

ENVIRONMENT — WETLANDS COORDINATING COMMITTEE

2550. Hon Diane Evers to the Minister for Environment:

I refer to the Minister for the Environment's response to question on notice 2184 on 6 August 2019, in which the Minister confirmed that he had not received any advice, reports, minutes of meetings or notes directly from the Wetlands Coordinating Committee (WCC) since he took over responsibility of this Ministerial Advisory Committee and that only three meetings have been held over approximately six years since the current chairperson took over, and I ask:

- (a) is the Minister aware that the minutes of the WCC held on 10 December 2019 indicate that the agenda items proposed by the members of the committee were not satisfactorily addressed by the WCC Chair;
- (b) has the Minister received a copy of the minutes of that meeting from the Chair;
- (c) does the Minister consider it appropriate that a Ministerial Advisory Committee under his responsibility has not provided him with any advice, reports or minutes of its meetings:
 - (i) if yes to (c), why; and
 - (ii) if no to (c), what does the Minister intend to do about it;
- (d) is the Minister aware that most of the key actions proposed in the State Wetlands Conservation Policy of 1997 have not been completed, contrary to the advice provided to him;
- (e) is the Minister aware that no formal audit of the completed initiatives from the Wetlands Conservation Policy has been carried out since 2007;
- (f) is the Minister aware that according to the EPA, more than 80 percent of the original wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain have been lost since 1829;
- (g) is the Minister aware that scientists have noted that healthy wetlands are highly productive biologically and are essential for the sequestration of carbon and the mitigation of global warming;
- (h) why has the updated Wetlands Conservation Policy developed by the WCC in 2007 not been progressed to the Minister, given that the 1997 policy is over 20 years old and still incomplete;
- (i) is the Minister aware that, contrary to advice provided to him, the WCC has an ongoing function of active coordination of wetlands conservation activities across government agencies and this is not occurring due to the irregularity of WCC meetings and the refusal of the Chair to allow members to place items on the agenda;
- (j) is the Minister aware that two members of the WCC requested that the Chair convene a follow up meeting of the committee early in 2019 because the Chair refused to discuss important business items which they had raised at the meeting on 10 December 2019;
- (k) is the Minister aware that the Chair has so far failed to respond to this request or to a subsequent request by these members to meet with her to discuss the work program of the WCC;
- (l) is the Minister aware that the Chair has not allowed development of work program for the committee:
 - (i) if yes to (l), does the Minister consider it appropriate for a ministerial advisory committee to work without a program of activities and lack of reporting arrangements; and
 - (ii) if no to (l), will the Minister direct the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions to allow the WCC to prepare and operate under a work program;
- (m) is the Minister aware that although the Wetlands Conservation Policy (1997) designates the Director of Nature Conservation in the Department of Conservation and Land Management as the Chair of the WCC, this position no longer exists and the Committee has been chaired by various officers of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and its predecessors over the past 22 years:
 - (i) if no to (m), why not; and
 - (ii) if yes to (m), does the Minister agree that he has the authority to appoint whoever he wishes to chair the WCC; and
- (n) given that the WCC is being prevented from meeting regularly to discuss important issues affecting wetlands and that the Chair will not allow it to develop a work program, will the Minister use his authority to replace the Chair immediately with a suitably qualified person:
 - (i) if no to (n), why not?

Hon Stephen Dawson replied:

- (a) I am advised that agenda items proposed by members of the committee for the 10 December 2018 meeting were addressed through detailed verbal updates from agencies at the meeting and also in writing following the meeting.
- (b)–(c) The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions has provided me with recent advice about the Wetlands Coordinating Committee, including information on the meeting held on the 10 December 2018.
- (d)–(e) I am advised that a review of the 62 actions within the policy was presented to the Wetlands Coordinating Committee in September 2012. The review found that 49 actions (79 per cent) have been completed or are ongoing activities of government agencies.
- (f) Yes, I am advised that this information was published by the Environmental Protection Authority in the former Position Statement No. 4 Environmental Protection of Wetlands, published in November 2004.
- (g) I am advised that there is some scientific information that healthy wetlands play a role in sequestration of carbon as well as providing other ecosystem services, and also provide other ecosystem functions, including habitat for threatened plants and animals.
- (h) I am not aware of the reasons for drafting of a revised Wetlands Conservation Policy in 2007 nor why it was not progressed to the Government at that time.
- (i) I am aware that the Wetlands Coordinating Committee was established under the Wetlands Conservation Policy 1997 to assist with the coordination and implementation of that policy and activities of relevant agencies with respect to wetlands.
- (j) I am advised that agenda items proposed by members of the committee for the 10 December 2018 meeting were addressed through detailed verbal updates from agencies at the meeting and also in writing following the meeting.
- (k) I am advised a meeting of the Committee has been scheduled for November 2019 and Committee members have provided agenda items for that meeting.
- (l) (i)–(ii) The role of the Committee is to assist with coordination of implementation of the policy, through the work of the relevant agencies and with input from community members and an independent scientist.
- (m) (i)–(ii) Due to the recent Machinery of Government and other government changes, the name of agency membership has altered. The equivalent position to the Director Nature Conservation is the Chair.
- (n) (i) No, the position of the Chair is defined in the Wetland Conservation Policy 1997.