

GIBSON DESERT NATURE RESERVE — NATIVE TITLE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT

909. Ms J.J. SHAW to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's historic native title settlement agreement with the traditional owners of the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve. Can the minister outline to the house what this agreement means for the Aboriginal people in the Gibson Desert region, including the economic, social and cultural benefits it will deliver for Aboriginal communities in the area?

Mr B.S. WYATT replied:

I thank the member for Swan Hills for that very good question.

In Western Australia, 75 per cent of our state is now covered by native title. We are the native title state, more than any other state in Australia. Indeed, on 28 October I was delighted, with the Minister for Environment, Stephen Dawson, to travel back out to the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve at Mina Mina springs to sign this agreement, which has been three years in the making for this government, but over 20 years in the making for the Gibson Desert people.

Under this agreement, the Gibson Desert has been renamed the Pila Nature Reserve—the traditional Aboriginal name that describes the landscape, being the flat plains of that desert region. For some, this is quite a historic agreement, because we are dealing with people who really came into contact with non-Indigenous Australians only in the 1970s. These people were moved off country when nuclear bombs were being tested in the middle of the desert. They were effectively moved around by the Australian government at the time. However, because of the operation of native title law, the creation of the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve in 1977, without consultation with traditional owners, extinguished native title. We have tried to address this clear inequity for a long time. We have created a jointly managed reserve between the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and the traditional owners.

The reserve covers approximately 18 900 square kilometres in central WA and will be the largest jointly managed reserve in Western Australia. Importantly, it will also cover a range of infrastructure upgrades as well—roads and community infrastructure at Patjarr, primarily. There will be a ranger base there, and rangers will be funded, of course, as part of the agreement.

The traditional owners have fought for a long time for this recognition. The settlement package, because we are also resolving compensation around native title, sets aside \$7.5 million to support these joint-management activities around ranger work, training and work opportunities at Patjarr mainly, but also in Warburton and some surrounding communities. That is significant. All members in this place are probably familiar with the blown glass window in the Aboriginal People's Room. That was done by the people from Pila Nature Reserve. There has been long connection between this Parliament and these traditional owners. Decisions made in the 1970s wiped out the opportunity for native title. Of course, over the last three years, the McGowan government has worked hard to try to resolve this issue. It was an emotional ceremony and an emotional agreement. It is one that I am delighted we have managed to pull together and resolve in the last three years. I want to congratulate the traditional owners of the Pila Nature Reserve.