



**NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: EYRE PENINSULA NATURAL RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT BOARD
2 December 2009**

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders) (16:03): The introduction of the natural resources management levy has seen a colossal cost and responsibility shifting from the government to the NRM boards and property owners, volunteers and their local councils. Volunteer regional boards are being asked to manage what is primarily a state government responsibility, and the cost has been transferred to ratepayers and property owners. The board's principal sources of funding are the federal government's Caring for Country funding and the NRM levy. In comparison, the state government's contribution is nominal.

To add insult to injury, the same people who are losing their rights under the freeholding, coastal protection, extension of crown land and native vegetation limitations are being expected to pay the natural resources management levy, the River Murray water levy, emergency services levy and to become volunteers to control the weeds and feral animals, monitor the marine parks and man the volunteer State Emergency Service, Country Fire Service, volunteer marine rescue service and the volunteer ambulance service, and put up with city boffins telling them what they are doing wrong while still earning a living and looking after their families and communities in other ways. Many of these people are getting angry and they have good reason to be.

The Eyre Peninsula Natural Resources Management Board is being asked to take on an increasing number of responsibilities. The current levy arrangements are inequitable as the levy is a population-based levy within individual regions, and there is no correlation with the actual tasks, responsibilities and resources of who uses the facilities or visits the area. Eyre Peninsula has a small population compared to the vast size and huge variety of issues the board is expected to deal with. Native vegetation covers 46 per cent of the Eyre Peninsula. It has a coastline bigger than Tasmania's and 11 of the 19 marine parks are found on the Eyre Peninsula.

The NRM levy on Eyre Peninsula is steadily increasing, with the majority of property owners now paying \$60 to \$80. In comparison, in 2008 and 2009, ratepayers in the Adelaide Hills and the Mount Lofty NRM region paid from \$10 to \$49. In comparison, a home, say, in the Adelaide suburb of Burnside is paying \$47.90.

The Eyre Peninsula Natural Resources Management Board covers an area of over 80,000 square kilometres and supports a population of about 55,000 people. The NRM board has dual roles: one, as an on the ground delivery agent, and, two, to provide a regional and strategic approach, particularly to water, planning and policy areas.

The committee's resolution to amend the EPNRM board's proposed division 2 levy and limit the increase in the rate applied to SA Water to only CPI and the minister's acceptance does not give recognition to the dire situation of water resources on Eyre Peninsula.

Prior to the Eyre Peninsula Catchment Water Management Board being established, various government departments and SA Water managed Eyre Peninsula's water resources, and to this day the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation and SA Water continue to provide the so-called expert advice.

Past management practices have clearly been inadequate, and changes have taken place after the event rather than taking a more informed pre-emptive approach; for example, the Robinson and Poldas basin debacles.

To overcome the lack of knowledge regarding our water resources, particularly the underground basins, the board is contributing a significant amount of money to collecting and collating information about water resources in collaboration with the National Water Commission, SA Water, the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation and Flinders University.

I was particularly pleased to read an article in *The Independent Weekly* which stated that Flinders University researchers are examining the potential threat from seawater incursion to the water supplies on Eyre Peninsula. This is a real issue of concern that has been talked about for years and needs to be constantly monitored. The EPNRM board's 2009 business plan states:

It is essential that ongoing financial resources are identified to ensure effective and efficient collaborative arrangements are in place to continue appropriate water resource monitoring. Funds contributed to the region through the NRM water levy will assist in additional water resource monitoring.

Therefore, instead of the committee criticising the board and reducing the division 2 levy, the committee should be supporting the board in taking a more proactive approach in managing the underground water supplies and somehow working out how to get more funds through to the board.

We should not be relying on ground water supplies for our baseline water supply. SA Water's cartel has not encouraged alternative water supplies or methods. The sooner we have access to new water supplies the sooner the community can be assured that our precious underground resources will be sustainable in the future.

The EPNRM position on the 50 per cent increase charge for SA Water is that additional water resource monitoring and investigations need to be undertaken to ensure the long term viability of the resource and that SA Water as the main user should pay for this monitoring. I support the board's position. Too little has been done in the past and it is time for action.

The lead-up to the NRM board being established was a long and convoluted process, which started in 1997-98 in response to the changing focus by the federal Natural Heritage Trust towards a broader, more holistic concept of management and a desire to transfer the focus of the region via a broad, integrated natural resource management body. Numerous meetings were held with key state and community stakeholders to develop a framework for the formation of a regional organisation that would play a leading role in promoting a more integrated and holistic approach to natural resource management within the region.

In August 1999 the EPNRM group was incorporated, and the first meeting was held in September. It was an interim committee, because at the time the appropriate legislation did not exist. Prior to the release of the draft integrated NRM bill in February 2001, discussions had been held for a couple of years at state government level, developing integrated natural resource legislation to combine the separate legislation governing soil boards, pest plant board, native vegetation, etc., in part to prevent the further burnout of the region's volunteers.

In March 2001 Eyre Peninsula Catchment Water Management Board came into existence as a result of growing concern about the management of ground water and underground supplies. However, it was to be four years before the Eyre Peninsula Water Catchment Management Board produced the much awaited Eyre Peninsula catchment water management plan. The lack of progress by the board to produce a plan to deal with the region's diminishing and indeed deteriorating water supplies attracted much public criticism.

After the March 2002 election, the state Labor government expanded the integration process to include not only the existing NRM groups, soil conservation, animal and plant control but also the catchment water management boards, and local management of Landcare, Bushcare and Coastcare.

What was supposed to be a bottom-up exercise became a top-heavy bureaucracy which the standing committee reviewed and criticised last year and was acknowledged in the presiding member's report to the committee. It was and still is my belief—and the current state government funding contribution to NRM boards

across the state supports this—that the catchment water management boards were only included as they had the legislative ability to charge a levy.

By September 2002, minister Hill had combined the previous separate water resources, environment and natural resources component of the primary industries portfolios and created the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation. A new natural resources council with direct links to the minister was also formed and the state Labor government commenced a statewide review and restructure of natural resources management agencies, boards and committees.

In May 2002, the EPNRM minutes recorded a board member's resignation and noted the growing time commitment required at regional NRM level and the danger of community burnout being a very real consideration. These are the very issues that the integrated model was supposed to be preventing. In August 2003, EPNRM minutes recorded that:

DWLBC funding to support group operation/sitting fees etc. were no longer available, meaning a budgetary deficit will be likely for the Group's operation. Budget lines had been cut as much as possible, including the number of meetings. However, without the \$30,000 operational funding from the State, only surplus operating funding and account interest/unallocated project funding of approximately \$17,000 is available which does not cover operating commitments.

On 18 February 2004, the NRM bill was introduced into state parliament. The EPNRM board was established by proclamation in September 2004 with the presiding member appointed in December 2004.

It took until April 2005 for the board members and agency representatives to be appointed. As you have just heard, it was a long and complicated process and, for some, a stressful time because of the uncertainty about the long-term future. The consultation period may have been extensive. However, the main participants were not the volunteers or general community members: rather they were the agency representatives and affected committee organisation members.

Consequently, at the end of the process, on-ground volunteers and the community were left wondering who was going to manage the local Landcare or Coastcare projects they had been working on for a number of years and who was going to ensure that rabbit and fox baiting projects would continue.

There was a long period of inactivity and local Landcare and Coastcare volunteer groups were left without direction, leadership and funding, and the lack of communication resulted in a growing sense of distrust about the changes. The introduction of another levy resulted in many of the volunteers becoming totally disillusioned, which to this day I do not believe has been overcome.

Time expired; motion carried.

EYRE PENINSULA NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT GROUP 19 August 2002

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): I wish to draw the attention of the house to the very good work being done by the Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management Group and the people on the associated bodies. The Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management Group was established in 1999 following a series of community meetings across the region in 1997-98. It is an incorporated community managed peak regional body that aims to provide leadership, direction and coordination of natural resource management on Eyre Peninsula.

This committee is also recognised as the interim integrated natural resource management body for the region under the proposed state legislative administrative arrangement. It is the body responsible for the development of the region's accredited natural resource management plan under joint state-federal government agreement to access future natural heritage trust program funding. The group comprises eight community members with expertise and skills in one or more of biodiversity, land, water, coastal and marine management, and agriculture, tourism, mining, aquaculture and fishing industries, local government and Aboriginal community and culture.

The group also maintains representation from key government and regional bodies including the Department of Environment and Heritage, Department of Primary Industries and Resources, Department of Water Resources, Eyre Regional Development Board and the Wangka-Wilurrara (ATSIC) Regional Council. All members must fulfil a range of essential criteria in addition to their specific areas of expertise and skill, and all must be members of the Eyre Peninsula community.

In addition, the group boasts strong and close linkages to the Eyre Peninsula Catchment Water Management Board, community Landcare officer network, Coastcare, individual local councils and a host of other key groups and stakeholders in the region. These linkages are critical if we are to avoid duplication and be effective with our human and financial resources over our large but sparsely populated area. There are estimated to be in excess of 200 contact people, paid workers and community group members whose job it is to know who does what and where.

The group currently manages in excess of \$1 million worth of funding for natural resource management projects across Eyre Peninsula, from salinity, vegetation and catchment management, addressing soil erosion, acidity and water repellents, through to managing native grasslands and other threatened flora and fauna. In the next few days, the Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management Group will attend the national Landcare awards in Canberra after winning the state title under the 'Community Group' category this year, and I congratulate them on their success.

On the employment front, the group is also doing its bit for the region and the state, employing a trainee in natural resources on an annual basis. So far they have had a 100 per cent success rate with their trainees securing full time employment in the natural resources field upon completion of their traineeships. The Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management Group is a good example of an integrated approach to natural resource management on a region-wide scale.

In my view it suits particularly well Eyre Peninsula's small population scattered over such a large diverse area to have this body to help pull all the pieces together. No one organisation can provide this diversity. I am hopeful that this organisation will be accommodated within the plans of the new government. These groups are too valuable a resource to lose, and further clarification of the future of regional natural resource management groups by the new minister would be appreciated.

The Hon John Hill responded to this speech on Tuesday 15 October 2002 please read below:

In reply to **Mrs PENFOLD** (19 August).

The Hon. J.D. HILL: The honourable member for Flinders has highlighted the important work being done by the Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management (EPNRM) group. I totally support her comments on the role and importance of this and similar groups. In response to her question of the future of such groups, I refer to the government's election commitment to natural resource management, which includes proposals to integrate existing institutional arrangements. Specifically the policy states:

'Integrated natural resource management based on water catchment areas will be developed and the continuation of 'skill based boards' will be supported'

The goal of the government is to establish efficient and effective NRM institutions, funding arrangements, and decision-making processes, at state, regional and sub-regional levels. These changes will be secured through legislative reform.

To achieve the above I have instigated a project task team working with the Interim Natural Resource Management Council to consult, evaluate and propose legislation to achieve this outcome. An important part of this project is a consultation process. Recently the EPNRM group participated in one of the nine regional workshops held through South Australia to consider options for integration.

Following these workshops and other consultation processes, submissions were received from interested parties. A discussion paper will be released in October for further consultation.

Subsequently, legislation will be developed to establish natural resource management boards for all parts of South Australia. The role of each board will include the functions of the existing regional integrated natural resource management bodies such as EPNRM. However, such bodies will also have other roles and responsibilities presently handled by catchment water management boards, animal and plant control boards and soil conservation boards. Thus an important focus of consultation is the development of appropriate regional and sub regional arrangements. So far there is a lot of public support for change and many excellent ideas have been raised. The exact arrangements and roles of regional bodies will be proposed to parliament next year following the public consultation process.