



Kelvin Thomson MP
Federal Member for Wills

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS
01/12/2008 Murray-Darling Basin Management Plan

[Mr KELVIN THOMSON](#) (Wills) (8.26 p.m.)—Regrettably, it seems to me that the member for Farrer, like the member for Riverina earlier, is simply in denial about the present state of the Murray-Darling Basin. I do not wish to talk about future projections; let us talk about what is happening now. If you look at the Coorong now, the measurements of water birds and the like there have declined dramatically over the course of the last couple of decades. There were 40,000 curlew sandpipers; more recently, there are 2,000. Other species have experienced similar declines. The picture for the Murray-Darling Basin is loss of river red gums, rising salinity and frequent algal blooms in a river system whose mouth is kept open by dredging at the mouth of the Murray.

This is not a question of projection; this is a question of the present state of the Murray-Darling. It is the present state of the Murray-Darling under the watch of those opposite. The member for Riverina is a good person, decently motivated, but the political party of which she is a member stands condemned for presiding over the trashing of the Murray-Darling Basin. If you look at the Coorong, the Macquarie Marshes or other parts of the Murray-Darling, you see that this is a river system which they have represented. I heard the member for Calare saying in the parliament today that all of the 17 electorates around the Murray-Darling Basin are held by coalition members. I am sure he is right about that, but it is a sad commentary on their representation of this area that they have managed to kill the goose that laid the golden egg and are now in a state of denial about the present health of the Murray-Darling and the need for action to be taken.

Having presided over this inaction, they are bereft of solutions. If patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel, consultation is the last refuge of the policy-bereft. The member for Riverina's resolution calls for consultation because, frankly, the opposition have nothing else and, having nothing else, they stand in the way of the government's attempts to solve the problems which the opposition have created. Each time you look at Labor's endeavours to solve the water issues—whether it is the purchase of Toorale Station, the pipeline in Victoria or the desalination plant to bring water to Melbourne—the opposition runs interference on those proposals. They have nothing of their own to respond with, but nevertheless they run interference on Labor's solutions. In relation to the issue of climate change, we still have the member for Farrer and others out there wanting to say, 'Let's look on the bright side,' and 'The CSIRO should talk it up.' What the CSIRO owes—and, indeed, is delivering—to this country is a clear statement of the likely water availability for farmers and communities with an

interest in this issue. I had the opportunity to hear evidence from the CSIRO this morning. I am quite familiar with their understanding and knowledge of the health of the Murray-Darling.

I commend the work of Dr Arlene Buchan and Amy Hankinson from the Australian Conservation Foundation, who have been working on a targeted land and water reform package which would help reverse the decline in the condition of rivers and wetlands, improve the profitability of agriculture and boost the confidence of rural communities of the Murray-Darling Basin. They have brought forward a targeted approach to land and water reform which I think would benefit the Murray-Darling Basin by securing water entitlements with a reliability that would provide secure environmental flows to restore system health.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr AJ Schultz)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired.