

Libs plan to fight water fee

CONRAD NATOLI

THE State Liberal Party will attempt to reverse legislation surrounding new water licensing fees following a meeting with farmers and dam owners in Manjimup on Friday.

More than 60 angry and disillusioned dam owners put their reasons for disallowance of the new laws to Warren-Blackwood MLA Paul Omodei, South West MLCs Barry House, Robyn McSweeney, Nigel Hallett, South West MLA Steve Thomas, Federal Senator Mathias Cormann and candidate for the seat of Forrest Nola Marino, with a majority feeling a positive step had been taken.

"It was certainly positive and what we, the Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners Group, did during that meeting was point out that these licences are unrational and unfair," group spokesman Neil Bartholomaeus said.

"The real test now is whether the Greens choose to support the disallowance."

Also during the meeting, newly-appointed Senator Cormann promised to pursue the concerns of local dam owners with Federal Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Malcolm Turnbull.

Many dam owners sent letters to Mr Turnbull, but are yet to receive a response.

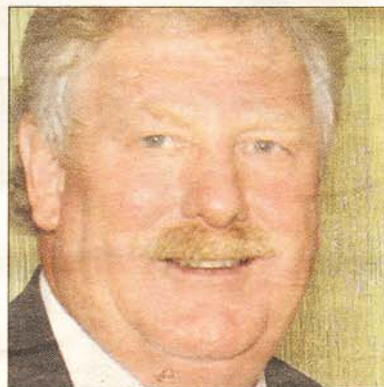
"Currently the legislation is not fair and equitable," Mr Cormann said.

"I think the State Labor Government has done a snow job.

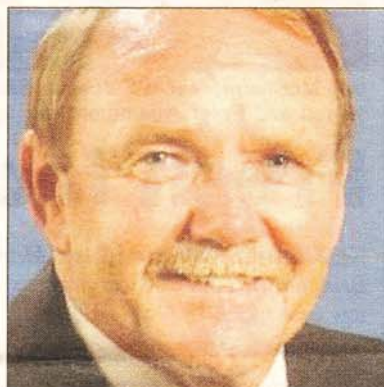
"I will be seeking clarification from the Federal Government as well as a clear message from Mr Turnbull."

Mr Cormann said he would also put light on the issue with a speech in the Senate.

Mr Omodei, who has been a supporter of the Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners Group, agreed with many of the farmers at the meeting, saying



Barry House



Nigel Hallett

the fees could be the death of agriculture and horticulture in the area.

"Farmers don't consume any more water than other people," Mr Omodei said.

"The water they use is turned into horticultural products that are consumed by the rest of the population.

"A lot of farmers are getting towards 60 years of age and another impost could force many of them out of the industry and force them to sell their land to bluegums.

"Then instead of potato chips we will be eating wood chips."

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Federal Senator Mathias Cormann, Warren-Blackwood MLA Paul Omodei, and Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners Group spokesman Neil Bartholomaeus listen to the thoughts of local dam owners.

Dam owners' dilemma over paying water fees

TO pay or not to pay, that is the question facing many dam owners following their meeting with members of the Liberal Party.

The Liberal Opposition has until September 25 to move to reverse the water licence fees legislation but with many farmers starting to be served with the fees, some are in two minds over what to do.

"Many feel paying will weaken our argument," Donnybrook farmer Steve Dilli said. "If the fees are disallowed, will we be refunded?"

Warren-Blackwood MLA Paul Omodei said he would not recommend not paying. "Although, it is a judgement they (dam owners) must make themselves."

"We are not going to advocate breaking the law," added South West MLC Barry House.

Paying or not paying was just one of the topics of discussion at the meeting, with many people expressing their disappointment at how the the National Water Initiative had been implemented.

However, Federal Senator

Mathias Cormann said the way the State Government had administered the legislation was not in line with the initiative.

"Currently they are not fair and equitable," Senator Cormann said.

"The National Water Initiative has nothing to do with what they are doing.

"Nowhere does it say anything about metering."

Federal candidate for Forrest Nola Marino pointed out WA had not been adequately represented

in the formulation of the National Water Initiative.

Mr Omodei said this legislation had been in the pipeline for some time.

"In my view the Government has been disingenuous in the way it has introduced this legislation into the proclaimed areas first," he said.

It was tabled just before a major break in the sitting of Parliament.

"It has been politically clever," Mr Omodei said.