

## ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO

### *Statement*

**HON SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [10.11 pm]: I find it very strange that remarkably little acknowledgement has been given by the government this week of the fact that we are now at the third anniversary of its taking government. I suggest that in the case of the environment portfolio, that is readily explainable. One certainty in caring for the environment is that we cannot afford to do nothing. The fact is that despite the government having had two goes at providing us with one, the Barnett government still has not been able to give us an environment minister who will stand up for environmental protection.

**Hon Donna Faragher:** You had seven; you didn't do very well. You never got a guernsey—always a bridesmaid; never a bride.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** The former minister is getting extremely excited over there. Sadly, because I intend to take my full allocation of time, she will not get a chance to respond tonight, but she will have plenty of opportunity for the rest of this week, which marks the third anniversary —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! We heard the previous contribution of 10 minutes without one interjection. The standard has been set that I would like to be adhered to by all members.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Thank you, Mr President. I am suggesting that the Minister for Environment, Hon Bill Marmion, who, of course, is a member of the other place, will be hoping very much that not too much attention is paid to him this week as the state recognises its third anniversary of coming to power.

As has been well documented in this place by me and many of my colleagues on this side of the house, there were a series of stumbles and blunders by his predecessor, Hon Donna Faragher, which, of course, included presiding over changes to the waste levy, which locked the Department of Environment and Conservation into legal battles that are expected to tie up the government for many years before they are resolved. I was very gratified to see on the news last night and in the electronic media that Hon Phil Edman agrees with me. I had a bit of a chat with him today and expressed my appreciation for his taking the government to task for the mess it has made of those changes to the waste levy.

After that couple of years, I suggest that Hon Bill Marmion was regarded as a safe pair of hands when he inherited the environment portfolio last December. I must say, having studied his performance quite closely, he has a technical background that he uses to good effect in sheltering from questioning by giving some pretty long-winded explanations. Sadly, I have to say that the evidence is mounting of the long-term damage to the state that weak and ineffective environmental leadership does, particularly in boom times when pressures around the cabinet table —

**Hon Donna Faragher** interjected.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Perhaps I can point out to Hon Donna Faragher and her colleagues that I am not taking interjections. I want to get through these points. I hoped that might be clear to them, but apparently it is not.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members!

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** As I was saying, the evidence is mounting about the long-term damage that weak and ineffective leadership does to the state, particularly in boom times when pressures around the cabinet table allow ministers not in the front line economic portfolios to lie low. To recap very briefly a bit of history, the Barnett government went to the 2008 election without a headline-grabbing set of environmental policies or commitments. I guess the fact that the shadow minister, Mr Steve Thomas, who was, I think, the member for Capel, lost his seat meant there was no-one to drive any real environmental agenda when members opposite came to government. That meant, of course, that environmental concerns were drowned out by the loudest political demands, which, as the boom geared up, were inevitably for the cutting of red and green tape. Some environment ministers might have leapt at the chance to lead the way in the face of those demands for cutting red and green tape, with some kind of radical shake up of their systems and processes. It seems to me and many other members of this house that those opportunities were certainly opening up to enable some significant changes, if reports from the high level of consensus that was being achieved by those people who were taking part in the stakeholders advisory group that was set up by Hon Donna Faragher are to be believed. However, just like his predecessor, the current minister seems to be frozen in the headlines and happy to allow Premier Barnett and the Minister for Mines and Petroleum, Hon Norman Moore, to make the running. We do not need to look any further than the furore currently surrounding the James Price Point development to see the mess and confusion that results when the environment and, I may add, any concern about social justice, takes a back seat

to the mentality that we must develop at all costs, which marks this Liberal–National government. The thing that makes the current minister’s lack of action so frustrating is that here in WA right now we are facing a series of major challenges, which are well documented, with our very future riding on the success or failure of our attempts to come to terms with those challenges.

I want to put on the record what I think are fairly obviously the top five things on the list that must be staring the current minister in the face every morning when he sits down at his desk—just five of them: one, finalise the state waste strategy; two, finalise the state climate change strategy; three, save the Swan River; four, create more marine parks; and five, protect remaining urban bushland. None of this is rocket science. It is all on the record; they have all been acknowledged by the government, which has been in office for three years, as its priorities. What have we seen? We have seen precisely nothing done on any of those issues. The sad thing is that none of those issues—I am sure Hon Donna Faragher would agree with me—presents the kind of intractable policy difficulties that so often bog down ministers. Indeed, we need only look along the front bench to see ministers such as Hon Peter Collier, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, and Hon Helen Morton, the Minister for Mental Health, facing issues of that kind. However, none of the issues that I have just identified present that kind of intractable policy difficulty. Industry, local government and environment stakeholders are 100 per cent behind the draft waste strategy that has been around for more than a year. With or without commonwealth action, state climate change plans have been years in the making and are long overdue for release. A simple audit of the money spent by state and local governments on the Swan River would give us enormous scope for making serious attempts to cut nutrient pollution of the Swan.

As far as marine parks and bushland protection go, there are some serious heavy hitters in cabinet like Hon Norman Moore and Hon John Day who need to be taken aside and taught some of the basic facts of life about how we think about biodiversity and values-based environmental planning in the twenty-first century.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** All that is needed is a bit of energy —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Hansard has no chance in the world of picking up what the member on her feet is saying, let alone the individual interjections if they come in a chorus.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Thank you, Mr President.

All that is needed is a bit of energy and a serious commitment to protecting what is most precious to the communities around the state about their environment. Sadly, the current minister appears to be suffering a serious deficit on both those counts; that is, energy and a serious commitment. He finds himself unable to resolve even the issues that most Western Australians regard as open-and-shut cases. He has allowed uncertainty about coalmining in Margaret River to drag on despite the Environmental Protection Authority’s strong statements about the dangers. He has refused to rule on the future of Magellan, even though the company has repeatedly shown itself incapable of following the rules about transporting lead through our streets. And just last week he ducked the opportunity given to him on a plate by a parliamentary committee report to finally resolve the issue about squatters’ shacks at Wedge and Grey by saying he needed yet more reports. Western Australia deserves an environment minister who will stand up for environmental protection, and the Barnett government has not been able to give us that minister.

*House adjourned at 10.22 pm*

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