

## **ADJOURNMENT**

### **Riverina Electorate: ASGE Program**

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (5.35 p.m.)—I rise tonight to advise the House of an injustice—one of the worst injustices I have ever seen and that I would ever wish to see happening to Australian people. That injustice is happening to people in my electorate. It is called the ASGE program— Achieving Sustainable Groundwater Entitlements program—that is being delivered by the state government. One of my constituents said:

We just can't see how we will ever pay off our \$2.4 million property purchase, when we paid \$1.2 million of it for an asset which we are likely to lose most of. And there's such a strong possibility that we'll now have to sell the property as our equity level is so non-existent without our water.

She went on:

I am sure we can both get jobs in civilian life as we are both quite switched on young people with varying skills, but we will have nowhere near enough income to ever service the debt we will leave with. Our banks took a punt on us with minimal equity, based on our business plan and our reputation in the industry. Our families have had frugal and innovative management over three generations, building their operation. And they have already started selling their assets as their own equity level will be impacted upon by our loss.

The issue here is that successive state governments of all persuasions have gone ahead and issued water licences, and people have taken up those licences. Then there was a decision by the New South Wales state government that, for five years, there would be an Achieving Sustainable Groundwater Entitlements reduction and a policy of across-the-board cuts. I have here letters from Minister Aquilina and from the director-general of water saying, 'The policy is for across-the-board cuts and you will receive around 52 per cent of your water entitlement.' Then we had two court cases where the state government used money—New South Wales taxpayers' money—to fight Murrumbidgee ground water users on the issue of across-the-board cuts. The ground water pumpers in my electorate lost that case to the state and then they lost an appeal to the state, all on a policy of across-the-board cuts. For five years people had letters from Mr Aquilina, the Minister for Land and Water Conservation, and from the director-general of water saying: 'You can be assured that you will have 52 per cent of your water.'

There was also a water-sharing plan that was adopted in December 2002 and gazetted in February 2003 for implementation in July 2003. That remains the water policy and the water management plan today. It has never been withdrawn yet now we have a history of extraction. Across-the-board cuts are not fair. The history of extraction system is not fair, but the water level management plan that my growers and producers put to the state government in court cases was fair, and they lost their case against the government. In December 2005, we saw the state government change its mind and then issue people a letter saying: 'Sorry, there's now going to be a history of extraction system. We no longer have a policy of across-the-board cuts.'

That is a good thing for those people under the history of extraction system and I have no reason to decry those people. They have been in the industry for a long time and have a good history of extraction. But now the state government has wiped its hands of responsibility for people who have done nothing wrong. This is a crime; this is an injustice; this is something that the state government must rectify through its anomalies committee. These people deserve a fair go. These people have been treated shabbily. These people are young Australians

who want to build a life in production. They have been very good at it and have done absolutely nothing wrong, but they have been subject to ridiculous policy changes by the New South Wales state government, which should have adopted the water level management plan put to them by people who actually know about water, who have dealt in water all of their lives and who understand the systems that they work in and the recharge of those systems.