

Conservation Council of WA — Adjournment Debate

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [10.45 pm]: I rise tonight to share some important news with honourable members. Last Friday night—many members would know this as I am sure they received their own invitations—was the windup of Conservation Week at Kings Park, when the Conservation Council presented its annual awards, the 2009 Conservation Awards. A couple of interesting and very important things happened that night, and I rise tonight to share those with honourable members. The first, and I suppose the most important, part of the evening was the presentation of the awards themselves. Several awards were presented. There were the 2009 Conservation Council of WA Honours List awards, which went to Brian Moyle of Melville, Phylis Robertson of Balga, Maria Mann of Broome, Alice Stubber of Bunbury, Rob Versluis of Riverton and Astrid Herlihy of Kalamunda.

Unfortunately, Maria was not able to be with us that night, which was a shame, because I was looking forward to having a chat with Maria about some of the truly outstanding work she has been doing within Environs Kimberley over the past few years. Environs Kimberley, as all members would know, is one of the groups leading the arguments about the construction of the LNG gas hub in the Kimberley. Maria was instrumental in getting the very important agreement that the Carpenter Labor government brokered when she was acting as a member of the northern development task force to bring all the proponents and stakeholders together around the table and to agree that the concept of a single precinct for LNG processing should at least be explored. It was disappointing that Maria was not there, but very heartening and pleasing to hear that she was a recipient of one of the 2009 Conservation Council of WA Honours List awards.

Three other awards were presented that night. The Young Environmentalist Award went to David Lian Sinclair of Mt Hawthorn. I do not know David, but according to the citation that was read out that night he is doing absolutely outstanding work among young people to raise not just their awareness of environmental issues but their commitment to a level of activism that can see things change for the better.

Dr Nic Dunlop received the John Oldham Conservation Employee Award. Nic Dunlop is very well known to many members of this house and to anybody who is connected to the conservation movement in this state. He has done some very noteworthy work.

The first award that was made that night was won by the Cape Conservation Group of Exmouth, a group that many members will know were instrumental in the whole Save Ningaloo campaign. That was the Len Howard Community Group Conservation Award, which had particular significance for me because Len Howard was one of the outstanding environmental activists in the Peel region. When I first started to get involved in Western Australian politics many decades ago, Len Howard was leading the fight to save the Creery wetlands.

I do not think we could put our hands on our hearts and say that we won that fight, but I am absolutely certain that the activities of people such as Len Howard and the members of the Peel Preservation Group, of which Len was the founder, played a major part in having substantial areas of the Creery wetlands protected, and also ensured that environmental consciousness in the Peel region increased exponentially. I wanted to draw the attention of honourable members particularly to those awards and to the recipients, all of whom were most worthy.

That leads me to the second point of significance about that night. The closing address was given by Professor David Harries, who has been serving as president of the Conservation Council of Western Australia for some time. Professor Harries gave a very rousing and interesting presentation to wind up both the awards night and Conservation Week. During his address he made two very important points. While I am not able to quote him, I want to convey to the house the gist of his comments to the gathering at Kings Park last Friday night. The first reference he made related directly to the awards that were being made that night and the sorts of people who win these awards. They are people who give enormous amounts of their time and energy to protect, often, their local environments. Many of the honours list award recipients were working very much in their own localities, but also with people like Maria and Nic—those who are working practically statewide. This, of course, honours the volunteer sector of the conservation movement in Western Australia.

Professor Harries made the point that with the election of the Liberal-National government, the whole conservation sector is taking a major funding hit. For 19 years the Conservation Council has been funded by the government to the tune of about \$80 000 a year. It has also, of course, managed to pick up other sources of funding, but many of those other sources of funding, which have at times funded up to 12 or more positions at the Conservation Council, were attracted by virtue of the fact that the state government was a major contributor to the Conservation Council's operations. As of this year, under the Liberal-National government's policies, that funding will be slashed dramatically. The result is that the Conservation Council of Western Australia will go from having about a dozen people working for it—that is, researchers, people who are experts in their field,

people who know how to pull together the arguments and people who are sophisticated scientists, as well as sophisticated political operators—to a situation in which it will no longer have funding to do that work.

The point was made very eloquently by Professor Harries that much of the work that is carried out by individual volunteers statewide is facilitated by the work that is done by the people who work for the Conservation Council, and other groups and organisations of that kind—people who are able to devote substantial resources to putting together major pieces of research, which is then picked up by governments, organisations and community groups and which ultimately has its on-the-ground impact in volunteer action. Professor Harries made the point—it is one that I will stand in this house and continue to make for as long as I have to—that, in the conservation movement, we cannot transfer the onus of environmental protection onto the shoulders solely of volunteers.

The second point that Professor Harries made was that he was aware of all the documents that were leaking from the industry working group set up by Hon Norman Moore to look at approvals processes in the mining sector. As I said when I addressed the house last week during the Address-in-Reply debate, the industry working group is leaking like a sieve. Why is it leaking like a sieve? It is because people working at the highest levels of industry and government in this state are expressing a very high level of alarm about the direction this government is going in. Professor Harries indicated that he is keeping very close to the operations of the group and to the material that it is making available. He made an offer to the Minister for Environment to assist her and to stand shoulder to shoulder with her to help marshal the arguments that would protect the authority of the Minister for Environment. It was a very significant thing for the president of the Conservation Council of Western Australia to do, and I was very pleased to be there to hear him make that commitment.