



HARBORS AND NAVIGATION (MISCELLANEOUS) AMENDMENT BILL
15th July 2009

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders) (12:51): On the surface, this bill appears innocuous. However, the operation of the facilities fund raises danger signals. The fund is to replace the Recreational Boating Facilities Fund and will establish, maintain and improve facilities for use in connection with vessels, both recreational and commercial, and also to pay the expenses of administering the fund.

This government is not noted for sound financial administration and, therefore, the likelihood that a large proportion of the fund that should be used to build infrastructure will be dissipated in management costs is all too real. The \$6 million administration cost of the emergency services levy is an example where a significant portion of the levy is not spent on what it is collected for.

In response to an article in *The Advertiser* criticising the government for the cost of collecting the emergency services levy, Labor—despite criticising the former Liberal government for setting up the beneficial levy—has not come up with any new ideas on setting up an efficient and economical collection system. It was under the guidance of the retired Liberal and former minister for transport Diana Laidlaw that the SA Boating Facilities Advisory Committee (SABFAC) was founded to make recommendations to government for investing the funds collected from the Recreational Boating Facilities Levy into the development of boating facilities.

The South Australian Boating Facilities Advisory Committee consists of seven members appointed by the minister from a number of organisations including the Boating Industry Association of South Australia, South Australian Recreational Boating Council, South Australian Recreational Fishing Advisory Council, two members from Wildcatch Fisheries SA, the Local Government Association of South Australia and a special ministerial appointee. The minister vested the South Australian Boating Facilities Advisory Committee with the responsibility of assessing applications for funding assistance for recreational boating projects from the Recreational Boating Facilities Fund. Each project is assessed on its merits. This has worked well for years.

Then there are two alarming subsections relating to the facilities fund under new section 90A:

(2) The Fund must be kept as directed by the Treasurer.

and

(5) The Minister may, with the approval of the Treasurer, invest any of the money belonging to the Fund that is not immediately required for the purposes of the Fund in such manner as is approved by the Treasurer.

I question these provisions. Recreational and commercial boat owners must be given an assurance that the levy will be put back directly into boating facilities and not into general revenue. In 2003, Boating Industry Association General Manager, Glen Jones, said:

The 52,500 recreational boat owners that continue to pay into the fund through the levy incorporated within their annual boat registration were satisfied that Ms Laidlaw had ensured that these funds were put back directly into boating facilities and not, as was first feared by many, put into general revenue.

The Minister and the Treasurer should not have the authority to invest any of the money belonging to the fund other than for the purposes for which the fund is collected. Facilities in this state are not of such a standard that there would

be money to spare if the fund were being administered for its designated purposes.

The purpose of the fund is to establish, expand or improve recreational boating facilities. These might include boat ramps, temporary mooring facilities or wharves, channel improvements or aids to navigation. Any local council or established community organisation may apply for up to 50 per cent of funding assistance.

Currently, local government or community organisations are required to contribute to the cost of facilities on a dollar for dollar basis and accept ongoing ownership, management and maintenance of the facility. This prevents smaller councils or organisations with a lower revenue base from accessing the fund so that it can be used for the purpose for which it is collected. It seems common sense that, if the levies are collected for building of infrastructure and facilities, that is what it should be used for. If there is spare cash in the fund it would be better spent on providing more funding to local government or community projects, perhaps on a two for one rather than a one for one basis.

The levy has enabled the development of new boating facilities and navigational aids which, in turn, have added to the regional economy of the state by encouraging more tourism and visitation to urban and regional areas for various boating activities. The improved facilities encourage more people to invest in housing for retirement or holidays in many coastal towns. The network of marinas along our coastline, lakes and the river can be attributed to the injection of these funds.

The average revenue collected over the past seven years is about \$1.35 million per annum, which is a small amount when compared with the cost of most of the projects. The expenditure committed towards projects for the same period is about \$9.2 million. For example, the new boat ramp at Coffin Bay was a \$500,000 project. Without the assistance of the Recreational Boating Facilities Fund, the District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula would not have been able to undertake this much needed and appreciated project.

Coffin Bay is a popular fishing spot and was restored to its former success following the Liberal government's introduction of fishing net bans and the consequent return of fish to the area. It attracts recreational fishers from across the state and interstate. Yet it is the locals who, through their taxes, provide the facilities for visitors to use. It should be a shared responsibility. The Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing contends that anglers are losing ground against commercial and government interests and that funding projects or interests in developing the \$350 million per annum industry are negligible.

The recreational industry asserts that much more can be done, as in other states, to develop the industry. Some examples are upgrades of boat ramps and jetties plus artificial reefs to attract fish. The minister stated that the fund can be used to provide facilities for the 'installation, maintenance and improvement of navigation aids and emergency marine radio'. Emergency marine radio is a safety necessity for all shipping. However, setting it up and operating it involves a huge cost. It should be a responsibility for the federal and state governments on a national basis in association with border patrols and national security, but the federal government, like the state government, is continually shedding its responsibilities and passing the buck.

Some of this safety work is now being done by volunteers operating their own radio systems. Mr Mick Dinon at Louth Bay was instrumental in a number of sea rescues when he passed on the emergency messages he picked up. Mick, a World War II veteran, has now retired from this voluntary community service. The Volunteer Marine Rescue Communications has been taken up by a Tumby Bay resident, Mr Gary Smith, who spends many hours a day manning his radio, and another Port Lincoln resident. This service not only serves South Australia's recreational and commercial fishing and boating interests but also has assisted international shipping in the relay of emergency messages.

There is a government marine radio service. However, due to climatic conditions it is not always able to receive emergency messages, thus compromising the safety of mariners. Its range on the West Coast of South Australia is also limited. One wonders whether the Labor government considers the more than two-thirds of South Australia west of Port Augusta as part of the state. Emergency services are responsible for the cost of the marine rescue radio. Madam Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to continue my remarks.

Emergency services are responsible for the cost of the marine rescue radio, therefore to cost-shift the expense to recreational and commercial fishers in South Australia is abandoning responsibility and duty of care by this government. I recall a boatie from Yorke Peninsula who struck trouble, but who, fortunately, was washed up on Thistle Island. The next land after Thistle Island is Antarctica. The fisherman's whereabouts was not known for some days. Our commercial fishers spend most of their time at sea beyond the Continental Shelf. Modern communications

have made their lives much safer, but have not completely removed the inherent risks of deep sea fishing.

I sincerely hope that there will be a Liberal government after the 2010 election and we will set up an independent commission against crime and corruption so that disaffected boaties, whether recreational or professional, will have somewhere to go for their complaints to be adequately addressed.

We must not let the good work initiated by the Liberal government under minister Laidlaw be undermined. It is important that the boating levy is retained for what it was originally intended, and not eaten up by the current government's shifting of costs and responsibilities to cover incompetent financial management.