

**STATE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND COASTAL CONFERENCE**

*Statement*

**HON DIANE EVERS (South West)** [10.01 pm]: I want to speak tonight about a conference I attended about two weeks ago during the break. It was the 2019 State Natural Resource Management and Coastal Conference, which I really enjoyed. I was there with a lot of very good people who are very interested in what they are doing.

It is interesting; I have been to these conferences before and have heard how to treat weeds, replant seagrass, revegetate and control feral animals. However, this conference felt a bit different. Maybe that was due to the options I chose in the breakout sessions, but I found that it was much more human focused. It was much more about engaging people and the volunteers who have become critical in looking after our environment. One session was even on legal rights and how our legal system has been based on human rights and at one point we added in corporate rights. However, we have never looked at the rights of the environment, the planet, for future generations. It is interesting because so much of what we do is very much focused on the human activity on our planet without any regard for the fact that we may be destroying it. It was something I found very interesting.

Another part of the sessions focused on health issues. When we think of our environment, we usually think about the health of biodiversity, the planet and the environment, but not the health of people so often. One area we looked at was prescribed burns and how many lives we save due to prescribed burns over a large area, but we do not look at how many people may be presenting to the hospital with smoke inhalation issues. This is something that people are doing research on but because these people most often do not die from it and it cannot be clearly specified that it has come from the prescribed burns, it is very difficult to count those affected. We should not continue to look only at prescribed burns just from the fires we stop but also the other damage we may be causing people.

The other side I really got out of it was the cultural aspect. I have never felt so warmly welcomed, not just at the initial welcome to country but also in each session I felt a sense of trust and of connection—of community. It felt really good. It seemed that at this conference, more so than anywhere else, skin colour did not matter. There were people of all backgrounds there and the Indigenous people from Australia were part of the whole group.

It was a place where we were really working together. It feels good. I enjoyed the experience of it.

The thing that really made an impression on me was the Noongar language. I have to acknowledge that Hon Stephen Dawson opened his address in Noongar, and it was greatly appreciated. It is really nice. The Aboriginal people I spoke to are really pleased to see Noongar words being used in the presentations. It is interesting that Professor Peter Klinken, who was also at the conference, not only opened his address in Noongar but also throughout his address added in more and more sentences and used Noongar words where they were appropriate. What is really nice is that I came out of there with a few words that I thought are very important, because they mean so much more than our own English words. I should not fail to address also that in most of the sessions, there was an acknowledgment of country and an acknowledgement of the elders. That was in almost every session. It was just part of it, and it felt really good.

One of the words that came out was koort, which means heart. So often, koort was spoken of. That is because it is not just heart. It is not just the physical thing. It is not just a love or whatever. It is more than that. It is part of the connection to the country, to the boodja. The boodjari is a pregnant woman. It is mother earth. Boodja is one of those really gripping words that make you feel a part of it. It makes you feel really connected with your heart, with your koort. The other word is kart, or head. We have to think with our head. Kaartdijin means knowledge. It encourages the knowledge, the things we share, and our understanding of them. Another word is wirrin, or spirits. I like to think of koort, kart and wirrin as sort of the Noongar triple bottom line. We have gone down that way of the social, environmental and economic. Koort, kart and wirrin make us think about it, see how we feel about it, and then experience how it connects to the ongoing world, not just now but in our future as well.

It is interesting. There are simple things we can do. They are as simple as saying “kaya” as a hello, as a greeting. It is part of their language and it could be part of ours. Another word is wanjju, or welcome. That is a simple word, but, when we use it, we get that connection. I feel that connection. I think it can help us feel more connected to the original humans who came to Australia, the original Australians, if we can accept it as Australia back then, even though they did not name it then. I feel more connected to our First Nation people, and I feel closer to the land that we all live on, and the people who were here before us, the Europeans who came, and the people who are still coming.

When I speak those words now, I speak them with pride, knowing that I have the trust of the people who have given these words to me. I speak them with love, and I speak them with the spirit of connection. We know that people need connection, to each other, but also to the environment, to our landscape. I have just checked. Sunday is coming up. It will be a beautiful day, 29 degrees, no rain. I suggest that members get out there. It has been a really tough week in here. I think we have all experienced a lot of emotions this week that we might not normally feel. Get out into the sunshine, to the beach, to the forest, or maybe go to one of the national parks, and just feel

that connection to the planet. I think that would make us all heal a little bit from the stresses that we have had over this week and that we expect to have next week. Thank you.

*House adjourned at 10.08 pm*

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