

NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST PHASE 3

713. Hon MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

Can the minister please advise the house of the state government's position on the federal government's announcement of a Natural Heritage Trust phase 3?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

Mr President -

Hon Norman Moore: Do you have an answer?

Hon KIM CHANCE: I do have an answer, as a matter of fact.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Will it be done on Leach Highway on 1 October; yes, or no?

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Oh, you are grumpy.

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

The PRESIDENT: The Leader of the House is capable of making himself heard above the noise that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is generating, but he should not have to raise his voice.

Hon KIM CHANCE: I would not think of doing that, Mr President, as you well know.

Hon Simon O'Brien: If this is a ministerial statement, I think I will go out.

The PRESIDENT: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has not heard the minister start his answer yet.

Hon Simon O'Brien: It is a ministerial statement.

The PRESIDENT: The member does not know that. Frankly, the number of questions asked by government members during the lifetime of this Parliament has been very few, and very few indeed compared with previous Parliaments as the member well knows. I trust that it is not a ministerial statement.

Hon KIM CHANCE: Would I deny your trust, Mr President?

I thank Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm not only for giving notice of this question, but also for the very keen interest that he has taken in community-based natural resource management.

Honourable members would be aware that in May 2007 the commonwealth government announced its intention to provide a third phase to the Natural Heritage Trust, extending arrangements from June 2008 to 2013. In that announcement the commonwealth indicated that it would roll the Natural Heritage Trust and the national action plan for salinity and water quality programs into one and has invited the states to contribute to the program as is done currently. Together that amounts to some \$2 billion contribution from the commonwealth over those five years.

On Monday this week the state government formally announced that it will commit to the new phase of the Natural Heritage Trust and funding has been set aside for this process. Members will recall that in 2003 the state government decided to add to the already significant recurrent expenditure on natural resource management by committing up to \$158 million to match commonwealth funds available under the national action plan. This week's decision will see a similar level of augmented funding remain on the table to leverage the commonwealth funds. Pivotal in our arrangements for natural resource management is the tripartite model whereby the state and the commonwealth, in conjunction with community-based natural resource management groups, of which there are six in Western Australia, work very closely together and, I might add, in a very cooperative way. This is one of the areas in which commonwealth-state partnerships have been seen to be very effective. I expect that the current arrangements will be further improved to refine the capacity of the regional groups to deliver on-the-ground public investment but - this is a very important "but" and the reason Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm would have asked this question - I do not expect to see a need for any fundamental change to the regional group model that empowers local communities. The state government's decision will enable us to formally complete negotiations with the commonwealth. I am hopeful that that can be done, at least at the umbrella level, prior to the commencement of the caretaker period for the federal election. That is our objective and one that I believe is supported by the commonwealth government.