

Move to block water fees in Upper House



Neil Bartholomaeus

DANIEL MERCER

A RARE coalition between Liberal, National and Green State Upper House members is set to block the Government's controversial new water licence fee legislation, according to the Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners Group.

Group spokesman Neil Bartholomaeus, after lobbying from the group and State politicians, including a meeting in Manjimup with State Opposition Leader Paul Omodei, said antagonism towards the reforms was strong enough to block the Government's Bill in the Upper House.

"We will be encouraging the State members of Parliament, par-

ticularly in the Legislative Council, to move a motion of disallowance of the regulations that underpin or introduce these water licence fees," he said. He expects a council motion disallowing the fees within the next two weeks.

Mr Bartholomaeus' comments came as West Australian Senator Mathias Cormann approached Federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull for Commonwealth support over the issue.

In his letter to the Minister, Senator Cormann said farmers who had used generational strong water management processes were being penalised by fees well above the average.

"To give you an example, landowners in Manjimup and

Pemberton who have been licensed for 40 gigalitres will end up paying about \$6.40 per megalitre, while in Ord River, the Ord River Co-operative, which has been licensed for 335 gigalitres of water, will pay only one \$3000 water licence fee, translating to less than a cent per megalitre."

But WA Water Resources Minister John Kobelke rejected the criticism, insisting Lower South West farmers would still be paying relatively little for licences.

"It is only fair that water users who will benefit from greater security of their water rights should contribute towards the cost of the new licensing system which has fees lower than other States," he said.