

WATER CORPORATION — METROPOLITAN WATER AND DRAINAGE OPERATIONS

666. Ms J.M. FREEMAN to the Minister for Water:

I refer to and congratulate the McGowan Labor government's decision to overturn the Liberal Party's privatisation of Water Corporation's metropolitan water and drainage operations.

Can the minister outline to the house how bringing this work and these jobs back into public hands will save taxpayers money and benefit Western Australians?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

I thank the member for the question. I thank her for her commitment to quality services here in Western Australia.

On Friday, we announced that the operations and maintenance work at the Water Corporation in the metropolitan area is being brought back in-house. To give people a little bit of context, it was 1995 when the Liberal Party's then Minister for Water, Peter Foss, made an announcement that this work was going to be privatised and put out to the private sector. Since then, the staff have gone through numerous tender processes. The work went out for the first time in 1995; they were put through a contracting process in 2002, and again in 2011; and here we are in 2019. After reviewing the operating structures at the Water Corporation, its board has come to the conclusion that, amongst a number of the changes they want to make, this work is core business for the Water Corporation.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cottesloe!

Mr D.J. KELLY: Just so that members understand, when the proverbial hits the fan, these are the people in the metropolitan area who go in and clean it up. These people do incredibly important work at the Water Corporation.

Mr P.A. Katsambanis interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cottesloe, I call you to order for the first time.

Dr D.J. Honey: I didn't say anything!

The SPEAKER: Yes, you did. For the time before, then. Minister for Water.

Mr D.J. KELLY: That work is core business for the Water Corporation. The board also looked at that decision and came to the same view. On Friday, we went out there, met with the staff and told them that over the next nine months, the Water Corporation was transitioning that work back and making those staff directly employed by the Water Corporation. About 250 staff will be affected. I have to say, they were pretty happy about the decision. It is not only about the better pay and conditions that they will receive as direct employees of the Water Corporation, but also about what that decision by the board of the Water Corporation says to them about the value they place on their work. I just give one example: one member of the staff there said to me that he had been employed doing that work for 30 years.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for North West Central!

Mr D.J. KELLY: He was going to retire in a couple of years. He could now retire with dignity as an employee of the Water Corporation. He always felt, as a private contractor, it meant that the Water Corporation never really valued the role that he played. Therefore, it is not just about pay and conditions or job security; it is about the dignity of the work that was done. Those staff are very happy. But I can also say to members of the public that the Water Corporation believes it will deliver a better service. It will allow it to have a direct line of sight between the Water Corporation and its customers —

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for North West Central!

Mr D.J. KELLY: — and it will allow it to better maintain its assets. Rather than having capital expenditure in one bucket and maintenance expenditure in a separate bucket, it will be able to bring the two together so that it can maximise the end-to-end life of its assets. Finally, the Water Corporation believes that it will lead to cost savings.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I can see members on the other side are not interested.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: If members could listen—it was privatised by the then Liberal government in 1995, the same government that closed the Midland Workshops, if members remember. We dealt with that a bit earlier.

Mr V.A. Catania: What about Fisheries up north?

The SPEAKER: Member for North West Central, you have mentioned that three times, and it did not work. I call you to order for the first time.

Mr D.J. KELLY: We want to deliver better services for the people of Western Australia at a lower cost while delivering a better working environment for those people who do the really hard work here in Western Australia.