



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members' Statements

17 June 2020

IRONBARK CREEK WIDENING

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (17:50):

It has been a difficult 12 months. Drought has sapped regional and rural economies across the State. Catastrophic bushfires caused billions of dollars in damage. Recently low consumer spending has been made worse by COVID-19 lockdowns. Capping all this off, the State is in recession for the first time in nearly 30 years. History shows that recessions only get worse in the absence of significant government intervention. When people lose work they have less money to spend and businesses fail. When businesses fail more people lose work and the cycle repeats and worsens.

Stimulus packages put the brakes on that cycle. That is why the Reserve Bank of Australia said that governments must invest in infrastructure projects to stimulate local economies. Infrastructure projects in Sydney have been fast-tracked in the past month. I want to ensure that the Hunter gets its fair share. The Hunter is the economic engine room in New South Wales, generating 28 per cent of the State's regional economic output. An additional \$3 billion in infrastructure funding to stimulate regional economies has been announced. Now is the perfect time to invest in local projects and address inadequate infrastructure in the Wallsend electorate. I will not present a wish list now. I have a lot of those wishes on the record and I would be happy to chat with Ministers at any time about them. Instead, I will make the case for one very important piece of work that the Government has delayed for far too long, and that is the subject of the motion of which I gave notice this morning.

When I was first elected 13 years ago in 2007, a storm inundated Wallsend. In the years since, particularly in 2015, floods have threatened damage on a similar scale. We finally have a chance now to complete much-needed flood mitigation works in Wallsend. The City of Newcastle finished replacing the Tyrell Street Bridge earlier this year. Now we need the Hunter Water Corporation to hold up its end of the bargain and finally widen Ironbark Creek, which will provide a welcome boost to the Wallsend electorate's economy and will drive jobs, providing the economic stimulus to support recovery from COVID-19 and cushion the impact of the recession on local workers, jobs and businesses.

It would also reassure residents and business owners in the Wallsend area that their investment in the local area will not be threatened by the next time an east coast low causes large-scale damage. It will happen again in Wallsend because we are built on wetlands. I note the Hunter Water Corporation's justification for refusing Wallsend flood works in a loaded survey of its customer base. I would be interested to know what other proposed infrastructure was put to a popular vote, or was it only Wallsend? Will the Minister step in and direct Hunter Water Corporation to deliver the important infrastructure upgrade for the Wallsend electorate? Will the Minister answer my argument maintained by Hunter Water Corporation that it cannot afford the project? We will see.

Last year the Government required Hunter Water Corporation to pay a \$100 million dividend, funded by Treasury Corporation bonds. Now that interest rates are at a record low and spending is needed more than ever, the Minister should direct Hunter Water Corporation to spend the money, widen the canals, ensure the safety of Wallsend residents and businesses, and stimulate the Wallsend economy. It is an obvious remedy for some of the many problems currently facing the Wallsend electorate.