

September 20th, 2007

NATIONALS WIN WATER INQUIRY

The National Party has successfully instigated a Parliamentary inquiry into the various methods available to supplement Melbourne's water supply.

The Nationals' Environment and Resources spokesman, **Peter Hall**, called for an inquiry that will look at the broad issues of water savings, including increased conservation and efficiency efforts, collection of stormwater, reuse of treated waste water, use of groundwater, small locally based desalination plants and any other options that add to better water use.

The Parliament has agreed to the inquiry, by the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, which will report back no later than December 2008 on the relative merits of supplementing Melbourne's water supply by some or all of the above means.

During a four hour debate on Wednesday, Mr Hall said there was an argument to be made that Melbourne's present and future water needs could be met without the need for the proposed north-south pipeline, which would divert water from the Goulburn Valley, or the desalination plant proposed for Wonthaggi.

He pointed out that while the Nationals did not oppose desalination plants totally, there was a case to be made that communities such as Melbourne should live within their means and should look for local problems to local solutions.

Mr Hall quoted from numerous Government and statutory body reports and said a basic mistake the Government was making was looking to water conservation as a last resort instead of a first resort.

He pointed out that, based on the various reports undertaken, including the State Government's own 'Our Water Our Future', Melbourne would have twice as much water as it needed by 2020.

But Mr Hall added this would be at the expense of irrigation water where it was needed in the north-east and by imposing a huge desalination plant on country Victoria.

"We clearly made the point that Melbourne needs an extra 200 gegalitres of water; we also made the point that Victoria has at least 300 gegalitres of water going out to sea via the eastern treatment plant and the western treatment plant; and we also made the point that we have 500 gegalitres of rainwater falling on Melbourne but that half of it, or 250 gegalitres, falls on impervious surfaces within the Melbourne catchment," Mr Hall told Parliament.

“Our claim, which has been supported by government documentation which I quoted from during my contribution to the debate, was that sufficient water -- in fact, plenty of it -- was produced from treated recycled water or harvested stormwater to actually supplement Melbourne's required water supplies without the need to take more water from the north of the state, from Gippsland or from any other part of the state as well.”

Mr Hall said no-one argued about the need to bring about security of water supply – the issue was how it was to be achieved.

“The inquiry by the Environment and Natural Resources Committee will, I think, throw light on the issue and give information and guidance to government and to the people of Victoria as an appropriate way forward to meet Melbourne's water supply needs. I think that is a positive step.”

Mr Hall added he was “bitterly disappointed” that the Government was not prepared to do as the motion says -- tread water for 12 months and to take a more serious look at the alternative water supplies possibilities.

“Despite The Nationals' and my bitter disappointment that the government is hell bent on proceeding with both of those major projects and spending the best part of \$5 billion of Victoria's money on a north-south pipeline and a desalination plant without the outcome of the committee's investigations, I have to say that I have not given up hope.

“The message that I send to the people of Victoria who have expressed a view about these particular projects is not to give up hope either, because by the time these projects have gone through various planning processes required to bring them about, then it may be that the committee has investigated some of these alternatives and reported back to the people of Victoria.”

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