GROUNDWATER INVESTIGATIONS

116. Mr V.A. CATANIA to the Minister for Water:

I understand that royalties for regions–funded groundwater investigations that started in 2012 are producing significant results. Can the minister please provide the house with an update on these investigations?

Ms M.J. DAVIES replied:

I thank the member for the question. An amazing amount of work is being done in groundwater investigations right across the state; in fact, we could say that we have turbocharged the Department of Water with royalties for regions funding to ensure that we are making this precious resource available for the diversification of our state's economy. We are de-risking investment decisions for the private sector, making decisions easier for local government and for businesses that are already operating, creating new business opportunities and allowing the state government to do its planning on a more fulsome basis.

I will run through some of the successes that we have had along the way. We have projects right across the state. La Grange, along the coastal strip of Broome, is defining water availability in this very prospective area. To date, more than 50 gigalitres per annum have been identified for potential irrigation projects. There is an $11 million investigation in the west Canning Basin, which is one of largest areas and contains the most exciting projects, adjoining La Grange. It has identified 100 gigalitres of sustainable high-quality underground resource. It is the largest water investigation in the state. It covers a 10 000 square kilometre footprint. We still have another year to run in the investigation. Up to this point, we have proven up a sustainable 100 gigalitres of resource a year. On the Dampier Peninsula, a $2.9 million investigation north of Broome has produced some very detailed three-dimensional maps of the seawater interface. This is very important when we look at managing our water resource. If we are looking at using them for productive use, in particular, we need to ensure that there is no seawater intrusion into what could potentially be potable water resources. This mapping will also assist Aboriginal communities, camps along the coastline and businesses so that they can access fresh water and supplement their water resources for stock and community supplies.

In the Murchison, member for North West Central, a $1.9 million project has allowed us to piece together information that we have already had on record. A lot of this is about going back and consolidating information that we already have. Members would have seen in the news recently the fantastic imagery of paleochannels running under the earth's surface up there. They are essentially very ancient riverbeds, and are proving up to be highly prospective in that area as well.

I now move to the south west and the $1.6 million from the Department of Water that is being used to map the seawater interface along the Scott and Swan coastal plains. It is very important from a public water supply point of view to have this information. On the south coast, $1.5 million has been invested. We have identified areas of potable water that will allow us to make decisions on deferring expensive desalination options and to look at managing the sustainability of our water resources in and around Esperance and the south coast region.

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston, I call you to order for the first time. Minister, I want a very short answer.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: In addition, of course we have the $40 million being invested through the Water for Food program and underwritten by royalties for regions that is about expanding our irrigated agricultural footprint across the state. A large proportion in addition to that is funded by royalties for regions. We are determined to make sure that we have the best science applied to understand this very precious resource so that we can not only look after potable water supplies for communities as they grow, but also create economic opportunities into the future for the state.