

ENVIRONMENT — WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BIODIVERSITY AUDIT

2300. Hon Diane Evers to the Minister for Environment:

I refer to the Western Australian Biodiversity Audit II, as well as strong indications from previous Western Australian State of Environment reports and the recent United Nations Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services showing that biodiversity is in serious decline, and I ask:

- (a) (a) has the audit been completed:
  - (i) if no to (a), why not, and when will it be completed;
- (b) (b) has all of the data collected in the audit, such as on the 3,300+ priority species, 120 wetlands and potential threatened ecological communities, been included in the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) dataset:
  - (i) if no to (b), why not;
- (c) (c) does the audit show that Western Australia's overall biodiversity is in decline;
- (d) (d) what was the full cost of undertaking the audit, and how many State government departments and employees were involved;
- (e) (e) given that DBCA stated in its Annual Report that Biodiversity Audit II was completed and made publicly available in 2015, why has a final report on Biodiversity Audit II with analysis, findings and recommendations not been released;
- (f) (f) when will a final report detailing the full findings and recommendations of Biodiversity Audit II be publicly released, with an executive summary, so that other government agencies, non-government organisations, community members and natural resource managers can have up-to-date information;
- (g) (g) has all of the data collected in the Biodiversity Audit II been made fully available to the public:
  - (i) if no to (g), why not; and
  - (ii) if no to (g), does the DBCA have data from the audit in relation to the following issues that are not publicly available:
    - (A) priority species;
    - (B) wetlands; and
    - (C) threatened ecological communities;
- (h) (h) what will be done to improve public access to the database in order to support sound and transparent decisions in collaboration with the people of Western Australia to deal with the current and future decline of Western Australia's unique biodiversity;
- (i) (i) when will the Government improve the quantity and quality of public access to this database;
- (j) (j) why does the Biodiversity Audit II database have an extremely limited ability to analyse data;
- (k) (k) what additional means will the Government consider providing to enable the public to analyse the data from the audit;
- (l) (l) is the Minister aware that in May 2018, *The Beeliar Group: Professors for Environmental Responsibility* offered to assist DBCA to undertake analysis of the Biodiversity Audit II, but they have not been permitted to access the full data set and information that was collected as part of the Biodiversity Audit II:
  - (i) if no to (l), why not; and
  - (ii) if yes to (l), will the Minister instruct DBCA to provide full access to Biodiversity Audit II and its data and information; and
- (m) (m) does the Minister acknowledge that in order to make sound and transparent decisions and act to address the decline of Western Australia's biodiversity, it is necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of the current state and condition of biodiversity and possible future management requirements and priorities:
  - (i) if yes to (m), will the Government develop an overarching conservation strategy to guide effort, integrate existing conservation plans, and coordinate responses?

**Hon Stephen Dawson replied:**

- (a) No further development of the Biodiversity Audit II is planned to be undertaken by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions at this time.
- (b) Information collected on threatened species and ecological communities during Biodiversity Audit II is available in the Biodiversity Audit II database. For some assets data is incomplete, including some priority species, wetlands and threatened ecological communities, and it is not appropriate to publicly release incomplete datasets.
- (c) Information in the audit database shows some elements of biodiversity are in decline, whilst others show improving trends.
- (d) I refer to supplementary information provided to the Estimates and Financial Operations Committee on 25 June 2015. The estimated cost of undertaking the audit for the core staff and database development was \$571,635. There were 110 staff involved in the project from the former Department of Parks and Wildlife and the WA Museum, and other scientific experts.
- (e)–(f) I refer to question without notice No. 206 on 15 June 2017. The information collected in Audit II was captured electronically in a database rather than produce a static version of the data, such as a final report, as this was considered to be the most effective way of making the large volume of information available. Biodiversity Audit II collected data and information during 2012 and 2013 and is a snapshot of information available at that time.
- (g) No. For some assets data is incomplete, including some priority species, wetlands and threatened ecological communities, and it is not appropriate to publicly release incomplete datasets. Incomplete data collected in the audit process is available on request so appropriate context can be provided regarding the status of those data.
- (h)–(i) Full public access is provided to the Biodiversity Audit II database.
- (j) The Biodiversity Audit II database was developed to make the data collected available to departmental staff as the primary users of this information. The database stores data and is not intended to be a means of analysing data.
- (k) Data collected by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions is available on request.
- (l) The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions has advised me that senior staff met with scientists from *The Beeliar Group* in August 2018 and offered full access to the data and information collected through Biodiversity Audit II to them. This offer to access the data is still open.
- (m) The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions maintains science based information on biodiversity assets and the Government makes decisions on management of biodiversity based on the evidence available.