

ELLEN BROOK WETLAND PROJECT

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

Can the minister please update the house on the Liberal–National government’s Ellen Brook wetland project, which is situated in Belhus in my electorate, and its importance in preventing nutrient flows into the Swan River?

Mr A.P. JACOB replied:

I thank the member for this question on this important issue. Issues to do with the Swan River’s health are some of the most important in the environment portfolio. As I said last week, despite the commentary from members opposite, the river is not dead and it is not in crisis.

Mr M. McGowan: The Auditor General said it!

Mr A.P. JACOB: That is not what the Auditor General said; it is what members opposite have been saying. Surveys in summer and autumn this year have shown that our river system is in good to fair condition overall, particularly when we base it on the fish community reports. We are already seeing some improvements on last year’s results. This is reflective of the presence of relatively stable environmental conditions across the entire river system, particularly during the monitoring period.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Gosnells, I call you to order for the first time. If you want to ask a question, put your name down.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I am very happy to answer questions from members opposite on this issue.

Reports are consistently showing, particularly through our Murdoch University fish community reports, that results from this year have continued an overall improvement in the Swan River’s health since the mid-2000s. River health is improving and has been steadily improving since the mid-2000s. We acknowledge that a range of historic health issues affect the river and more work can be done in a range of areas. We are not resting on our laurels with the river health improving. We want to see it improve at a greater rate. That opens up a range of issues in areas that we need to address. One of those key areas is nutrient run-off and a subset of the issue of nutrient run-off into the Swan and Canning Rivers system is Ellen Brook. It is the largest tributary contributor of nutrients into the Swan and Canning Rivers system. Over the past three months, this government has undertaken the construction of a nutrient-stripping wetland at Ellen Brook. This has also incorporated the planting of almost 50 000 seedlings endemic to the Swan coastal plain. Planting started only last month and I had the opportunity to plant a few of those seedlings. This wetland will become fully operational once those seedlings have established and grown in height. This will enable water levels in the artificial basin to operate at the optimal level to strip nutrients, including phosphorous and nitrogen, from those inflows. The state government has contributed \$2.5 million to this project and the federal government has also come to the party with \$1.53 million. This is particularly significant because it is only stage 1, which is estimated to remove 270 kilograms of phosphorous and 330 kilograms of nitrogen each year from that key tributary that feeds into the Swan River. Indeed, the artificial wetland will not only strip nutrients from that tributary, but also create a fantastic native artificial environment and habitat for the fauna and flora that exists in those brooks and waterways.