

## NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT GROUPS

### *Motion*

**HON ADELE FARINA (South West)** [11.29 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house recognises the important work being undertaken by natural resource management groups across the state in protecting and rehabilitating our natural resources.

Hopefully, this motion will be a little less controversial than the previous one.

We are very fortunate to live in a state that is recognised internationally for its rich biodiversity and unique and iconic natural features. WA's unique flora and fauna are of a scale and diversity not seen anywhere else on this earth. Our state's unique soils support a diverse, vibrant and critically important farming community that contributes directly to the economic and social fabric of our state. Our magnificent forests, beautiful beaches and gourmet local produce are all significant drawcards for tourists from around the world. Much of the state's wealth comes from its natural resources. Consequently, the state's future long-term prosperity depends on the sustainable use of natural resources and effective management of our natural landscapes.

Although the "Western Australian Natural Resource Management Framework 2018" refers to a collaborative approach from the government, industry and community in delivering the management of WA's natural resources, the truth is that without the amazing work of community groups and the passion, commitment and the many hours that volunteers tirelessly give to working in natural resource management, much of the work that has been achieved would not have been achieved. It is the efforts of these community groups and volunteers who are committed to natural resource management that I want to acknowledge through this motion today.

As members will be aware, there are six natural resource management regions in WA. The south west is one of them and it is divided into five broad areas: Leschenault, Blackwood, Geographe, the Cape to Cape track and Warren. These board areas consist of a number of groups that are all involved in natural resource management at various levels, they include regional NRM bodies; "Friends of ..."; Landcare groups; conservation management networks; environmental groups; local government authorities; catchment councils; coastal management groups; biodiversity groups; and land conservation district committees to name just a few. There are a lot of them. I think all members will agree that one of the great aspects of our job is the opportunity to meet the thousands of people in our communities who are doing incredible work, and many of them are doing it on a volunteer basis. They give up their time and effort to give back to the community, and I am always very impressed by the amount of commitment people in south west actually have to their communities.

Those who work in the area of natural resource management are passionate and dedicated, and are delivering important outcomes for their communities by conserving, rehabilitating and effectively managing our natural resources for the long term. The limited time we have during private members' business means that it will not be possible to cover all of the great work that is being done by the many groups that exist in the south west and across our vast state, so I just want to say, up-front, a big thank you to all of those who are involved in this area and give an apology for not being able to give a special mention to them all.

By supporting community groups to undertake NRM activity, taxpayers are getting much greater outcomes than would otherwise be the case. It has been estimated that for every government dollar committed to NRM, between \$2 and \$7 is leveraged from in-kind resources, volunteer effort, cash and other funding sources. That is an impressive outcome of supporting community groups that undertake NRM activities. I have been really impressed with the level of local knowledge, academic knowledge, expertise and abilities of the people who are involved in natural resource management. As the member for the South West Region, I am pleased to see a growing number of farmers actively involved in natural resource management groups, and the high participation rates of farmers in Landcare and land management workshops run by these groups. Despite the outcomes that are achieved by these groups, and would not be achieved if not for the work of these groups, since I was first elected in 2001, both state and federal governments have decreased funding to support and build community capacity in natural resource management, which is both disappointing and concerning. The former Gallop state cabinet established the state NRM office in 2003, and from 2003 to 2007 a bilateral agreement between the state and federal governments delivered significant funds to natural resource management. In 2007, the bilateral agreement expired and the federal government did not renew it. As a result, there was a massive cut in funding to natural resource management groups.

As I stated earlier, the work that these community groups do is absolutely vital to the protection, rehabilitation and effective management of our natural resources. These community groups are able to activate thousands of volunteers to carry out projects; however, this is not possible if they are not funded to engage the people with the relevant expertise to coordinate and organise the volunteers. The loss of federal government funding and a reduction in state government funding resulted in the South West Catchments Council having to close three of its offices—Dunsborough, Narrogin and Bridgetown—and cut its staff from 30 to 11. Without adequate funding to employ staff

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to coordinate projects and volunteers, the South West Catchments Council says that the benefit of 4 000 volunteers has disappeared. South West Catchments Council also provides support to other NRM groups across the south west region; however, its ability to do so is now significantly reduced. The impact of the cut in funding has been significant and other groups have reported similar impacts to me. It is simply not good enough for the federal government to vacate this space. Funding for natural resource management is as critically important as funding for roads. The magnitude of the need cannot be met by state governments or community groups without the support of the federal government. The federal government needs to reinstate its funding to support natural resource management needs and to ensure that funding is not tied to areas of need that are relevant in the eastern states and not relevant in this state, thereby effectively excluding WA from accessing any of the available NRM funding. That has been a really critical problem that has worsened over the years.

I am pleased to say that the Minister for Agriculture and Food understands the valuable work performed by community groups in natural resource management and the critical role of government in supporting these groups. Despite the current stringent financial circumstances, as the state government works to pay down state debt, the minister has ensured that this government delivers on its commitment to provide funding towards natural resource management. The government has committed \$7.75 million annually in the budget forward estimates towards a state NRM program. This program helps to build capacity in natural resource management by providing annual funding for both small and large grants, which assists a range of groups throughout the state towards delivering the NRM priorities identified in the framework. I hope to have enough time to talk about some of these achievements later.

In 2018, the state government finalised the “Western Australian Natural Resource Management Framework 2018”, and I acknowledge that this work was commenced by the former government. I will provide the minister with some feedback on the framework that has been provided to me by groups across the south west as I have talked with them as I moved through the region. They all welcome the framework; however, many say that it is a little too skeletal in its detail. Groups would like to see a little more meat on this skeletal framework. The framework identifies the need for collaboration and the shared priorities agreed across those groups. However, there is a view that the framework is short on an implementation plan and the tools to achieve the target priorities. Community groups are seeking greater leadership from the state NRM office, stronger partnership with state government and better strategic coordination amongst the various groups. I ask the minister to take these comments on board as feedback, as I know she will, and I ask her to work with the groups towards this end.

I also encourage the minister, as the state’s finances improve, to do what she can, as I am sure she will, to deliver more funding for natural resource management and to encourage the federal government to come back into this space, because without the support of the federal government, we cannot achieve the things that are needed in this area.

I am a bit biased, but I think that the south west is the jewel of the state, but it is also under significant pressure. It is a biodiversity hotspot. The drying climate and human habitation are having an impact on the region. Protecting this biodiversity hotspot is critical to protecting its values and decreasing the risk of global extinction of a number of flora and fauna that is found nowhere else in the world.

We have a number of Ramsar wetlands in the region, including the Vasse–Wonnerup wetlands, and I welcome the state government’s funding commitment of \$1.6 million in the current budget to continue the important monitoring program that has been commenced to improve the quality of those wetlands. I also acknowledge the good work being done by local community groups towards this end.

The possum finishing school, which is a collaborative approach between Fostering and Assistance for Wildlife Needing Aid; the South West Catchments Council; the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; the University of Western Australia; and local veterinarians, is a project that I am particularly fond of and strongly support. About 200 orphaned western ringtail possums, out of an estimated population of 8 000 living in the wild, come into care every year. The western ringtail possum is an endangered species. Improving outcomes for the species when it is returned to the wild and while it is in the wild is critically important if we are to stop it becoming extinct. The project will microchip and register orphaned possums brought into care, better prepare possums for a return to the wild, and conduct vital research on those possums that are returned to the wild to ensure that we can deliver better outcomes for them.

I also want to mention the good work being done by Nature Conservation Margaret River Region. It finalised a very impressive plan for the management of arum lily throughout the area that it covers. The group has managed to attract \$340 000 in state government funding over three years to enable the group and its volunteers to implement the management plan. The group is also doing excellent work in a number of other areas, but time does not permit me to mention those.

I recently met with representatives from the Lower Blackwood Land Conservation District Committee. I was really impressed by the comprehensive range of work that is being undertaken by this group of volunteers, the number of farmers involved in the projects, and the group’s genuine efforts to ensure that farmers are better informed about

the value of land conservation and regenerative agriculture practices. It does excellent work in rehabilitating native vegetation along private waterways on private properties, which is absolutely critical in the area of nutrient stripping, as well as creating important habitat corridors for native fauna. It is engaged in weed control in those areas and is erecting stock exclusion fencing to protect them. The Lower Blackwood Land Conservation District Committee is also working with farmers to better understand their fertiliser needs and prevent excess nutrients from being washed into waterways. It is assisting in a practical way with soil testing and teaching farmers how to do nutrient mapping so that they can make better informed decisions. It has also begun a research project in collaboration with Curtin University. Time will stop me from getting on to it, but it is using Google Earth Pro to map the area and ensure that farmers have easy access to the information they need to make critical decisions, and that will also assist the group to do planning of the areas that they need to target in the future. One of the group's frustrations is that it is very difficult to get information from the government. It is very slow to get information from government computer systems and use it in an interactive way. It is working to create its own bank of information locally. The people involved in the Lower Blackwood Land Conservation District Committee are really impressive. They have a lot of intellectual knowledge and ability. If they are able to secure additional funding, they want to continue to grow the mapping work that they have done.

**HON DR SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [11.44 am]: I think it is very fitting that the first two speakers on this motion are both members for the South West Region. Mr Acting President (Hon Dr Steve Thomas), I saw you, a fellow member for the South West, nodding at a lot of the points that Hon Adele Farina made. I think the importance of these projects is one of the many things about which all six members for the South West would agree.

I noted that Hon Adele Farina commenced her remarks by saying that this motion was likely to be less contentious than the previous one, which was moved by the Leader of the Opposition. I think that is a shame. I wish I could see the kind of passion that members of the Liberal Party in particular showed for the previous motion being shown about natural resource management in this state. Unfortunately, that is not the case. I know that several members on this side of the chamber are keen to get to their feet to talk about some of the work going on in their local areas and I am very pleased to add my comments.

I counted seven natural resource management regions in the state. Hon Adele Farina said there were six, but I make it seven statewide. They include Avon, Swan, Peel–Harvey catchment, south west, south coast, northern agricultural, and rangelands. The three that I want to talk about are those that cover the South West Region. I will start with the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council. What a job that catchment council has done both in directly addressing some of the problems of the Peel–Harvey region and in ensuring that the many small environmental groups that work under its umbrella have the resources they need to carry out their work. I have made the point many times in this place during debate on community involvement in caring for our environment that these groups, probably more than any other community groups in existence today, need continuity of funding. They need the certainty of knowing that there is money in the pipeline for them. If they go for a year without funding, their local support falls away. Sometimes it might just be because nobody has had the time to put in funding applications. All these things take time and need to be done properly. It is a very fortunate community group that has someone with experience in submission writing. These groups cannot leave things undone for a couple of years and then regroup when some more money comes through. In that respect, above all others, I want to pay tribute to Hon Alannah MacTiernan as Minister for Regional Development, who well recognises that fact, experienced as she is in dealing with grassroots community groups throughout the state. It is through her good officers and the good work she has done since coming to office that we have been able to restore some certainty to community environment groups throughout the south west and, I understand, throughout the state.

The Peel–Harvey Catchment Council, under the leadership of CEO Jane O'Malley, who does a fantastic job, and its chair, Councillor Caroline Knight, has some challenges on its plate. I really respect the work they are doing to help focus the opposition to, for example, the Point Grey development. They have worked very closely with me and the local member, David Templeman, in helping the community to express its opposition to that project, and we will continue to do it. The work of Jane and Caroline and the rest of the council has been absolutely central in helping us to focus those arguments. I should also pay tribute to some of the environmental warriors in the Peel–Harvey region who are still actively involved on the board of the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council. They include people such as Paddi Creevey, Jan Star, and Sue Fyfe from Dwellingup. The wealth of experience that those three people alone bring to resource management in the area is absolutely breathtaking.

One of the things I have really enjoyed watching in the work of the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council is the way in which it engages multiple stakeholders on these projects. We have so much energy for environmental matters in the community, but it is a real challenge to harness that energy and focus it on worthwhile projects. If members flick through the website of the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council and pick a selection of its ongoing projects, they will see that it always engages multiple stakeholders from industry, Indigenous groups, local government, state government agencies and departments, and landholders. Often landholders are the major beneficiaries of

environmental projects that both restore the ecology of a local area and remove threats. We have multiple small local environmental groups, as Hon Adele Farina referred to when she talked about the South West Catchments Council. The Peel–Harvey Catchment Council works with groups like the Harvey River Restoration Taskforce and, of course, it works extensively with schools in the region. An important part of a child’s education experience is to do some of that hands-on work to help their local environment thrive and prosper. Hon Adele Farina well and truly paid tribute to the South West Catchments Council, and I join her in applauding its efforts. The SWCC was for many years under the leadership of Damien Postma, who has now moved on, and is now led by Steve Ewings.

Being a biodiversity hotspot is not something to be proud of, as you would well know, Mr Acting President (Hon Dr Steve Thomas). This designation is given to an area because of the number of threats to biodiversity in the region. If a region is a biodiversity hotspot, it is an area that is at risk of modern environmental trends. Nowhere is that more true than the south west, with its threatened species, fauna at risk, coastal erosion and coastal pollution. The SWCC has done some great work cleaning up beaches, particularly that blue tape that goes around packing cases, which was a major threat to wildlife in the area. There has been a remarkable reduction in that pollution since the SWCC commenced its efforts. Of course, the south west has had huge population growth as well, with the population growing by 37 per cent between 2001 and 2016. That, apart from anything else, puts pressure on the local environment.

I finally want to mention South Coast Natural Resource Management, which covers a huge area that includes all the south-flowing rivers from Walpole to right out past Cape Arid, which is about halfway between Esperance and the South Australian border. It is a huge area. It has two offices—one in Albany and one in Esperance. In my hometown of Denmark, we have the Denmark Environment Centre. I spent a fascinating half-day recently with the Denmark Weed Action Group. I am sure that my colleague Hon Diane Evers is familiar with its work. Members of the group took me to some of their site work. I have to say that after spending some hours with them, I actually started to see through new eyes, because a lot of their work is about removing invasive species. A couple of days after going out with them, I was doing fuel reduction on my own block when I came to a large patch of invading agapanthus from next door. I pulled out the leaflet that the weed action group had given me and looked it up and thought, “Right; they’re going!”, so the agapanthus landed on my compost heap. I learnt a lot during that couple of hours. They do fantastic work. Of course, these groups work together. In a sense, they are the stepping stones in a community, because they enjoy their work, they impart their passion for their work, and local landowners learn to appreciate what they are doing because of the improvements they see in the local environment.

Like Hon Adele Farina, I am going to run out of time to talk about the work that has been done just in the Albany region with the project called “Looking forward, looking back: planning and action for the Oyster Harbour”. Several hundred thousand dollars has been allocated by the NRM program to that project. Of course, one of the big projects down there is the implementation of the state dieback management investment framework, which is a little over \$400 000, with a total project cost of \$1 million. One can drive down any of the major highways in the great southern and see the devastation that dieback has caused, or walk through some of the walk tracks to find dieback stations at which people brush down their shoes. That all takes money to do. It is all vital work in making sure that we retain the integrity of that region.

Going back to this idea that we are supposed to be restoring the ecology and removing threats, nobody does it better than our local NRM groups.

**HON DIANE EVERS (South West)** [11.54 am]: I know that I could probably speak on this motion all day, but I have only 10 minutes. The first thing I will say is that I wholly support all the things that the two previous speakers have said. My thanks go out to every one of those people who volunteer an hour, a day, a week or sometimes 20 years of their lives. It is very important that we have got those people.

The first thing I would like to say is that climate change is only making this worse. People on the ground are seeing the effects of it and know we need to do something about the burning of fossil fuels, which is leading to a rising level of carbon dioxide that is causing devastation in many parts of the world. We have to find a way to fix this landscape. That means we are going to have to invest considerable amounts of funding through every level of government, because this problem will not just go away. We are moving towards a greater number of extinctions of different creatures, which could lead to the collapse of whole ecosystems—if one creature goes, other ones that depend on it will go, and so on and so forth down the line. Devastation can happen from this. If we do not support these groups and our own departments as much as possible, we are not going to have any effect on this whatsoever. We have to get to work now.

I appreciate that the original custodians of this land, the Noongar people, looked after the land for the past 60 000 to 100 000 years—they managed it, it worked and they survived—whereas since European settlement 200 years ago, we have been destroying it. We have to do a lot of work across the landscape very quickly. As

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noted in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, we have to look for answers through the storage of carbon in the soil and in the forests. We have to increase that carbon storage on the planet immediately.

I will go back to these community groups. The volunteers who put in much of their own time are trying to manage the land. They are revegetating where they can. They are taking out invasive species so that native species can continue to thrive, grow and look after the landscape, as we need them to. However, there has been a change over the past one or two decades in that there has been cost shifting from the state government to anywhere else it can find. The federal government has done it as well. At some level, these obligations and responsibilities have to be met. Federal funding came and went when Telstra was sold. There was a big pool of money and a lot of stuff happened and a lot of management plans were made, but then what? That funding stopped. The state has continued to try—it has put in \$6.5 million a year, but \$6.5 million is next to nothing. That amount would barely even cover the cost of the people we need on the ground to apply for funding, so that we can leverage that \$6.5 million to get other funding. In each of the groups that were so aptly named by the previous speakers, people are scrounging around and trying to get enough money just so they can pay themselves a reasonable amount, so that they can put time into filling in the applications and meeting all the criteria. These applications are then put into an underfunded project fund that may get 200 or 300 applications for funding that can be divvied out to only about 20. There is so much wasted time and effort on all our parts, because those people could actually be running workshops instead.

We need to find a way to fund these organisations—I do not know the exact answer of how to do it, but it is something we have to look at—so that rather than people putting their efforts into applying for a little bit of funding to pay their wage, they can put effort into actually doing the on-the-ground work and running workshops. Those workshops really should be run by the state government, as happened in the past. I know we have a few workshops out of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and I understand that things are changing there and getting better, but it is a slow process and we need to work faster. In the meantime, while DPIRD is getting its act together and working out what it will do about regenerative agriculture, a lot of community groups are running these programs on their own. They are inviting farmers to the workshops and getting people to talk, so that they can see what their neighbours are doing and find out what they can do themselves, so that we can improve the landscape and absorb that carbon back into the soil.

I spoke about this cost shifting. The federal government is shirking any responsibility, and I applaud any opportunity that the minister may find herself in to strengthen our request that it needs to put more money into the environment. It needs to stop burning coal—it needs to do so many things—but in the meantime, it could put some money into the environment to somehow try to counter the effects of all that pollution we are putting into the air on a regular basis. We need to petition the federal government to give us more funding, and not tie it to weeds of national significance. It is excellent that we can target blackberry, but down south that is about the only weed that is on the weeds of national significance list. In the meantime, we have weeds from the eastern states that are not of national significance, because they naturally occur in the eastern states. Let us take one example. *Acacia longifolia*, Sydney golden wattle, is creeping further and further north from the south west. We conducted a study on it in the Albany region 10 or so years ago, and its prevalence was found to be increasing by 15 per cent a year. At the time of the study, it was on about 3 000 hectares. In the next update I heard, it was up to 6 000 hectares. Sydney golden wattle is a woody weed; it is a tree. In its natural habitat it may grow to only three or four metres. Here, it grows up to six to eight metres high and six metres across. It adapts to our landscape and if it is not controlled, it will slowly take over more and more land. It is interesting to note that these trees were introduced into the south west as fodder for sheep. In the 1960s people were getting trailer loads of them off the trains—when we had trains that delivered things—and planting them widely in their paddocks.

**Hon Robin Scott:** Do they absorb CO<sub>2</sub>? Do they?

**Hon DIANE EVERS:** Okay, I will take that comment. Do they absorb CO<sub>2</sub>? Yes, they are a tree, they absorb CO<sub>2</sub>. Why do we not just cover the planet in Sydney golden wattle? Would that make sense? Would that provide anything for the rest of the biodiversity on the planet? We have to be reasonable. Yes, I understand what the member is saying, that any tree is a good tree. But, unfortunately, that is not the case. Not all trees provide what our ecosystem needs. Not all trees provide what we need for biodiversity in our landscape.

As I said, the state is working on it. I understand that the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is gearing up and getting better after the dearth of funding that it had for the past decade. We really need to see that funding increase. I want to see that supported so that we can encourage our farmers to take up practices that are beneficial to the landscape. We have to get away from industrial agriculture and move to agriculture that is sustainable for the ongoing feeding of people on this planet, but is not based on industrial methods of just pouring in more chemicals that leave us with a bit of dirt and a lot of chemicals producing food that is low in nutrients because we do not have the right biology in the soil. We have to fix that. In the regions, natural resource management organisations are looking at how we can improve the soil and the landscape. That means taking out the things that do not belong there and putting in the things that do. Individuals out there are doing it off their own bat. They receive

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some help from local government, and I applaud what local government does in this sphere, but, unfortunately, there are people around who still ask, “Why is local government involved in the environment? They are supposed to do roads and rubbish.” That is rubbish. Local government is supposed to be doing all the things that the state and federal governments are not providing for and which we cannot expect individuals to do for one reason or another. We work better as a group. We need to share resources and work together to make things better.

As I spoke about yesterday, we cannot rely on business to do this either because business needs to act in its own best interest; it needs to keep its own sustainability going, so business will not always do the right thing. I should say that some of the timber plantation companies are doing the right thing. They want to have forest stewardship certification, so they remove weeds from the plantations because if they are not removed, not only do their trees not do so well, but also the weeds spread downstream into other people’s properties and create other problems there. The difficulty with not addressing environmental issues on our own landscape is that they flow onto other people’s landscapes, grow and spread, so that more and more resources and people are needed to address it.

I applaud any opportunity to provide more funding for these NRM groups across the state that want to put back into this country, this landscape, the things that we need to make it a healthier place so that we can continue to feed people and have a good economy. We must look after that biodiversity, we must look after the plants and animals—the flora and fauna—the microbiology and everything, otherwise we will not be here any longer.

**HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West)** [12.04 pm]: I thank Hon Adele Farina for the motion—with a bit more sincerity this time than last time—on national resource management. It is an issue that I have been quite passionate about for a very long time.

I want to throw a little history in here so that members understand that the opposition is very supportive of the natural resource management process. We have an NRM process ultimately because John Howard sold Telstra. In order to get that through the Senate, the Prime Minister at the time, John Howard, had to do a deal with the Australian Democrats to put a significant amount of money into a fund for the environment. I do not think it did the Democrats’ leadership at that point a lot of good in the long term, but it ended up with a significant amount of money—we are talking billions of dollars, not millions—being invested in natural resource management. Starting from the sale point of 2001 onwards, a massive amount of money was available for natural resource management. Of course, the federal government at the time divided up all the states and regions, and, as Hon Adele Farina said, the south west currently has six NRM groups; it started with five. As far as I am aware, Peel is the only region in all the 150-odd regions that was allowed to break off and form its own group. I think that was part of a 2007 election commitment, which I thought was quite interesting. The reason it exists and that so much money is involved at a federal level is the sale of Telstra. That is probably a reasonable outcome. But it has a bit of a chequered past. The money that was provided, as members have said, is not at the same level anymore. All those groups have to be far more efficient.

After the federal system was set up, the state also decided to contribute. It has been raised in this chamber before that the state is generally paying between \$7 million and \$8 million a year for the NRM process, but there was a particularly successful year, in 2009. It has been brought up with the Minister for Agriculture and Food: why do we not continue to put \$30 million into that project as we did in 2009? The minister wondered how on earth it came to be a \$30 million project that year. The answer to that question is, “You’re welcome!” In 2009, under the then Liberal–National government, the Minister for Agriculture and Food, the lead minister for natural resource management, was Hon Terry Redman; Hon Donna Faragher was the Minister for Environment; and I was the principal policy adviser to Terry Redman, the Minister for Agriculture and Food. We went into bat for a significant budget. First, we reviewed the NRM with a small budget of, I think, \$100 000. We had Gary English from the Albany region review it, because there were already question marks about the efficiency of the program. We decided to reorientate it to make sure that it was delivering better outcomes and to bring the feds in a little more closely, and really focus the state effort. I was there for the fights with Treasury and the Economic and Expenditure Reform Committee, both bodies that are generally determined to not spend money or to make sure that it has maximum effect; the environment has not always done horribly well out of that process. In 2009—give Terry Redman, the then minister, his due—we went into bat in that process for a significant budget for investment in the environment. That is when those fights, those arguments, rode over the top of Treasury and why under that government in that year there was a \$30 million budget for natural resource management. It invested in some very good and interesting programs.

Hon Ken Baston occasionally raises with me the time when he was Minister for Fisheries and he had to reduce the herring catch. The 2009 natural resource management budget had been used to invest in significant research into inshore fish stocks. It was a significant piece of work by the then Department of Fisheries, under I think Hon Norman Moore as Minister for Fisheries and funded under the NRM budget. I make the point at the start of this process that there are patches of members in the Liberal Party who have a very good track record in the NRM arena. Certainly, the opposition is a great supporter, and I personally am a big supporter, of the NRM process.

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It has not always worked well and there are always things that we can do better in that process. In about 2013–14, much of the NRM budget was converted into other programs. It was problematic that funding—I am particularly talking about the federal level—was effectively pulled out of the NRM process distributed to the NRM regions and it put into other programs. The Green Army concept, which was theoretically modelled on the Green Corps of 20 to 30 years earlier, in my view, was not a particularly successful program; it just happened to have a lot of political backing at the time. The federal NRM budget was pulled out of the NRM regions, put into Green Army projects and then ultimately into tree planting projects in some areas, and it did not have the same sort of success. The Green Army did not have the same very good processes that had been put in place by the previous state Liberal–National government and the focus of the program did not continue at the level I would have liked. I will give members one particular example. I looked at a Green Army project based in the Collie hills to revegetate a particular area that was supposedly being developed for mainland quokka. At the time, we went to the federal and state departments of environment to ask how many mainland quokkas were actually in the area. We asked about the results of this significant investment in a Green Army project and we asked each department of environment what it had to say about the project. We got back a report that said that the previous owners—who had inherited the property, currently lived in Sydney and visited the location on rare occasions—had done some weed management in the process. They had sprayed some Roundup around the place, killed off a number of plants and effectively got rid of the quokka population at the same time. I struggle to think how putting in a Green Army project to try to revegetate that land when the quokkas had already gone was not considered questionable. It raised some eyebrows about whether that was a good project and good value for money.

NRM projects delivered local people on the ground pushing local projects. As I said, the NRM program was not always the most efficient version, but it harnessed a massive number of volunteers to look after their own environments—the friends of every park and every river. A huge number of people were galvanised into action by having funds available to do work to deliver outcomes under the NRM banner. The NRM groups still exist, but the federal funding has shrunk. The state funding, from the glory days of \$30 million in 2009—again something those of us who were involved in the process are pretty proud of—has shrunk, too. State funding has shrunk to \$6 million, \$7 million or \$8 million a year. The federal money has been shifted into other programs. We do not have another Telstra to sell to give the NRM program an enormous boost, so it is a much tighter marketplace at the moment. It is difficult to put money into programs to leverage off that. The people who are still in the system do an absolutely magnificent job and they should be encouraged and promoted at every opportunity.

I am proud of the previous government's history in the NRM area. In 2009, we took some major steps to deliver some real environmental outcomes. Although the money is no longer there and we have to get tougher and more strategic on where we deliver projects, we need to support local communities as much as we possibly can to deliver the outcomes that they have been delivering really effectively since about 2002, when the program really started to kick-off. The first couple of years were more about administration, and I can tell members we spent a lot of money on administration in the NRM system in those early years. A lot of money went into setting up all those administrative bodies, but once they got going with activities, they did some great work, and they need to be supported as much as we can to continue that work.

**HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development)** [12.14 pm]: I thank Hon Adele Farina for raising this critical issue and all the members who have spoken on this motion. The fact that we have had contributions from across the Parliament indicates the importance a succession of governments have placed on funding natural resource management projects. Our election commitment was very clear that we wanted to give some stability in the out years and would be contributing \$7.75 million a year across the forward estimates. As the forward estimates have moved forward, we have kept that allocation, unlike the situation in which there was money in the budget—in some years an absolute bonanza—but there was no certainty into the out years that there would be money. We have sought to deal with that by having some stability in the system.

Extraordinary work is unleashed through engaging volunteers. I think the most effective programs that I have seen have been from very small grants, such as \$3 000 to the group working on the South Perth and Bicton foreshores. There is no professional administration involved and all the money goes directly to purchasing seeds and putting in place infrastructure. Interestingly, when we visit these groups—I am sure all the members here have gone out and seen these groups—we see that there is not only clearly massive environmental benefit, but also extraordinary social benefit. These groups are very strong social networks for the participants. This happens equally in the city, whether it is South Perth, Lesmurdie, Bicton, Cottesloe or Karrinyup. We just see people's sense of engagement that goes beyond the key environmental task. If we are talking about building resilience in the community, this is perhaps another added benefit that is not often assessed.

We have a problem with federal funding. Hon Adele Farina and other members set out that we have had a 40 per cent cut in federal funding as it walked away from the bilateral agreement and more recently a 20 per cent cut in funding for the NRM groups. The core funding is no longer available and these moneys are now the subject

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of competitive processes. There is no easy answer to this issue because sometimes—I think Hon Dr Steve Thomas might have been referring to this—we do get very big bureaucracies building up and the amount of money that goes into sustaining the bureaucracy actually transcends the product. That is why very small grants to totally volunteer groups might seem to give better value for money. We always have to be very conscious about getting the balance right between providing core capability to coordinate this work without engendering massive bureaucracies across the state, because when we have people applying for funding, we need to keep some of the bureaucracy alive. Some of the grant applications that were received this year did not necessarily seem to be about making a change in the landscape but, rather, sustaining an organisation that does not otherwise have a path forward.

These are challenges for us. Some of the work that has been done is fantastic. I was talking to the Minister for Environment. Like me, he is a great supporter of the work being done in the great southern by the Gilbert's Potoroo Action Group to bring the Gilbert's potoroo back from the brink of extinction. Work is going on in the savannah lands of the north, with Aboriginal communities working on savannah burning, fundamentally underpinning one of the carbon farming techniques. Last year, we gave a grant to a group that I found particularly engaging—the Gillamii Centre, a very progressive farmer-grower group that has been doing work on saltland restoration, working closely with the CSIRO on the performance of animals on saltbush. This is an extraordinary story. The federal and state governments did all this work on salinity and developed a great app called Saltland Genie, which is an amazing tool for farmers to use to learn how to deal with their saltland. Around 2012, someone in government forgot to maintain the site and it was captured by a domain pirate. Part of the work done involved getting all the material back.

We recognise that there are struggles. I note that Hon Adele Farina thought that the structure of the framework was quite skeletal. I am not sure that I quite accept that. We have sought to enlarge it. We very much wanted the regenerative agricultural themes to be brought in. As Hon Diane Evers said, much of the land that we need to restore and invigorate is farming land, and regenerative farming practices will obviously be a critical way of doing that. We do not suggest that we necessarily have the optimum way of administering this. The department is interested in conducting a review of the strategic framework but we do not want to expend too much money on that. We will certainly do that. I agree that there needs to be far more coordination across the groups. I am very disappointed. I have tried on a couple of occasions to get the natural resource management groups to work more closely together. When I look at the current round that we are assessing, I find, for example, that there are many feral pig programs. I am not confident that there is shared knowledge and people are not going off in their own direction in relation to feral pigs, and likewise with regeneration. We need a very coordinated response to the biggest test of all—feral cats. We need to be doing more to bring these organisations together and share that knowledge. We do not want to say that everyone has to do the same thing but we do not want to keep reinventing the wheel and having all these programs when people are not learning from each other. The department thinks that there will be a greater role for us to play if we share the learnings from these projects and enable people to go forward with programs that are proven to have worked.

We believe that the federal government has to come back into this field. Although I recognise the concern that it may have against bureaucracy, nevertheless, it cannot keep reducing the amount of money that is available to these groups without basically cutting the core capabilities. Our deep concern is that although we will still have lots of small volunteer groups, we will not have those bigger agencies.

**HON MARTIN PRITCHARD (North Metropolitan)** [12.24 pm]: There is only a short amount of time left for this motion. A lot of the points that I was going to make were made by previous speakers. I wanted to add my voice to this motion. It seems to me that state governments of all persuasions have recognised that a small amount of money in this area gets a big bang for its buck. I want to talk about a couple of programs in the northern suburbs that I know a bit about. I do not disagree with previous speakers that the south west is the jewel in the crown but this sort of work needs to be done throughout the metropolitan area and, indeed, throughout the regions of Western Australia.

I notice that the member for Wanneroo, Sabine Winton, was in the gallery earlier. I want to recognise some of the work that she has done relating to Yellagonga Regional Park. She is a fairly passionate supporter of that area. I note that this year Greening Australia sought a grant, which was successful. With a grant of some \$22 000 from the state government, because of the support of the City of Joondalup, Greening Australia and all the volunteers, work will be done at Yellagonga worth some \$66 000. That is the point I was trying to make when I spoke about getting bang for our buck. The state government supports the other partners and supporters and particularly the volunteers, which makes the project much bigger than it would otherwise be.

The other study in the northern suburbs that I have been aware of is the invasion of the annual South African one-leaf cape tulip, a declared pest in Western Australia, which has invaded the coastal heath region of the Bush Forever area in Iluka. For the past six years, Friends of North Ocean Reef–Iluka Foreshore conducted a program of control and removal of the cape tulip and other weeds, including gladiolus. This project will continue the weeding efforts of over 8.6 hectares using various physical and chemical methods. Volunteers will map the distribution and density of the cape tulip using GPS. That map will then provide some basis for further work to be



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done in the future. The state government gave just over \$14 000. Again, with the support of the City of Joondalup and Friends of North Ocean Reef–Iluka Foreshore, that work is estimated to be worth some \$25 000. That seed money assists the work, which certainly could not be done without all the volunteers. This program taps into the volunteers within our community.

I note that I have only a very short time left so I wanted to bring to members' attention the WA State NRM and Coastal Conference, which has been held for many years. It is occurring again this year and will be held at Edith Cowan University in the northern suburbs. I note that Ministers Dawson and MacTiernan will be speaking at that conference, along with the Mayor of Joondalup, Albert Jacob. One of the issues that will be discussed is integrated training and biodiversity conservation using multi-partner collaboration to protect and restore unique ecosystems. There are many others that I will obviously not get an opportunity to talk about, but that is something to be supported.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.