



**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**  
**Water**  
**15/09/08**

[Mr KELVIN THOMSON](#) (Wills) (7.31 p.m.)—In June 2007 the Victorian government released *Our Water Our Future*, the next stage of the government's water plan to secure Victoria's water supplies for at least the next 50 years. That water plan includes building a desalination plant in the Wonthaggi region. Desalination is the fastest growing form of water provision throughout the world. It creates new drinking water supplies that are not rainfall dependent and is therefore a drought-proof source of water. Once in operation, the desalination plant will provide 150 billion litres, or 150 gegalitres, of water each year to Melbourne, Geelong and, via other connections, to towns in Westernport and South Gippsland.

The Wonthaggi region on the Bass Coast was chosen as the preferred site for the plant following a comprehensive feasibility study which examined a range of potential locations. The Wonthaggi region was found to have the best mix of features needed for a desalination plant, including ready access to open ocean water for intake, freely circulating ocean water for rapid dispersal of saline concentrate and suitable connections to existing water distribution infrastructure. The desalination plant will use approximately 90 megawatts of electricity, which will be offset through the purchase of renewable energy credits. In other words, the plant's operations will be carbon neutral; and, importantly, the renewable energy source will be in addition to the government's current renewable energy target.

An environment effects statement, or EES, for the project has now been completed. It is an extensive environmental assessment, with input from over 200 scientists, environmental engineers, and experts in areas such as marine ecology, flora and fauna, landscape, energy efficiency and waterway health. Key findings include: (1) penguins will not be impacted by the operation of the plant; (2) seals, whales, orange-bellied parrots, giant Gippsland earthworms and hooded plovers, and their habitats, will not be significantly affected by the project; (3) the saline discharge will dilute within a very short time and will be subject to a works approval application to the Environment Protection Authority; (4) dinosaur fossils beneath the sands of Williamsons Beach, adjacent to the plant site, will not be affected by the plant's construction or operation; and (5) there will be small reductions in local larval numbers in the order of less than one per cent but no wider impact on food chains.

Furthermore, an independent economic report has established that there will be significant economic benefits from the construction of the desalination plant, including the creation of over 3,000 full-time equivalent jobs, 920 direct and 2,260 indirect, during construction of the plant; 150 full-time equivalent jobs, 50 directly on the operation of the plant and 100 indirectly, to support the ongoing

maintenance and servicing of the plant; and a billion-dollar economic boost to Victoria during the construction of the plant. It represents one of the most significant infrastructure projects in the state's history and a commitment to investing in the future. Local companies like the Morwell based company Drilltech and Korumburra based Ancon Drilling have been awarded contracts for work and will benefit.

The desalination plant at Wonthaggi is yet another example of the fact that, when it comes to water, the Liberal and National parties create problems and Labor solve problems—and, even when we are trying to solve the problems they created, they run interference. They try to block solutions yet offer no solutions of their own.

I have four examples. First, state Liberal and National parties trash the Murray-Darling river system by handing over water allocations to irrigators which have run the system dry, and when Labor acted just a week or so ago, purchasing the 91,000-hectare agricultural property Toorale to return some water to the river system, the Liberal and National parties opposed that. Second, Labor in Victoria is building a north-south pipeline to achieve water efficiencies and better secure Melbourne's water supply and the Liberal and National parties oppose that too, running interference through a campaign called 'Plug the pipe'. Third, there is the issue of global warming, which is causing southern Australia to lose rainfall and to dry out, but, when Labor acts to set up a carbon trading scheme to reduce CO2 emissions, the Liberal and National parties oppose that too. They say it will drive up prices. What on earth do they think will happen as our water supplies diminish? And, four, they are at it again here with desalination. Labor comes up with a solution; they come up with obstruction. Their pandering to special interests has got Victoria and Australia into the water mess we are in, and this motion shows they continue to be bereft of ideas or answers. The best they can do is to sledge and undermine Labor's serious efforts to address a monumental challenge of our time: providing water for a rapidly growing population. This motion shows the Liberals as not ready to govern—not ready to govern in Victoria, not ready to govern in Australia.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)**—Order! The time allocated for the debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.