.' Of course they damn well cannot make it rain, because they are not God. So, they cannot make it rain, and no-one is stupid enough to ever think that they could. However, they are legislators and leaders, and they could have done a lot more. The Prime Minister made the commitment, so why did we not play the hardest possible game that we could?

With respect to environmental flows, why were not gigalitres of water committed to the Lower Lakes and work done on the survival of permanent plantings? I would like some answers on that. I am advised that, even now, 30 gigalitres of water down to the Lower Lakes would at least give them a chance for one year. I pray to God that we will again receive proper rains from next year. However, in the meantime, let us have some leadership, because 30 gigalitres could be sent there tomorrow if there was real leadership. It could be down there within a week. All they have to do is drop a bit off all the locks, from Lock 1 to Lock 9, and they could help the bottom end.

Why was there not a strong argument to ensure that we had water supply from the Lower Lakes back up? It is a whole river system, and we cannot continue to pull too much out of the top. Our modelling has to be on a worst case scenario that the water is still from the bottom up. That is the only way in which to have a healthy river system. In America, where there is a situation

similar to ours—where there is a significant major river system running through, I think, three states—it is enshrined in legislation that the bottom end of that river system must be protected first, and that is the only sensible way in which it could be done.

However, this legislation does not do that. This legislation does not do anything to guarantee or give people confidence with respect to their businesses, their social environment, environmental issues and all the things they need. Where is the water for the Lower Lakes? What priority will the lakes have to receive water from a 1,850 gigalitre share? What is the amount that the government has set aside out of that 1,850 gigalitres (if it receives it) for the Lower Lakes, and has the government done any modelling of that nature?

I would like to see a pie chart, if one is available, or some graphs, charts or spreadsheets—and the government must have them. I think we are entitled to have a look at them. Before the committee stage I would like to see the information that shows, when we receive 1,850 gigalitres, how it will be distributed. No-one knows at this stage. However, someone in government must know. What percentage do they have there for SA Water, for environmental flow and for irrigators? No-one knows. That information is locked away in a ministerial or departmental office somewhere. Let us know.

I understand that the commonwealth environmental water holder within the legislation will have a licence to use water, like any other irrigator. What is the minister's best estimate of the water the holder will have available? If the answer is that it is up to the authority to decide, that is a common answer and begs the question: are we building the top of the pyramid without knowing the foundation? By that, I mean that these two current bills are just the top of the pyramid. We were not initially given the middle section that I talked about, where the devil is in the detail—that is, the tabled text—which still has to be passed by parliament. The bottom section is the basin plan and other scientific matters that the new authority still has to come up with. It is paper thin on detail and wide open on uncertainty.

If it were not all Labor states that were dealing with this legislation at the moment, there is no way known that it would get through without serious amendment. And rushed? Let us just talk about that for a minute. It was introduced in the other place on 23 September 2008, debated and concluded effectively over only two sitting days, 14 and 15 October, and then introduced in this place on the last sitting day, 16 October. I have mentioned previously but I will say specifically now that it was a bill of five pages but it had a sister bill of 17 pages and 304 pages of tabled text.

Why the hurry? I reckon that if we were to all talk on this topic for the time that we should, and if we spent as much time in committee as we should fleshing out the real detail behind this so that we could expose it to the community and get a little bit of feedback from talkback radio on the way and have enough time to digest all this and put it into language that we could send to the key stakeholders throughout the state, we would need a bit more time, but we would do a better job of it.

But do you know what would happen if that was to take place, Mr Acting President? The government would accuse Family First, the Democrats, the Greens and the Liberal Party of holding up this history-making legislation, and it would try to blame us by saying we were making it difficult for it to get the bill through. That is what it would be telling the media. But that is not true. What we are doing is missing out on a golden opportunity for South Australia.

As I said, why the hurry? There is a commitment to pass this bill by a certain date. What is the significance of that? Parallel to this, and what is not happening fast enough, is consideration for the futures of the growers in this state right now. This legislation is not going to fix anything for them immediately. There is a lot of work that should be going on right now to address issues for growers for this season, and I want to talk about a couple of those things in a little while. So the government should not attempt to hoodwink people and tell them that it has to be hurried through now. The only reason it has to be hurried through now is two P words: 'political' and 'political'. That is the only reason it is being hurried through now.

I turn to SA Water. I want to know what SA Water's allocation is. In other words, how many gigalitres is SA Water permitted to take out of the basin? If we are to give fully informed

consent to pass this handover package, will the minister tell us the parameters, in terms of gigalitres, of how much water SA Water is allowed to take out of the river?

Also, what is the status of water restrictions? Food producers along the River Murray complain to me that, whilst they have a legal licence and allocation, they obviously are only getting a very small percentage of that at this point in time. They go on to say that people on town supply are required only to water at certain times and, whilst through altruism and concern for irrigators and the environment, that has produced some reduction in water use, it is not strictly a water restriction of the same nature as that which applies to a food producer in percentage terms of the reduction in their licensed allocation. What it is actually is a restriction on the timing of the use of water. I would like the minister to outline what impact this plan will have on water restrictions in Adelaide going forward, and I will be asking that question during committee.

On a related matter, and of much concern, is Victoria. I want to talk for a moment about how much water the city of Melbourne is now taking and what it is projected it will take out of the Murray-Darling Basin—I highlight 'Murray-Darling Basin'—by taking water out of the Goulburn River? How does that work out on a per capita basis between Adelaide and Melbourne residents?

In relation to the legal access to the Hume and Dartmouth dams, I congratulate those who got that in, because it had to happen. But I want to know what will be the legal access to water that spills over the top of the dams when we get a good year? What are the legal mechanisms around opportunities for South Australia in that instance? In relation to the 1,850 gigalitres, which I understand allows water to be held back so that South Australia can get water in the future, will we be holding back water in other states' storages by taking less than our 1,850 gigalitres? In other words, will the government choose to take, say, 1,250 gigalitres one year so we can hold back 600 gigalitres for another year? I do not know, but I would like an answer.

I want to talk about critical human needs. I have a question for the minister: what was intended by what I see as incredibly broad political wording in the definition of 'critical human needs' in clause 3? When I was arguing for a flow of water for environmental purposes and survival of the Lower Lakes, I raised the issue of the Menindee Lakes, where there had been an increase in water, and the negotiation to allow some of that to flow through. The answer I got from the minister, via the media, was along this line: 'Well, that is critical human needs for Adelaide and towns supplied by SA Water.' So I took that to mean only two things: for human consumption and sanitation purposes within households. But, when you start to look at this, it is far broader than that.

I know this is a committee question but, if the minister and the government are in such a hurry to pass this bill, I put them on notice now that I want clarification of all this. I ask: what are 'prohibitively high social, economic or national security costs'? That is contained in the definition of 'critical human needs'. We have had some legal advice on this. Also: for whom is it prohibitive? Does that mean communities or family farms? Or, is it prohibitively high for the government of the day?

I challenge any honourable member to defend the present clause as a narrow clause. It is not a narrow clause. It is wide open—it is as wide as AAMI Stadium. That is one of the reasons Family First will move an amendment that I will address in more detail in committee. I have sent to honourable members the text of my amendment. It is about protecting permanent plantings by ensuring that the broad wording in the definition of 'critical human needs' is certain to include permanent plantings. People have to drink water in order to survive, and they also have to eat. If we cannot produce our own food, where are we going as a state and as a nation? We cannot mine ourselves out of trouble forever. We can sustainably grow food.

Let me put before the council for its consideration, as it thinks about Family First's amendment, what the Premier said in a media release on 7 February 2007. The media release states:

I have made it clear that I am willing to cede our state's constitutional powers over the Murray—

we all are, subject to the legislation being fair for South Australians and, hopefully, better than it was in the past—

but only if there are adequate safeguards and assurances for flows to South Australia.

That is what the Premier said. Are members happy with that? Is what the Premier said in the legislation? I cannot see it. I cannot sit comfortably at home tonight and feel satisfied that, if anyone in South Australia comes to me, there are adequate safeguards and assurances for flows to South Australia. I will not lie to them. The truth is that there are not those safeguards and assurances in this bill. I beg the media to look at it and tell the public of South Australia that they are not there. They are not there, and I will do what I can to ensure that people realise they are not there. As one member of this council, I do not want them coming for my blood. The media release continues:

I'm also aware that commentators have said that South Australia is out on its own, that I'm being increasingly isolated, and that John Howard's takeover bid will prevail tomorrow without the safeguards I have been demanding. I'm not backing down and I'm heartened by statements made yesterday by the premiers of Queensland and Victoria. The River Murray will be the loser without the safeguards I am insisting upon.

That is what the Premier said. He said that the River Murray will be the loser without the safeguards on which he was insisting. Well, they are not there. They are not there for South Australia. It continues:

The fact that cotton and rice growers are opposing South Australia's position is, in my view, a vindication.

Our amendment does not protect annual crops, such as cotton, rice or wheat. These can be planted at any time once temporary water has been purchased. The amendment provides a responsible safeguard if a state government really has a plan for the long-term future of our irrigation communities. There must be a basic question to both the commonwealth and state governments. I want this debate raised, and I will do what I can to get it on the public debating platform.

Do we want a Riverland, as we know it, being a food producing bowl? Do we want a dairy industry, as we know it, along the River Murray and the Lower Lakes? Do we want family farming or are we writing them off? Are we writing off family farming? Sadly, I think there is a wink and a nod between the state and commonwealth governments, that they are happy to write off family farmers. They are happy to bring in the corporates and leave the management investment schemes in place—which I thought were gone.

Members should think about the Barossa Valley where we have best-practice wine grape growers and wines such as Hill of Grace and Grange Hermitage. They are all complaining because the corporates are now in the Barossa Valley, spending as fast as they can. I do not think they are irrigating from bores or using recycled water in the Barossa Valley. I think they are bringing that water from the River Murray.

While this is a chance to strengthen and stop this, Timbercorp (the forestry company) through MISs is planting thousands of acres of almonds just over the border. It is getting a water licence for that project, yet South Australian food producers are on their knees. I have spent a fair bit of time around the Riverland and along the river system because, next to my home district, I love it. I lived up there for a while. They are salt of the earth people. They farm at best practice. They generate an economy and stand on their own two feet whenever they can, but during their time in need they are not getting support. They are not getting support—and I condemn the government for it. I do not care whether it is a Liberal or Labor government. If it was a Liberal government in power now, I would be condemning it, too.

Where is the support for family farming? How did this nation get built? Families came to South Australia in 1840 to do family farming. They built this economy and governments—and the federal Liberal government was just as bad—rolled over and had their tummies scratched by the corporates. They encouraged MISs, yet we cannot even guarantee water for family farmers for the survival of their permanent plantings. It is not good enough.

Does this government have a plan for a reduction in the number of family farms? If it does, is it consolidating them into white collar farmers, corporates and shareholder monopolies? I want to know that. Come out and say that I am wrong and show me why I am wrong. All rural people ask the same question. I can tell members that, if we got this right, we would see immediately a reinvigoration of confidence in those areas.

Yesterday I was visiting some rural growers. Has the government got a plan for growing food for our own use and for export? I am proud that my son is a fourth generation farmer. He is a very good farmer, but he cannot work in the future against climate change or all the other problems, including accreditations and input costs, and then have the corporates working against him, as well. Farming families and best practice food producers yesterday told me that they are actively discouraging their kids from taking on their properties. They are actively discouraging them. I was always brought up to encourage the next generation because of the experience, the ethos, the passion and the love of growing food.

There is nothing in my life that has been as rewarding as being a food producer, visiting people and looking at the food on their table and knowing that we had a part in providing that food. It is the most fantastic thing, working with nature. These people are actively discouraging their kids from going on because they have lost confidence, as they have not had direction from the government. Where will our labourers come from if the experience is lost and workers from family farms give up?

**The Hon. A. Bressington:** From China.

**The Hon. R.L. BROKENSHIRE:** My colleague says, 'From china'. The labour will, actually, because the food will be produced in China. I thank my colleagues for their patience, as I have nearly finished. However, when we get to committee I will be in there for the long haul with quite a few questions, as will others, because we have missed a golden opportunity here. If I am wrong, I ask the Premier and his government to show me where I am wrong, but I am not wrong. We have missed a golden opportunity, political point-scoring on our future!

I will comment on a couple of other issues. I am calling today for things to be done for food producers right away. We may be ridiculed in the media and by the government for spending a bit of time talking about this. Is it democracy or is it now the dictatorship? When my father went to the Second World War, with a lot of other fathers, backed up by a lot of women doing their job supporting them, do members know why he went there? He went to fight for democracy and against dictatorship, and I am not sure that we have a true democracy here right now. Whether this legislation goes through on 1, 2 or 3 November does not really worry me. It worries me whether we get it right, and I do not think we will get it right; it certainly is not right at the moment.

Whilst New South Wales may have rushed through its legislation in a couple of days, I am cynical about that. That is not anything to champion. New South Wales rushed this supposedly mirror legislation through both houses of its parliament, I am told, in a couple of days. I wish I had had time to read the detail of the debate. I am cynical, because New South Wales has not done any favours for South Australia in the past when it comes to the Murray-Darling Basin, nor has Victoria. I am told that Victoria and possibly Queensland will not get it through by the date agreed by COAG, 1 November. They are not sitting or they will take longer to deal with it. I do not know whether members saw *Four Corners* last Monday week. I saw just the last part of it but will be looking at it in detail. I suggest that members look at it with respect to the attitude of the Queenslanders. What does it say about the agreement?

I am calling for something like the old agriculture department's rural industries assistance scheme. There are food producers right along the river who need two things right now: first, they need assistance to buy temporary water because the banks may not give them finance this year. We heard here today from the Minister for State/Local Government Relations that \$2 billion was a great initiative for the tramline extension. I would like to debate that on another occasion, but if you can find \$2 billion for that you can find a few million to subsidise some interest rates so that our food producers can obtain some of that temporary water and create income for this state and some GST that will be returned to the coffers. They need subsidisation right now. It could be done

next week in cabinet and they could buy and produce, rather than simply keeping their permanent plantings alive. This legislation will not help them immediately.

The other point I make in conclusion is that the Premier said, when an announcement was made about an exit package for irrigators, that it was the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle. He is so wrong! It is one very small piece of a jigsaw puzzle that we are not completing here with the debate on the bill. Why just an exit package? It is an ill-thought through exit package, because it does not, for example, allow for the house to be subdivided off so that the next irrigator can buy the property; it actually pays them to rip out the permanent plantings. It implies that if you have only 30 acres or less you were not growing very good crops in any case. That is wrong and ill-thought through, and there should be a comprehensive restructure package.

Before the global financial crash there was buoyancy, which I hope we can see continue. In my industry, the dairy industry, they are exporting their backsides off now because the dairy restructure package worked. That same package needs to be given to the Murray-Darling Basin, with the principles and modelling of that package adopted for those growers and irrigators while we debate this bill. Then we will start to get somewhere, because we will have the survival of our food production and our food bowl.

The final point with the legislation is that, whilst it is an attempt—and only an attempt—to get some sort of fairness into sustainable water supply through the Murray Darling Basin, there is no legislation I am seeing from the government to ensure that we start to wean ourselves off the city, and that all those people who rely on the River Murray start to wean themselves off it as well. If we are serious about the River Murray and about a sustainable future for South Australia, we would have a holistic comprehensive water strategy and plan and we would have a stack of other legislation in here that we would be debating, but it is not here. There is some from the Independents and crossbench members, but neither of the major parties, Liberal or Labor, has anything when it comes to a comprehensive water strategy and relevant legislation to ensure that we get that sustainable future.

I have been pretty critical of this legislation, and some members will go out there and tell the media that and they will also try to tell their constituents. However, I have been critical of the legislation because I was a great supporter of the principles we were going to be debating in this place. As I said earlier, if the legislation had fought for a better deal and absolute independence, with no interference from politicians in the future and if, for once in 100 years, we had a Murray-Darling Basin system that was fair and equitable for all Australians, I would not have stood up and spent the past 50 minutes, or whatever it is, debating this bill. However, that is not the case, and it is one of the greatest missed opportunities I have seen.

In closing, I place on the public record that history will show that, if we pass this legislation in its present form, democracy will be gone; we will be like puppy dogs; and we will have missed the greatest opportunity ever to fix the only river system on the eastern and southern side of our nation of Australia. I say to my colleagues: we could have done better, but we did not have the leadership.

Debate adjourned on motion of Hon. I.K. Hunter.