

QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 700

asked on Thursday, 12 May 2005

MR FINN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR NATURAL RESOURCES AND MINES (MR ROBERTSON)—

QUESTION:

Will he outline steps the Government is taking to best manage Queensland's water resources?

ANSWER:

There has been considerable progress towards sustainable management and the use of Queensland's water resources since the national water reforms began in 1994. The framework to ensure a sustainable future has been set up through the *Water Act 2000*.

Proper planning is a central element of sustainable management. Water Resource Plans focusing on surface water have been finalised for 11 catchments. Overall water resource planning activities cover approximately 91% of the State, while three Resource Operation Plans have been finalised to cover 31%. New plans will be completed to include the Great Artesian Basin as well as other important groundwater systems.

Within limits, Water Resource Plans and subsequent Resource Operations Plans, allow water trading. To-date there has been approximately 8,000ML of water permanently traded in the Fitzroy and Burnett catchments. The total consideration for these trades is almost \$12.5 million with an average price of about \$1,900/ML in the Fitzroy and \$900/ML in the Burnett catchments.

A Water Allocations Register, has been established which centrally records ownership information so that allocation holders can lodge dealings and conduct searches regarding water allocations in the same manner as land titles.

Regional Water Supply Strategies are being developed to ensure the continuing supply of water in Queensland communities. Currently strategies are being developed for South East, Central and Far North Queensland.

In addition to supply management, the Queensland Government has introduced a number of initiatives to reduce water consumption. These include development of the Sustainable Housing Code, which is proposing the mandatory installation of water efficient devices in new houses; and the EcoBiz program, which provides subsidies for businesses to reduce water and energy consumption. There are also a number of programs underway to facilitate the substitution of recycled water and rainwater for potable water.

The Queensland Government will contribute more than \$380 million over the next five years towards upgrading sewage services and water recycling projects. Where additional pipelines are required to supply water to high population growth areas, state subsidies may be made available. A significant project, for example, is the Southern Regional Pipeline Strategy, which has been developed to supply water from the Mt Crosby Treatment Plant to Ipswich, the Western Corridor, Beaudesert and the Gold Coast to ensure future security of supply.

It is anticipated that the Burnett River Dam will be finalised by the end of 2005. The Eidsvold Weir is now complete and has contributed significantly to the local economy. In addition to upgrading Hinze Dam, Wappa Dam, Ewen Maddock Dam and Borumba Dam the government will also provide infrastructure subsidies towards projects undertaken by local governments and other water service providers.

The Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative (GABSI) is an incentive scheme that is in place to address water and land management issues in the Great Artesian Basin. The scheme gives landholders the opportunity to access subsidies to cap and pipe their bores, creating more efficient and sustainable use of groundwater.

The Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative (RWUE) has been delivered over the last six years in partnership with rural irrigation industries. The RWUE will provide better natural resource management outcomes by improving irrigation water use efficiency, reducing losses in distribution systems and providing financial incentives to achieve best practice irrigation water and farm management.

The *Wild Rivers Bill* proposes to protect rivers with all, or almost all, of their natural values intact. Whilst existing activities will be allowed to continue in these catchments, legislation will place strict controls on new water extraction and other new activities with significant impacts.

Water Reform initiatives have also provided for a clear separation between industry regulators and water service providers. For example, SunWater operates at arms length from government as a corporatised entity.

Metering is one of the most important factors underlying the development of effective resource management practices for water. Water planning, allocation, pricing and trading would all be impossible to implement without an effective system to measure the volume of water available.

Water use metering will be extensively expanded over the next seven years in Queensland to measure the amount of water taken from streams and underground aquifers. There are currently over 3,000 water meters in place for unsupplemented water. Over the next six years my Department will roll out meters for an estimated 16,000 water entitlements, effecting approximately 8,000-10,000 users.