**LAKE EYRE BASIN (INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT) BILL 2000**

**Legislative Assembly, 29 November 2000, pages 711-2**

Second reading

**The Hon. M.K. BRINDAL (Minister for Water Resources)** obtained leave and introduced a bill for an act to ratify and approve the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement; and for other purposes. Read a first time.

Mr Lewis: It is a very important bill.

The Hon. M.K. BRINDAL: I thank the member for Hammond for saying that: yes, it is a very important bill. I move: That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have the second reading explanation inserted in Hansard without my reading it. Leave granted. The Lake Eyre Basin Agreement is a major achievement for the South Australian government and represents the start of a new era in the management of the Basin. It fulfils a South Australian government initiative to cooperate with the commonwealth and Queensland governments to recognise the environmental, economic and social values of the Basin and to work towards integrated catchment management.

The Lake Eyre Basin Agreement was signed on behalf of the South Australian and Queensland governments in Birdsville on Saturday 21 October 2000. The Commonwealth had previously signed the agreement.

Both of South Australia’s great river basins—the Murray Darling Basin and the Lake Eyre Basin have their origins in other states. Our geographic position at the receiving end of these river systems makes it imperative that we establish formal cooperative agreements with our upstream neighbours. We have had such arrangements in place for the Murray Darling Basin for some time, and now have developed the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement for the Cooper Creek and Diamantina River systems. The Lake Eyre Basin Agreement esta lishes a formal and effective way for the South Australian government to engage strategically and constructively with the Queensland and Commonwealth governments for the management of the Basin.

While the Lake Eyre Basin is perhaps less well known than the Murray Darling Basin, it is nevertheless of great importance to South Australia. Lake Eyre Basin rivers have not been substantially altered by major regulation and extraction. They are amongst the few remaining major rivers with near natural flows and have some of the most variable flow regimes in the world. We have an opportunity for good, sustainable environmental management in the Lake Eyre Basin, an opportunity for ‘getting it right’, an opportunity that we have been slow to recognise in other river systems and are now struggling to correct.

The agreement had its origins in the controversy over a proposal to grow irrigated cotton on Cooper Creek in Queensland. Concern by the community and the South Australian government for the future health of this Australian icon led to the signing in May 1997 of the Heads of Agreement for the Lake Eyre Basin by the South Australian, Queensland and commonwealth governments. This important document provided the basis for developing the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement. Since the beginning, South Australia has been the driving force behind the agreement.

The agreement requires the preparation and adoption of policies and strategies for the Basin and periodic reporting on the ‘state of the rivers’. These should provide a sound basis for long-term management and monitoring of the Basin.

The agreement requires approval and ratification by the parliaments of South Australia and Queensland. The passage of this bill is therefore vital to give effect to the agreement. In introducing this bill so soon after signing the agreement, South Australia is again leading the way.

A comprehensive community consultation process was undertaken and several changes were made to earlier drafts of the agreement in response to community views. During this consultation process and at the signing ceremony in Birdsville, the community has demonstrated its support for the agreement.

The community has also made great strides towards an integrated approach to management of the Lake Eyre Basin. Overcoming the logistic difficulties of a vast area and a small population, the Basin community has made linkages across State borders and has undertaken a range of activities over the past three years, the most significant being identification of management issues, community education and the development of strategic plans which were also launched in Birdsville on 21 October 2000.

The agreement provides an excellent opportunity for the further development of partnerships between government, the local community and other stakeholders.

The Arid Areas Catchment Water Management Board will prepare a catchment water management plan for the South Australian portion of the Lake Eyre Basin rivers and will play an important role in the Basin. The Board is also required to advise the South Australian Minister for Water Resources on activities in other states which are likely to affect the water resources in the Board’s area.

The State Water Plan recognises the Lake Eyre Basin as one of South Australia’s five key water resources and acknowledges the importance of the agreement to protect South Australia’s interests in the Basin.

The water resources of the Lake Eyre Basin in South Australia are valued for the conservation of wetlands and aquatic ecosystems, in particular South Australia’s Coongie Lakes wetlands are classified as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. These 19 800 square kilometre wetlands support 73 species of waterbirds and 13 wetland-dependent species, of which 43 and 9 respectively have been recorded breeding.

The Cooper and Diamantina provide water for stock and flooding is beneficial for floodplain grazing by the pastoral industry.

Floods sustain vast wetlands, support rangeland grazing and are the trigger for breeding activity in many native species. During dry periods, the wetlands of the Lake Eyre Basin are vital drought refuges for wildlife.

The Basin’s two major rivers, the Diamantina River and Cooper Creek flow through semi-arid and arid regions of Australia, and paradoxically some of their most significant wetlands coincide with some of the most arid areas of the continent.

The terminal lake of the system is Lake Eyre, a vast ephemeral salina which experiences minor flooding on average every couple of years, mainly from the Diamantina River and occasional extensive floods from both the Diamantina and the Cooper in exceptional years. Both systems support important wetlands.

The agreement and passage of the Lake Eyre Basin (Intergovernmental Agreement) Bill together provide the framework for the protection of these great nationally and internationally important environmental assets.

I commend this bill to the House.

Explanation of Clauses

*Clause 1: Short title*

This clause is formal.

*Clause 2: Commencement*

The measure will be brought into operation by proclamation.

*Clause 3: Interpretation*

The relevant agreement for the purposes of the bill is the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement, a copy of which is included in the schedule to the bill.

*Clause 4: Ratification of Agreement*

The agreement is to be ratified and approved by the Parliament.

*Clause 5: Facilitation of Agreement*

The Minister and State agencies are to do anything reasonably necessary to ensure the performance and observance of the agreement.

Schedule The schedule sets out the intergovernmental agreement.

Mr HILL secured the adjournment of the debate.