

OFFICE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AUTHORITY — ESTABLISHMENT

Statement by Minister for Environment

HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan — Minister for Environment) [4.04 pm]: I am pleased to advise the house that the Liberal-National government is strengthening the independence of the Environmental Protection Authority and enhancing its effectiveness with a revitalised structure. The EPA will be bolstered with the establishment of the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority. The new office will be operational by December and have responsibility for parts of the Environmental Protection Act that deal with policy development and environmental impact assessments. The new office will have its own general manager, staff, budget and management capability, meaning that for the first time the EPA will have administrative independence to match its statutory independence. The office will work with and report directly to the EPA and ultimately to me as Minister for Environment.

Complementing its increased independence, the EPA will now also have not only the ability to recommend conditions for a project, but also responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of ministerial conditions over the life of the project. This will provide for continuous improvement and currency of the conditions that are recommended for development proposals.

The Department of Environment and Conservation will retain responsibility for conservation and environmental regulatory matters, such as clearing of native vegetation, pollution and other works approvals. These changes will mean better environmental outcomes are delivered for Western Australia and will increase confidence in the environmental assessment and decision-making process. The new arrangements are consistent with a number of previous reports, including the review of environmental impact assessment undertaken by the EPA.

I have also today released a report of the environmental stakeholder advisory group chaired by Dr Bernard Bowen, which provided advice to me on the role and structure of the Environmental Protection Authority. I established this group earlier in the year to provide advice on matters that will deliver more efficient and effective environmental assessments whilst maintaining the highest environmental standards. The group comprises a broad range of industry, conservation and other stakeholder groups. The advice I received from my environmental stakeholder advisory group has contributed positively towards the steps we have taken today to bolster the independence of the EPA.

The strengthening of the Environmental Protection Authority complements the Liberal-National government's positive environmental stance and reflects our commitment to work with all stakeholders to develop genuine solutions to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of assessment processes whilst maintaining the highest environmental standards.

Consideration of the statement made an order of the day for the next sitting, on motion by **Hon Ed Dermer**.