

URANIUM MINING — PUBLIC INQUIRY

972. Hon SALLY TALBOT to the Minister for Environment:

I refer the minister to her recent media statement titled “Public comment extended on mine proposal”, of which I have a copy if the minister wishes to see it. I refer specifically to the minister’s reference to “a public inquiry under the act”.

- (1) What are the provisions for a public inquiry under the act?
- (2) In what situation would the minister consider setting up a public inquiry under the act?

Hon DONNA FARAGHER replied:

I thank the member for her question.

- (1)-(2) Yes, I am aware of the press release that I put out last week about BHP Billiton’s proposal for a uranium mine. This related to the level of assessment. The member was one of the appellants who requested a public inquiry. The issue of a public inquiry was dealt with quite significantly within the Appeals Convenor’s report, which the member would have a copy of. Essentially, the advice that I received from the Appeals Convenor was that a public inquiry can be requested by the minister but that it can look only at those matters relating to the environment. A number of the appeals looked at a broader range of issues surrounding uranium and various aspects that were unrelated to the area of environmental assessment. As a consequence, the advice that I received was that the environmental review and management program is the highest level of assessment and that that was acceptable for a project proposal of this kind. I am aware that the honourable member does not support what the Environmental Protection Authority has proposed. I agree with what it has proposed. However, I took into account that this is the first time that this particular type of proposal has been put and is to be assessed. I felt that it was important to extend the public consultation period to 14 weeks, which is the maximum. I felt that that was appropriate for a proposal of this kind.