

Radio precis 13/2/07

[Excerpt] Liz Penfold, Member for Flinders (639ABC 16.22-16.26) Water crisis facing Eyre Peninsula

(Marnier: Yesterday on the program the Member for Flinders, Liz Penfold spoke about what she called the water crisis facing Eyre Peninsula, she said that the system was basically collapsing and she raised many questions about South Australia's water, including SA Water itself, its commitment to providing water to smaller rural communities, in a moment we'll hear from Karlene Maywald, the Minister for Water Security, but first this is what Liz Penfold had to say on yesterday's program)

I have been trying to get the attention of SA Water for over 10 years and they keep saying no there's not a problem with water on Eyre Peninsula and yet all the signs are showing that there's diabolical trouble with the water on Eyre Peninsula, the Polder Basin [phonetic] was going to be the solution for Eyre Peninsula's water years ago and that's overdrawn ... we haven't got anywhere else to go now, we have to get desalination as a matter of urgency and there's private enterprise that are willing to put in desalination plants, particularly one up there at Ceduna that's ready to go now but has a memorandum of understanding with the council and all it needs is the support of SA Water and the Government, but SA Water will not facilitate any competition and I've doxed them in to the competition council who've put it through to the Water Commission, but still we're not getting any action ... because of the track record of SA Water being so poor, they obviously have underestimated the capacity of four basins, the most recent of course being the Robinson Basin where they anticipated 50% of it would be able to be used for Streaky Bay and that is now just not available necessitating this robbing of the basin south, so my concern is that once again they will have underestimated the situation with our southern basins ... well my view has been for a long time, if we had to have any of the development that we need on Eyre Peninsula, we must have the desalination happening as quickly as possible, the 1.4gigalires, even if it ever does come through, that pipeline through to Kimba, is just not going to be adequate even for the housing and the existing development here as you can see with the fact the Robinson Basin is overdrawn, that 50% is no longer there ... we've got problems with Polder [phonetic], so we must have desalination if we are to look after the current development and then of course we've got huge mining potential, there's billions of dollars worth of ... exploration happening over here now ... that's not going to be able to be mined or value added as I think it should be ... the mineral [unclear] are hoping to value add up there at Ceduna and if that's to be done, then that desalination plant at Ceduna must be put in as quickly as possible ... at last people are beginning to take notice of the water situation in the cities and I think that is helping me to draw attention to what's happening on Eyre Peninsula which I think is a far greater crisis ... than the problems with the Murray because if it rains again, the Murray will replenish ... but of course the underground resources on Eyre Peninsula are just not going to recover that quickly ... I think that SA Water, we really must look at what their charter is, SA Water's charter is to provide water for the people of the State and I can't get water provided by SA Water - well private enterprise will, but at a price, but little councils like Elliston have communities that they must grow because their rate base is so low and yet I've had letters back from SA Water saying no the council has to provide the water for these small communities ... when you've only got a rate base of about 800 people and you've got the biggest council area in South Australia ... it's just not possible ... that is the job of Government and in my view, part of the charter of SA Water ... SA Water had \$218m that they put back in to general revenue for this State ... I don't think the people of South Australia realise that that amount of money that they are paying for water is going back in to general revenue for other things ... most people think their money that they pay for water is going in to providing water for the people of the State and it certainly isn't.

Karlene Maywald, Minister for Water Security (639ABC 16.26-16.35) Water infrastructure

(Marnier: ... Joining us now is Karlene Maywald. ... Lets take up that point first of all of the \$281m that has been raised, that has gone back into general revenue as opposed to water infrastructure and resource management. Are regional people in South Australia being done a bad deal?)

No I don't believe so. ... SA Water have been undertaking work to ensure that the future water supply to Eyre Peninsula is secured. They've just invested \$48.5m on a pipeline between Iron Knob and

Kimba. That pipeline will supply initially 1.4 gegalitres of water and in stage 2, 2.3 gegalitres of water. *(Marner: We just heard Liz Penfold saying that's nowhere near enough. ... She's looking at the potential development in that area. She says it's simply nowhere near enough water.)*

I don't think she understands the figures quite frankly. That's an extra 20% over and above what's currently taken from Eyre Peninsula, so there's a good quantity of water. We're also looking at investing in the largest desalination plant in the Southern Hemisphere, in partnership with BHP and the Federal Government and that will take pressure off the River Murray. That will supply water to all of the Iron Triangle cities and also to the Upper Spencer Gulf. Now we're also looking at other options on the Eyre Peninsula and today I have spoken with a number of people who are involved in managing the water systems on Eyre Peninsula and we're going to be holding a summit early in March to have a look at the data. A lot of the debate is about the data and whether it's accurate or not, whether it's being interpreted correctly, whether we've got enough data to make the right decisions and quite frankly it's much easier when you can see water flowing past in a river than it is to actually manage underground aquifers. So we have to actually ensure that we've got everything that we need on the table, the information gaps are filled and that we can make decisions on the basis of an informed basis, not an emotive basis.

(Marner: The Polder Basin and the Robinson Basin, Liz Penfold says are overdrawn, have been overdrawn by SA Water. Is that true and if so, how has that been allowed to happen?)

Well SA Water take water in accordance with the licences that they're permitted to take water. ... they've done that in accordance with the water allocation plan, where there is a prescribed water resource and the basins in the southern Eyre Peninsula are prescribed and SA Water is licensed to take a certain amount of water out of those. Now in recent years SA Water have been given permission to have a very small overdraw on their license in anticipation of the pipeline coming on line in July this year and that pipeline will take the pressure off that lower basin. In Robinson Basin at the moment we're actually undertaking some trials on new technology called aquifer storage and recovery. We're you have available water you can take it and put it under ground and store it until you need it to bring it back to the surface.

(Marner: As per the Salisbury Council.)

As per the Salisbury Council, and that's a very, very good project and we're trialling that one at Robinsons. So there's a lot of work that's being undertaken by SA Water on the Eyre Peninsula and I'm having this meeting, which will be a meeting regarding the technical issues to get the data out on the table ... see where the gaps are and start to get some agreement on what the facts actually are, rather than the emotive political response that seems to have occurred in recent times.

(Marner: Is there a threat of seawater contaminating any of those basins on Eyre Peninsula as Liz Penfold was suggesting? ... Are they being managed properly?)

I believe so and we're going to actually look at that data and analyse that data from the Natural Resource Management Board, from the Department of Water Land and Biodiversity Conservation from SA Water, put it all on the table and lets start talking about the facts, and when we start talking about the facts we can have a useful debate about where we need to go. Emotive debates don't help.

(Marner: Do you think some of the basins are in real trouble as Liz Penfold was suggesting and that someone has got it wrong in terms of the calculations of how much water is in them?)

That's Liz Penfold's view and she's entitled to her view. I prefer to deal and facts and I'll be using the technical expertise and advice of those people that are involved in the water management on Eyre Peninsula.

(Marner: What about the charter at SA Water itself and their responsibility to look after all of regional SA and including those council districts that are quite small, as Liz Penfold was suggesting?)

Well SA Water has .. their charter and their mission in core business is deliver drinking water, recycled water and waste water services, using assets we own and operate on behalf of the govt. and people of South Australia ... that's their core business ... providing water to ... close to 95% of South Australians. So they do a really really good job for the State. There are significant issues for very small communities and ... the cost associated with the delivery of that water becomes a problem and there needs to be innovative solutions to those issues and they're things that need to be worked through

with the community ... you can do anything at a price. That's the issue that we have to deal with. (Marner: Minister a caller has phoned in from Eyre Peninsula saying that the licenses may be followed correctly. I suppose they mean by SA Water but maybe you need to revisit the licensing?) Well that's exactly the point. ... There is much debate over whether the information that's being used to set the licenses is correct or not. ... I want to get the people around the table that are responsible for delivering that data, those people who are responsible for analyzing that data. ...

(Marner: Who does deliver it ... ?)

The data comes from consultancies that are undertaken by the Natural Resource Management Board. The NRMB has a responsibility to do a water allocation plan and that ... determines what is a sustainable yield from those water resources. Now they get their information from consultants and also from the Dept of Water Land and Biodiversity Conservation and SA Water. Now if there is gaps in that information then we'll need to find that out. ... the important thing is to sit down around the table and actually look at it rather than doing it through the media and having all this emotion, rather than actual fact out there for the public to digest.

(Marner: Liz Penfold says it's critical that Ceduna get a desalination plant ... then Streaky Bay and Port Lincoln. She said that there is a memorandum of understanding between the council ... all it really needs is the support of SA Water and the Government, will you give your support to that desal plant for Ceduna?)

Look we are certainly not opposed to a privately funded desalination plant being built using renewable energy, it sounds like a terrific option to me, now that proponent has sought access to SA Water pipes and that detail is being worked through between SA Water, but there's certainly no opposition to the plant going ahead

(Marner: ...so you're not concerned that it's about competition?)

Definitely not ... if there's a proposition that stacks up and that the private desalination plant - and the investors choose to invest because it's a good proposition for them, we're certainly not opposed to it

(Marner: ...you mention that the special summit will be held in early March, where will it be held?)

) In Port Lincoln ... it will be the 1st week in March, we're just finalising dates and times at the moment ... it's something that we've worked through with the community yesterday ... there'll be a technical ... forum initially and that will involve the Natural Resource Management Board, the Department of Water Land and Biodiversity Conservation, the Eyre Regional Development Board, a representative from the Local Government Association and also SA Water and myself just to actually go through the technical aspects of it, work out what data we've got ... what different interpretations there may be and start to come to some common themes in regard to what the reality is (Marner: ...thank you ...)