

YAMATJI INDIGENOUS LAND USE AGREEMENT

47. Ms J. FARRER to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs:

I refer to the historic Indigenous land use agreement that this government signed with the Yamatji native title community last week.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house what this agreement means for the Yamatji people?
- (2) What economic and social benefits will this agreement deliver to that community?

Mr B.S. WYATT replied:

- (1)–(2) Those in the house yesterday may have heard my brief ministerial statement about what I think will be the most innovative and significant native title outcome in Australia. It is not as large a scale as the Noongar native title, but certainly it is an extremely innovative outcome for a very complicated native title. For those who have been following it, and I know that the Deputy Premier was very keen to see this outcome, of the five claims that were settled as part of the agreement, some have been in the Federal Court of Australia since 1998—a long time. A lot of people have passed away on that journey but this is without doubt a very significant agreement. The recognition of the non-exclusive native title rights over a number of culturally significant land parcels includes, of course, the right to live and camp on the land and to visit and maintain sites of significance, and to hunt, fish, take resources, conduct ceremonies and invite others onto that land. There were two components. The court judgement recognised the native title and the Yamatji Nation Indigenous Land Use Agreement has been some two years in negotiation. It is worth over \$440 million and includes \$325 million in cash, the transfer of commercial land, tourism opportunities, access to housing properties for sale, leasing or development, and a strategic Aboriginal water reserve for use, lease or trade. Importantly, we are providing a business development unit to help the Yamatji people and corporations establish or develop their own businesses. The key to this process will be in the implementation. The government partnership committee will be co-chaired by a director or the CEO of the prescribed body corporate and the deputy director general of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. This is very important to ensure that the benefits are rolled out over time.

This process started in August 2017 with our initial offer from the state. I appeared with the state negotiating team a couple of times before the Federal Court to ensure that this progressed in a timely manner. I want to acknowledge the traditional owner negotiating team comprising 12 members of the Yamatji leadership who were incredibly sophisticated and determined to ensure that they negotiated with the state a very good outcome, and that has certainly been the case. I want to acknowledge as well on the state side two people: Debbie Fletcher, who led the state negotiating team and came up with what I think is an outstanding outcome; and Kate Alderton, the head of the Aboriginal policy coordination unit in government. By way of an aside, the old Department of Aboriginal Affairs has been replaced and I think the member for Dawesville is officially the one person in Western Australia who wants that back, going by his question in question time today.

I want to make one final comment around native title. As we enter the phase now that sees the rise of prescribed body corporates and, in due course, the end of representative bodies, as is appropriate, it has been a very productive time in native title. Over three years of McGowan governance, we have resolved 47 native title claims, 41 of which were by consent. These determinations cover 551 000 square kilometres. I do not make this by way of a critical comment, but it will give members some context. In three years, we have resolved 47 native title claims. In eight and a half years under the former government—I am not saying it was bad—there were 41 claims. We have really lifted the effort around consent determinations ensuring that native title is resolved. We are now in the scenario in which we know that there is a compensation liability on state governments, the exact nature of which is still subject to, I suspect, a few more High Court decisions. This, for the Yamatji people, will be incredibly significant. For the people of Geraldton in their entirety in the midwest—make no mistake—this is an economic stimulus package. This means that the Yamatji people are right in the guts of economic decisions in the midwest and every single person who lives there will benefit from this outcome