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FARMERS SUPPORT MINERS TO STOP WATER TAX GRAB

Farmers have asked members of the Legislative Council to support disallowance of water licence fees applying to the mining and petroleum industries, before they are also applied to agriculture. A disallowance motion moved by Robin Scott MLC of Pauline Hanson One Nation will be debated in the Legislative Council this week.

A Labor State Government tried to introduce similar water licence fees in 2007 and 2008 and they were twice disallowed by the Legislative Council.

Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners, who led opposition to the fees in 2007 and 2008, are alarmed at Water Minister Dave Kelly's introduction of unfair water licence fees of \$6,668 for renewal of a water licence and \$13,057 for a new licence.

Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners convener, Neil Bartholomaeus, said the State Government was using a grubby 'divide and conquer' approach to introduction of the unjustified fees.

"While these licence fees initially apply to the mining industry, miners and farmers often use the same aquifers and surface water resources, Mr Kelly knows this and is trying to split industry opposition.

"\$6,668 to renew a water licence by what is usually a simple 'rubber stamp' administrative process is an outrageous water tax grab.

"We have paid for our self-supply water dams and bores and it is objectionable that the Government is demanding thousands of dollars for us to use them.

"The water programs in the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation employ 447 staff and cost \$87 million, but don't supply a drop of water to anyone. Don't expect industry to pay for a bloated Department that isn't properly administering water laws," Mr Bartholomaeus said.

Mr Bartholomaeus said thousands of family-based farmers using less than 100 megalitres of self-supply water to produce food and wine will pay the same \$6,668 licence renewal fee as the subsidised Ord Irrigation Cooperative licenced to use 246,300 megalitres from the Ord River.

"This favouritism of huge subsidised water users is clearly unfair. Repeating the flaws in the 2007 and 2008 failed water tax grab.

"Minister Kelly is attacking the agriculture and mining fabric of regional Western Australia by a tax on rain water; but ignores the 177,000 garden bores in Perth using between 88,000 and 120,000 megalitres of water. This is unacceptable city electoral bias. In a digital age, the 177,000 garden bores could be licensed, and owners pay fees; if we must.

"Manjimup and Pemberton Landowners are not opposed to paying any water licence fees. Fees for a Driver's Licence are a tested benchmark for Government service; being \$89.15 for a New Applicant Fee and \$149.50 for Licence Renewal for five years.

These benchmark fees could be applied to water licensing, which we have advocated since 2007. Mark McGowan and the Labor Party could put this level of fees for water licensing transparently at the next State Election. That would be fair," Mr Bartholomaeus said.

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