

WATER INVESTIGATIONS — MURCHISON

128. Mr V.A. CATANIA to the Minister for Water:

Recently, investigations have been taking place in the Murchison to find new water to support industry. Can the minister please provide an update on this work?

Ms M.J. DAVIES replied:

I thank the member for North West Central for his question and his interest in this portfolio. It is very important. The significant projects underway in the water portfolio are all geared to driving diversity and economic growth, which is leading to jobs. This program is really exciting. There has been significant interest in some of the high-tech investigations of the palaeochannels in the Murchison that are underway to support new development of water resources. We are undertaking aerial electromagnetic surveys over 57 000 square kilometres in the east Murchison, which will precisely locate and identify the water quality and quantity in some of those palaeochannels. For members who are not aware, an aerial electromagnetic survey involves a helicopter with a magnetic coil beneath it flying around 90 metres above the ground, measuring and sending electromagnetic pulses into the ground. We are carrying out these surveys across the state but the Murchison is one area in particular that we have identified. It is an exciting project. It is part of a \$25 million royalties for regions investment to investigate groundwater resources across the state, identify new sources of water, prove up their quality and quantity and maximise our current resources.

I have spoken previously in this place about the investigations that we have undertaken down in Albany, the great southern and the south coast. I can now report that we have sunk up to 16 investigation bores in the Albany hinterland and two long-term monitoring bores have been constructed. We will prove up that resource by measuring those bores over a period, which will allow us to better define that work without having to drill a number of bores, and it minimises our expenses upfront.

We are also assessing the Hamersley range near Karratha, member for Pilbara. It appears that up to 10 gegalitres a year might be available for Onslow, member for North West Central, and 20 gegalitres for the west Pilbara and the west Canning Basin. We know that there are significant resources. Areas near Port Hedland are showing some very promising signs. We think there is a potential to find up to 50 gegalitres of water in this space in addition to what we have already discovered. Investigations are also occurring in and around Broome and at the Wallal aquifer. We will provide some more information on that groundwater availability and where to extract the water, while maintaining important cultural and environmental aspects in that space. That program is helping us to define those aspects as we move forward.

All of this work will inform the decisions that we make about investment going forward. It provides information to the private sector, to government and to local government, and it ensures that our regions continue to grow, made possible by royalties for regions. Our water resources are significant and we need to ensure that we continue to invest in this space.