

YEELIRRIE URANIUM MINE ASSESSMENT — PUBLIC INQUIRY

1018. Hon SALLY TALBOT to the Minister for Environment:

I refer the minister to her response to my question last week about BHP Billiton's Yeelirrie uranium mine. Given that the minister has accepted the advice that a public inquiry is not a level of assessment, in what context would the minister consider authorising a public inquiry under the Environmental Protection Act?

Hon DONNA FARAGHER replied:

I thank the member for her question. I thought I had actually answered this question last week.

Hon Sally Talbot: No.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Well, perhaps the member should read the letter that I wrote to her as an appellant, because she did not agree with the Environmental Protection Authority's level of assessment—which I did—and the Appeals Convenor's report, but I will go through it again. What I had to consider was that a request had been made that a public inquiry be undertaken. The fact is that an environmental review and management program is the highest level of assessment that can be undertaken. In terms of a public inquiry—which, as I understand it, has never occurred in the 20-odd years that the EPA has been an authority here in Western Australia—it can only consider issues around the Environmental Protection Act. Some of the issues that were being raised in the appeals with respect to the level of public interest and, therefore, why we would have a public inquiry, related to issues such as the nuclear cycle, Indigenous matters and other issues that are actually outside the scope of the Environmental Protection Act. The very clear advice that came back to me from both the Appeals Convenor and the EPA was that the issues that had been raised in the appeals could be adequately dealt with through the ERMP process, which, as I have said, is the highest level of assessment. However, I did take note of the fact that given that this is the first proposal of this kind, and given also that sometimes there are challenges in terms of communication and the like and in getting information through to regional and remote communities, there is merit in increasing the public consultation period, so that is what I have done.

Point of Order

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Mr President, I seek your advice as to whether it would be appropriate to re-read my question, because it does not relate to the minister's answer.

Hon Simon O'Brien: No, it would not be appropriate.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Norman Moore: The minister can answer it in any way she likes.

The PRESIDENT: Order! A point of order has been taken. The question has been asked. From what I am hearing, the minister has a pretty clear understanding of what the question is and is getting to the point of her answer.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Thank you, Mr President. As I have said—I am not sure how much clearer I can be—the advice that I was provided with by the EPA and the Appeals Convenor was that the level of assessment that had been set by the EPA was an appropriate level of assessment for a proposal of this kind. However, as I have also just said, I did believe that it was important that we have an extended period of public consultation, and that is what I determined.