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FIRE HYDRANTS, COUNTRY AREAS

Mr GRIFFITHS (Goyder) (11:47): It is my pleasure to rise to speak briefly in support of the motion from the member for Hammond. It is obvious from the research that he has done that this is a passionate issue for him. I am aware that he has spoken on this matter several times in this house in our relatively short careers here, and I have no doubt that the member for Hammond will continue to make sure that the government is held accountable in this area.

Within the Goyder community there are 70 towns, 54 of which have access to a potable reticulated water supply; so, presumably, those 54 communities also have fireplugs, involving maintenance issues that need to be taken care of. It might seem an insignificant matter to people, but the reality is that, in time of an emergency, when a fire occurs the last thing anybody wants is to be unable to access water supply once the first tank-load of water has been used to combat the fire. It is important that the government, and we on this side, recognise the importance of this motion and ensure that we do something about it.

We are very lucky, though, that in most areas the instance of fires is quite low. Certainly, in my electorate I cannot remember a house fire within the past few years. Whilst I was growing up in Yorketown I lived down the street from a house that burnt down, which was exciting for a seven year old to go down and watch the fire. But now I respect the fact that, all of a sudden, it put a family at risk and it very much put at risk the people who were fighting the fire. I have a different perspective on it now, after seeing it as a seven year old, and it is important that we are able to do something about this problem.

There was quite a large fire on the outskirts of Edithburgh in early December last year at about the same time as we had the fires near Warooka and on Kangaroo Island. I am aware that, certainly, the fire teams that went to the Edithburgh fire were not just from the Edithburgh Brigade; other brigades responded. An issue for them would have been ensuring that they were able to identify the location of the fireplugs and to ensure that they could get water, because they certainly would have needed more than one tank-load of water.

I have noticed, though, driving around my electorate, particularly in the Mallala area, that a lot of work seems to have been undertaken. The work being done by SA Water and the government is now evident. When I am driving around these unsealed road networks, I see that there are quite a few plugs identified with blue plastic—so it must be working a bit. You drive past and think, 'Okay; there's a fireplug', so you remember that for future use, but that is the only area in which I have noticed this. I have tens of thousands of kilometres of unsealed road network in my electorate, but it is only in that small, confined area, which probably makes up about 15 per cent of the electorate, that I have noticed that the program of maintenance must be working.

The Hon. R.G. Kerin interjecting:

Mr GRIFFITHS: The member for Frome indicates that it might be one dedicated volunteer. That is another thing that I want to talk about. It seems that in the past 25 years there has been an enormous reduction in the number of people within SA Water who work in the regions. Obviously, the fewer people there are and the increasing delays in responding to not only breaks in the mains but issues such as important maintenance work on fireplugs means that we need more staff to come out to do these jobs.

The Hon. R.B. Such interjecting:

Mr GRIFFITHS: The member for Fisher mentions that we could use trusted prisoners; that would be a very good employment program. Yes; community work orders could be implemented. Let's be innovative about

it; let's actually get people out there who can do these things. They are a part of the government system; let's make sure that we use them. In driving around, it is obvious that the mains network is suffering also. There is the fireplug issue with which the member for Hammond has dealt very well in connection with this bill, but there is also, for me, the greater concern of mains network maintenance. It all comes down to a lack of staff and resources provided to ensure that the network of mains, which supplies the water that feeds into the fireplugs, is also operable.

For hundreds of kilometres of the mains network in the Goyder electorate, we have the above-ground pipes, and you can easily see as you drive past that they are in a poor state of repair; they are very rusted in many places. I know that leaks occur, and it takes far longer than we would all like to get maintenance staff out there to do that work and to patch up or replace that section of pipe.

A person from Paskeville came to me, probably two months ago, and we went out and took some photos. We drove around and he showed me some badly rusted main pipes just waiting to burst. At Port Vincent in early 2000, as a result of a mains burst, the community did not have a water supply for two days in January—the peak time. I commend the member for Hammond for bringing this motion before the house. While it might not be in a lot of people's thought processes, this motion certainly identifies an important issue, because being able to identify the location of fire hydrants and getting water out of them quickly in an emergency will save lives and property.