

OFFICE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AUTHORITY — MINISTERIAL DECISIONS

297. Hon SALLY TALBOT to the Minister for Environment:

I refer the minister to the statement in last week's budget papers that the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority will be expected to play its part in reducing the number of environmental issues under appeal by refining and continually improving its procedures based on its analysis of ministerial decisions. What guidelines or procedures has the minister put in place, or plans to put in place, to guide, direct, focus or otherwise inform the analysis by the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority of ministerial decisions?

Hon DONNA FARAGHER replied:

I thank the member for the question. This is a similar question to that which the member asked me last week.

Hon Sally Talbot: You did not give me an answer then either.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Hon Sally Talbot should have listened to the answer and she might have learnt something! I have not put in place any guidelines, or anything in that regard. That refers to a twofold issue. For the benefit of the member, can I say, first and foremost, that the EPA board is independent of government. The Office of the Environmental Protection Authority is a division of government, and I would have thought the member was aware of that. The EPA is working to improve its processes. In fact, it has released for comment its draft administrative procedures, and some of those aspects have been incorporated as part of the legislation that is before this house. I am not quite sure what the member is trying to get at. Is she trying to suggest that I am directing the EPA board, or something like that? The EPA and the chairman of the EPA are very committed to improving their processes to ensure that we have a world-class environmental impact assessment process. That is something I fully support as minister. The fact is that some things can be done better, and that is why last year I released the findings of the EPA's very comprehensive review on all things relating to the EPA. They are working through a number of those recommendations that have been put forward by the chairman. That is where those improvements are being made. I just remind the member—I did say this last week and I will say it again—that the EPA, as a result of the very good changes that this government made to make sure that we now have an Office of the EPA, has been given an additional responsibility, which it previously did not have. It is now responsible for monitoring the conditions that I determine on all projects that require a decision by me to ensure that it sees that the recommendations that it puts forward to me —

Hon Sally Talbot: That is not about me; it is about you.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: I am answering the question. The member can listen to it. If she does not like it, that is her problem, not mine. The EPA has responsibility for monitoring those conditions. I think it is very important that the Office of the EPA has that role.