

ENVIRONMENT — SOUTH WEST WETLANDS MONITORING PROGRAM

2208. Hon Diane Evers to the Minister for Environment:

- (1) Is the Minister aware that the South West Wetlands Monitoring Program commenced in 1977, and was expanded under the Salinity Action Plan in 1996, then continued under the State Salinity Strategy with ongoing funding of \$250,000 per year, and is currently managed by the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions:
 - (a) if no to (1), why not?
- (2) Is the Minister aware that the South West Wetlands Monitoring Program is one of the very few natural resource management monitoring programs in Western Australia providing routinely collected, long-term salinity, climate and biodiversity data for 105 wetlands across the south-west of the State for over 40 years:
 - (a) if no to (2), why not?
- (3) Is the Minister aware that the South West Wetlands Monitoring Program is a critical indicator of catchment health, establishing climate trends and in supporting remotely sensed and other resource condition programs, and is used by a number of government and community-based natural resource managers to inform decision-making and set priorities:
 - (a) If no to (3), why not?
- (4) Is the Minister aware that in mid to late 2018, the Director of Science and Conservation at the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions withheld and stopped funding to the South West Wetlands Monitoring Program with the result that the program has effectively been prevented from operating and has ceased:
 - (a) if no to (4), why not?
- (5) Can the Minister advise whether any fieldwork has occurred under the South West Wetlands Monitoring Program in 2018–19:
 - (a) if no to (5), why not; and
 - (b) if yes to (5), what dates in 2018–19 was fieldwork undertaken and for which wetlands under the program?
- (6) Given the importance of the South West Wetlands Monitoring Program, and its key function under the State Salinity Strategy, in determining trends and the state of salinity; the condition of wetlands; supporting management; and contributing to the knowledge of climate change, can the Minister explain why funding has been stopped:
 - (a) if no to (6), why not?
- (7) Can the Minister confirm that program funding will be re-established and that it will continue at the current level of funding of \$250,000 and with current staffing levels:
 - (a) if no to (7), why not; and
 - (b) if yes to (7), when will these funds become available to staff this important State program?

Hon Stephen Dawson replied:

- (1) The South West Wetlands Monitoring Project commenced in 1977 to provide information for managing duck hunting. The program expanded under the State Salinity Strategy with \$90,000 operating budget. Funding was reduced in 2013 due to budget reductions across the Public Sector.
- (2) The South West Wetlands Monitoring Program collected salinity, pH and depth data from 1977 to 2017 from between 55 and 105 wetlands. An associated program of wetland biodiversity monitoring was undertaken from 1996 to provide information on the effects of ongoing salinisation on a subset of these wetlands, especially in the Wheatbelt. Climate monitoring was not part of this program.
- (3) The South West Wetlands Monitoring Program has provided indicators of wetland condition that has been used for a variety of conservation planning purposes, such as Ramsar wetland descriptions and setting condition targets, and water resource planning. It has shown that many wetlands across the south west are becoming progressively shallower as rainfall declines.
- (4) The South West Wetland Monitoring Program ceased field work in 2017 and the data is currently being analysed and managed to ensure it is available for use as required in the future.

- (5) In 2018/19 no field work was undertaken under the South West Wetland Monitoring Program. Monitoring was undertaken at 35 of the wetlands through complementary programs using permanent gauges established through the South West Wetland Monitoring Program.
- (6)–(7) The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) is re-focussing wetland monitoring towards Ramsar and other high conservation value wetlands across the State. This program will be tailored to the knowledge needs of each Ramsar wetland and therefore better inform wetland management and improve DBCA’s ability to report on the condition of Ramsar wetlands.