

TRIBUNE
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Guest editorial

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Water - the big issue

There is no doubt that water security is the biggest issue on the Eyre Peninsula, in South Australia, and right across southern Australia. Without water, everything else becomes incidental.

The recent meeting of landholders reliant on the Poldra Basin demonstrated the severe impact on our most precious natural resource. It also highlighted the reliance of our businesses, and ultimately families, on water and the natural environment.

The State Liberals have committed to allowing third-party access to SA Water infrastructure on the Eyre Peninsula if elected. This commitment will create the opportunity to provide the community with cost effective, desalinated water, and private companies other than SA Water will be able to do so through existing pipes. This overrides the monopoly situation that currently exists.

With the Robinson Basin no longer drawn from, and the Tod Reservoir too saline for human consumption, we are now in a situation where about 80 per cent of our entire water supply is sourced from just one place – the Uley South Basin – situated west of Port Lincoln. A further 15 per cent is piped in from the River Murray, and the remainder is made up from on-farm and household supplies.

Like it or not, desalinated water will be required to assist with our future water security. Obviously desalination is no silver bullet, but when utilised in conjunction with other water conservation measures, it will help provide for existing and future demands.

Two other Liberal policies that are particularly relevant to the Eyre Peninsula are the allocation of 25 per cent of state mining royalties to the Regional Development Infrastructure Fund, and the reinstatement of local hospital boards.

The lack of investment into regional infrastructure by the Rann Labor Government has highlighted its disregard for the people of Eyre Peninsula. The overwhelming majority of this State's export income is generated from the regions, and it is high time that was recognised. It should also be understood that to ensure our earning capacity, we must invest in roads, rail, ports and power to ensure our future prosperity.

One of the real indicators of a community's wellbeing is the standard of its health services.

The provision of basic health services is a fundamental right in any civilised nation, and in one of the world's richest countries, this government is intent on centralising services.

What they don't realise is the real feeling of ownership that we have for our local hospitals. In many cases it was the community itself that first built the hospital, that sourced the doctor and that raised the funds. By reinstating hospital boards, we will return that ownership to our communities.

I believe the role of government is to provide a framework in which business can operate and communities can function. Anything more than that and we are caught up in regulation and red tape. In among all the election hype that will occur in 2010, it is worth remembering that we do still live in the lucky country.