



RIVER MURRAY LEVY

6 May 2004

****Question relating to the Flinders Electorate****

The Hon. G.M. GUNN (Member for Stuart): Will the Minister for the River Murray immediately grant an exception to non-profit organisations from paying the River Murray levy? As you would understand, Mr Speaker, with a lot of small non-profit organisations in your own electorate, community halls and other organisations are classed as commercial and are paying \$135 per unit. For example, the Yongala hall, the Marree Progress Association, and the combined community sports facility at Cummins have been charged three times and they are going to have to pay \$405. I therefore seek the urgent intervention of the minister, because in some cases these people are never going to be connected to the River Murray and they have very poor water quality.

The Hon. J.D. HILL (Minister for the River Murray): When the River Murray levy legislation was introduced into the house a number of concessions had been granted. I am not sure whether the particular examples that he has referred to are covered by those exemptions, but I will certainly have a look at it for him.

River Murray Levy Petition

22 March 2004

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): In the more than 10 years that I have represented the people of Eyre Peninsula, there has not been an issue that has caused such a negative reaction in my constituency as the River Murray levy. This feeling has been illustrated by the 4760 signatures on the petition which has been circulated for only a few weeks and which I presented today, and the hundreds of phone calls and letters that have come in. The people of Eyre Peninsula and many others who do not receive water from the river believe that this is a very unfair and inequitable levy. As a result of necessity, they are more conscious of water than others, having historically put up with poor supply, continuing severe restrictions, and the costs of private augmentation, etc.

The Minister for Environment keeps telling us that the River Murray levy is an environmental levy to be paid by all South Australians. However, this levy is not being paid by all South Australians, some of whom have been and continue to be major beneficiaries of the water. Letters are being sent to the Minister for the Environment; however, he forwards them on to the Minister for Administrative Services in charge of SA Water—the collector of the levy.

The former minister for administrative services has responded to my letter on behalf of people who have said they will not pay the levy. He advised that 'If it is not paid, SA Water will have to consider recovery options. That could result in your water supply being restricted.' If this levy has nothing to do with SA Water, what right has the minister to cut off the water to those who will not pay the levy?

These are the people who rely on underground water from south of Port Lincoln for the survival of their stock and

who have to stay close to their farms during the summer to ensure that their troughs are working and check that their water supply has not been cut off. These are the people who volunteer and risk their lives fighting fires on the farms and many parks in this region using this underground water. They are supported by the volunteer ambulance and state emergency services workers, families and businesses who are all on stand-by in our area throughout the summer. Where is the equity when a shack on the coast of Eyre Peninsula pays this levy while a shack along the Murray may well not pay it despite taking unlimited water straight from the river for free?

A few days at a shack on Eyre Peninsula, in close proximity to their farms and businesses, is the only holiday that farmers and business people on Eyre Peninsula can hope to have at this dangerous time of year. However, these people are well aware of others who go to the river for a week or two without a care or responsibility, who volunteer for nothing and who use the river water with abandon. No wonder they are angry.

The inequity, injustice and the draining of funds from rural and regional South Australia as a result of this levy is just another rip-off of the fewer than half the population of this state who live outside the city. A constituent writes: "It is about time the government stopped and had a good look at where best the money and extra water could be sourced, i.e. through irrigators upstream before it reaches the Murray, irrigators along the river, and the general population who rely on this water to water their gardens, wash their cars and pavers and fill their pools."

It is obvious that this government rushed through the levy without any real thought.

I have been contacted by a number of small businesses which operate as one entity but which occupy more than one property. However, each property is billed the full amount of \$135. This is an enormous levy cost to the small businesses that use minimal water.

Once again, self-funded retirees have been penalised for providing for their retirement. Pensioners do not pay the River Murray levy, but no such consideration has been given to self-funded retirees.

Confusion and alarm has been caused by SA Water accounts giving January to March as the period of the levy instead of October to March.

Charitable and not for profit organisations are charged \$30, which is the same levy as for residential customers. However, these organisations are receiving accounts with a commercial levy of \$135. To clear up this mess, volunteers are required to make many calls—usually STD—along with having to deal with paperwork and stress to have the charge altered.

And, to rub salt into the wounds, the \$30 levy also applies to recreational sport and sporting groups. It is yet another imposition on country people, who have to develop their own community and recreational sporting facilities, usually with little or no help from governments.

Eyre Peninsula residents have had to develop their own water resources, often with individuals contributing thousands of dollars, to gain a reasonable and reliable water supply.