

SWAN RIVER WATER QUALITY — ELLEN BROOK ARTIFICIAL WETLANDS

160. Mr F.A. ALBAN to the Minister for Environment:

Minister, I understand the Liberal–National government is funding the construction of one of Western Australia’s largest artificial wetlands in the Ellen Brook. Can the minister please update the house on how this initiative will help to improve water quality in the Swan River?

Mr A.P. JACOB replied:

I thank the member for Swan Hills for the question. It is a very important issue in his electorate of Swan Hills. Given that the river runs through the electorates of many members on both sides of the chamber and is a key natural feature of our city, it is a very important issue for all members in this place. I am happy to report to the house that construction has recently started on a slightly over \$4 million artificial wetland project in the Ellenbrook region. This project is aimed at reducing the inflow of phosphorus nitrogen run-off nutrients coming down the Ellen Brook tributary, which is one of the main feed-in points to the Swan and Canning Rivers system. This wetland will make a significant contribution to stripping out nutrients, which is important because the phosphorus and nitrogen flow into the Swan River actively feeds algal blooms. Algal blooms are an issue that many governments have had to tackle on the river, although, fortunately, recent programs have shown significant progress in this area. Algal blooms lead to a depletion of oxygen, particularly in the upper reaches of the river, which leads to fish deaths. If we can get it right at the point of nutrient inflow to the Swan and Canning River systems and keep those nutrients out, this will prove to be a key project. This project will remove some 270 kilograms of phosphorus and 330 kilograms of nitrogen each year. The state government has put \$2.5 million towards this program, and the federal government has contributed about \$1.5 million.

Stage 1 of the wetland will take about three months to complete now that construction has begun. This will include the planting of up to 50 000 native plants as well as some ripples that will assist to strip nutrients from the Ellen Brook waterway before it flows into the Swan and Canning River systems. Equally important—members with electorates on the river will know this—in managing the water quality improvement of the Swan and Canning Rivers is foreshore stabilisation. Foreshore stabilisation is an issue that members with river-fronting electorates raise with me again and again. This project will include 800 square metres of riverbank stabilisation. It is designed as a compartmentalised system that allows for a further seven wetland basins to be constructed should it prove to be as successful as we believe that it will be. I look forward to updating the house about that.

The Ellen Brook wetland builds on a range of programs that the Liberal–National government has continued to invest into the Swan and Canning River systems. The river systems have seen a steady improvement in their health over the past five years. Clearly, some historical issues must be dealt with, but the government’s strategies are working and we are seeing a demonstrable improvement in river health. However, the government does not rest on its laurels and more work is to be done. We have started the Ellen Brook wetland, and work will continue in that area. The state government recently invested in a \$1.2 million nutrient-stripping wetland in Bayswater, which members representing that area will already be familiar with. As I informed the house recently, work has started in the last couple of weeks on our fifth oxygenation plant on the Swan River out at Nicholson Road Bridge. The plant has the latest oxygenation technology and will service a further 2.2 kilometres of the river, which, as I showed the house previously, is the area of the river in most need of oxygen. The plant builds on the four existing plants in the Swan and Canning River systems to help to prevent algal blooms and to preserve aquatic life in our river system. I look forward to updating the house on further measures the Liberal–National government will take to protect our Swan and Canning River systems.