

## **STORMWATER QUALITY MONITORING**

### *Grievance*

**MR I.M. BRITZA (Morley)** [9.53 am]: My grievance also is to the Minister for Water and concerns the cessation of funding of the officer responsible for the water quality monitoring program of stormwater drainage. Presently in the Perth region, an estimated 359 127 properties are serviced by main drainage. The overall length of the main drainage that is managed is approximately 957 kilometres, with at least 50 per cent of the stormwater flowing directly into the Swan and Canning Rivers. Until only a decade ago, the urban stormwater input was specifically managed for quantity, certainly not for quality. In 2002, it became apparent that there was a significant gap in the urban stormwater management, which neglected monitoring the quality of the stormwater, which eventually discharges into the Perth river systems. As a result, the federal government funded the appointment of an officer to commence the quality water improvement program, known as QWIP, to target three main drainage catchments, with the collaboration of the Water and Rivers Commission prior to its amalgamation with the Department of Water.

Since its inception, the monitoring program has employed a full-time officer, who works in collaboration with the Department of Water to sample, record and compile analysis data to create snapshot reports on the quality of the stormwater that eventually discharges into our rivers. Another of the officer's key roles is to engage with local governments and community environmental groups on issues relating to urban stormwater quality, and to identify pollution hot spots in stormwater that affect the health of urban catchments.

The monitoring program has targeted up to 15 urban catchments with more than 243 past sampling sites. The program is crucial in evaluating the conditions of local catchments and associated tributaries that eventually discharge, again, into the Swan and Canning Rivers, which are increasingly under threat from stormwater pollutants. The monitoring work at one of the urban catchments known as Bennett Brook includes Lightning Swamp bushland, which is in my electorate of Morley. The level of information and collected data has been immensely beneficial to the group of environmental volunteers, known as the Friends of Lightning Swamp, who work tirelessly to preserve and manage these wetlands.

Since 2003 water monitoring at the reserve has shown increasing levels of heavy metals in stormwater discharging into the A-class reserve. In 2010 the former Minister for Environment committed extra funding to the Swan River Trust for industry auditing projects at two industrial areas identified as causing pollution of stormwater. One of these areas is the Malaga industrial estate, a known source of stormwater pollution into Lightning Swamp. Last year, pollution levels in the swamp were so high that residents were warned against letting their dogs play in the toxic water. If it were not for the past sampling and analysis reports generated by the officer, the toxic pollutants in the stormwater would have gone undetected, to the detriment of the swamp. The polluted stormwater that seasonally flows through Lightning Swamp eventually discharges into the Swan River. However, the current federal funding excludes water monitoring, which means the funding of the officer responsible for the QWIP will cease after June 2011. This is of major concern to both the Perth Region Natural Resource Management and environmental groups, such as the Friends of Lightning Swamp, whose president is in the gallery today, who rely on the valuable input from the officer. I understand that the Department of Water was unsuccessfully approached by catchment groups, the Swan River Trust and community representatives to take a lead role in coordinating and implementing stormwater monitoring. The Department of Water has declined to support the officer responsible for QWIP, who is based at the South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare after 2011.

Can the minister please advise whether the quality water improvement program will be supported by the state after June 2011, as an interim solution? If not, what steps will be taken to monitor future stormwater quality in urban catchments? Considering the urgency, because federal funding of the contracted officer is about to cease, will the minister consider and support the forming of a working party comprising stakeholders such as the Department of Water, the Water Corporation, the Swan River Trust, local government, the South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare and community groups, to develop a permanent, workable solution that builds on the quality water improvement program for urban stormwater catchments?

**MR W.R. MARMION (Nedlands — Minister for Water)** [9.58 am]: I thank the member for Morley for raising these important issues about the quality of our water catchments in Western Australia, particularly, the Swan River. The Swan River–Canning catchment is an important water source for us and its care is a high priority for this government. As everyone knows, the Swan River Trust is the agency that looks after the quality of the Swan River. Indeed, water quality improvement plans are paramount within the operation of the Department of Water. There is a water quality improvement plan for the Swan–Canning catchment, the Peel–Harvey catchment and the Busselton–Vasse area. I acknowledge the president of Friends of Lightning Swamp in the public gallery. I think I will have some good news for him at the end of my response.

Water quality improvement plans are so important to the health of rivers. There are eight programs under the state's Healthy Rivers Action Plan. The three main objectives of those eight programs are to: reduce the input of contaminants at the source of the catchments; intercept pollutants as they travel through the tributaries, drains and groundwater; and apply river intervention techniques to improve water quality in the Swan and Canning Rivers. I understand that a lot of community groups, including Friends of Lightning Swamp, play an important part in the second objective in particular, carrying out management techniques that intercept the pollutants and slow them down and planting shrubs to drain the pollutants before they travel into the river.

Water quality improvement plans are a whole-of-government response to specific water quality problems. All three water quality improvement plans I mentioned before received funding for implementation from the state government through the Natural Resource Management program and from the commonwealth's Caring for our Country program for 2010 to 2013. The Department of Water is developing water quality improvement plans for the Leschenault Estuary and Hardy Inlet in partnership with local stakeholders. Additional investigation of water quality improvement plans for the Blackwood River and Hill River catchments are also being undertaken. Water quality improvement plans are developed through extensive consultation with landowners and catchment groups, and they have proved a most effective way of addressing water quality issues in priority catchments. These types of plans have proved very successful in developing water quality objectives and targets to protect identified environmental values in these areas. Through the planning process, the most effective social and economic management actions to achieve these targets are identified and a series of actions are then put in place. One of the major objectives of the water quality improvement plans is to establish a working group, work out actions to improve the situation and monitor those actions; monitoring the quality of the water forms part of that work.

The Swan River Trust, in partnership with the Department of Water, monitors 15 priority catchments. These have been monitored over the past 15 years. For the past six years this monitoring has included an additional 15 catchments, which I think the member for Morley alluded to in his grievance. All 30 catchments of the Swan and Canning Rivers are sampled fortnightly for nutrients. Funding for the South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare, SERCUL, to undertake urban water monitoring in partnership with local government is not a component of the Swan–Canning water quality improvement plan. On the cessation of the commonwealth Caring for our Country funding in June 2011, the Swan River Trust has agreed to fund the SERCUL person. The Swan River Trust and the Department of Water will support the technical guidance, data management and reporting for the next financial year. In other words, the water quality partnership program initiated by the Perth NRM program will continue at the current level next financial year and longer term funding will be sought. Therefore, the current SERCUL employee will maintain her position. I am sure that the funding for the SERCUL employee for 2011–12 will be welcomed by the catchment groups and community representatives.

In addition to the water quality improvement plans, a significant amount of work is being undertaken to improve urban water management for a number of outcomes, including water quality. With funding from the National Heritage Trust and national action plan NRM programs, the Department of Water, the former Water and Rivers Commission, in partnership with Perth region NRM, the former Swan Catchment Council, developed a framework to rationalise water quality monitoring effort on the Swan coastal plain, which was often ad hoc, poorly documented and produced data of unknown quality. We have moved a long way since then. The local groups play an important part in the data we get.

The Department of Water established a collaborative approach providing technical guidance to catchment groups and local governments. The key initiative was to engage local government in managing water quality in drains, an initiative that has been very successful. I visited a drain in the Welshpool area about a month ago which showed what could be done to what was previously a horrible old drain running through Welshpool. The Department of Water and the local catchment groups worked together and deviated the stream path so it had to meander through an area. They planted shrubs. The idea was to strip the nutrients out of the drain as the water flows through, and also there is a sedimentary slot in which sediments can filter down. They will monitor the quality of the water downstream to see how effective this technique is. The local catchment groups are using that technique all along the Swan River. We really value their contribution.

I conclude by saying that the tenure of the female employee for SERCUL is certainly safe for another year. After that we can look at lots of other sources for funding. We certainly value their contribution.