

COBDOGLA IRRIGATION AND STEAM MUSEUM

Mr WHETSTONE (Chaffey): Presented a petition signed by 5,732 residents of Cobdogla and greater South Australia requesting the house to urge the government to take immediate action to ensure SA Water continues to own and support the Cobdogla Irrigation and Steam Museum and allocate funds to facilitate the ongoing operation of the Humphrey pump and museum to enable current and future generations to appreciate the state's water heritage.

COBDOGLA IRRIGATION AND STEAM MUSEUM

Mr WHETSTONE (Chaffey) (15:10): Today, I rise to speak about how the Riverland community has rallied behind one of its most beloved historic icons—the Cobdogla Irrigation and Steam Museum and the world-renowned Humphrey pump. Today, I presented a petition with almost 6,000 signatures urging the state government to take immediate action to have SA Water continue to own and support the Cobdogla Irrigation and Steam Museum whilst allocating the necessary funds to facilitate the ongoing operation of the Humphrey pump and museum to enable current and future generations to appreciate the state's water heritage.

I would like to commend the Cobdogla Steam Friends Society for their efforts in distributing this petition and note that people across the world signed it. Many recognised engineers, history and tourism organisations have thrown their weight behind the petition and what it stands for, and these include the National Trust of South Australia, the History Trust of South Australia, Destination Riverland and Engineers Australia.

As a bit of background to the house, the Cobdogla Irrigation and Steam Museum was established by the then engineering and water supply department (now the SA Water Corporation) as a major project commemorating South Australia's sesquicentenary in 1986. The key drawcard to the museum was the Humphrey pump, which is one of only two in the Southern Hemisphere and holds the title of the only working Humphrey pump in the world. In June 2010, it was declared a national engineering landmark by Engineers Australia—the ultimate accolade from this organisation—and an international honour along similar lines was recently announced.

In May 2012, a gas leak occurred during the operation of the Humphrey pump at Cobdogla, and following this event operation of the pump ceased. Volunteers at the museum provided a submission to SA Water outlining the need for the pump to become operational again, and after two years they had heard nothing from the department. It was not until I organised for questions to be asked in the parliament that the state government acknowledged the situation. I wrote to the Minister for Water in October last year, and he responded by stating that SA Water was unable to commit to the capital upgrade required for the pump and associated infrastructure or to subsidise the ongoing operation of the museum.

Further pressure from the community caused a backflip by SA Water and the Minister, providing financial support to the museum but not to the Humphrey pump. Senior managers from SA Water visited the museum while in the Riverland on another matter and were given an insight into how the museum has developed and the role the steam friends and the National Trust have played over 27 years since they took over the running of the museum.

Following that visit, SA Water's general manager, operations and maintenance, Mr Mark Gobbie, stated that there were no plans to withdraw money or reduce support to the museum and that SA Water had always undertaken to maintain its commitment and pay other costs associated with the site to ensure that the Cobdogla Irrigation and Steam Museum could continue to operate. I do note that nearly 300 people attended an open day recently at the museum to provide support to that petition.

As an irrigator, I am proud to stand here and be a part of the fight for the continued operation of the Humphrey pump. It is world renowned, it is an icon of the South Australian irrigation fraternity but, more importantly, it is an icon of Australia's history with irrigation. It is an icon recognised by world-renowned engineers, and it is visited by world-renowned engineers, and this is the reason that it has so much commitment from the community and from afar.

The community had a win with the continued commitment to operate the museum, but it is outrageous that the minister will not provide the same commitment to make the Humphrey pump operational again. This pump is a historic icon for South Australia and will continue to have many tourism benefits for the state. The passionate volunteers who operate the museum and the pump deserve much better from this state government.