

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
Question on notice

Thursday, 5 December 2013

667. Hon R. Chapple to the Minister for Agriculture and Food representing the Minister for Regional Development.

With regard to the new agriculture development proposed for Derby in the so-called Knowsley Agriculture area, as reported by ABC Rural on Friday, 29 November 2013, and the Department of Water's *Derby Water Reserves Drinking Water Source Protection Plan, Report 98* published in 2008, I ask:

- (a) is the Minister aware of concerns expressed in Report 98 of the very real potential for the "inland migration of the salt water interface, including leakage from the overlying aquifer which is the result of the current abstraction rate of the Lower Erskine Sandstone Formation";
- (b) how will the Minister allay these concerns;
- (c) will the Minister ensure the establishment of "monitoring bores to measure the rate of inland movement of the salt water interface into the confined aquifer ... in order to provide early detection of increased salt water intrusion into the Derby town water supply";
- (d) if no to (c), why not;
- (e) will the Minister make public the results of all monitoring and, if not, why not;
- (f) what crops are proposed to be grown in the Knowsley Agriculture area and by whom;
- (g) is the Government talking to a private investor about getting involved in the project and, if so, who;
- (h) what is projected to be the cost to the taxpayer for the scoping study, including the trial work, bore and investigative work into other water sources such as the May River and rivers feeding into the Fitzroy River catchment;
- (i) will these investigations include proposals for dams and weirs;
- (j) what other infrastructure is being considered;
- (k) what areas of land are being considered for cropping and will the Minister please table a detailed map;
- (l) what is the timeline and how much money has been allocated for the study from the budgets of the:
 - (i) Department of Water budget;
 - (ii) Department of Regional Development; and
 - (iii) Department of Agriculture and Food; and
- (m) at what stage in its development will the proposal be referred for environmental assessment?

Answer

- (a) Yes. The first stage of investigations are being designed to better assess these risks and to inform the future risk management of the aquifers through bore field design and monitoring programs.
- (b) All possible water sources for Knowsley Agriculture area will be assessed in terms of both water supply potential and water source risks, including at least the local alluvial aquifers, the unconfined Wallal aquifer, the deeper confined Erskine aquifer, and possibly a much deeper aquifer associated with the Poole or Grant geological units. Groundwater abstraction

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licences will only be issued for sources where these risks are identified and for which a suitable management strategy (including monitoring program and a precautionary trigger/response program) is provided by the licensee.

- (c) Yes. Monitoring bores will be required for licences in any aquifers around Derby. Monitoring and responses will be designed to mitigate any water resource risks.
- (d) Not applicable
- (e) The Department of Water has advised it will make its monitoring results available, consistent with its usual practice, following any investigatory work.
- (f) No specific crops are proposed. These will be subject to water availability and market demand.
- (g) No.
- (h) Cost and scope of investigations yet to be determined.
- (i) No.
- (j) Infrastructure requirements will be considered after investigatory works are completed. Any such investments will seek to minimise any government funding.
- (k) Investigatory work underway will inform what areas in and around the Mowanjum pastoral lease and adjacent Crown land could be suitable for agriculture.
- (l) (i-iii) It is expected that much of the preliminary investigations will be completed in 2014/15. Funding allocation from the Department of Regional Development cannot be provided until scoping and design of the investigatory work is completed. \$20 000 from the Department of Regional Development has previously been spent on Global Ground Water Case Study in September 2013
- (m) Once a proposal has been defined and is ready to progress.