

“OUR NORTH, OUR FUTURE: WHITE PAPER ON DEVELOPING NORTHERN AUSTRALIA”

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

In the “Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia” released by the federal government last week, it is proposed to provide support for water investigations in the West Kimberley. Can the minister please provide an update on how the state government is also working to develop this area?

Ms M.J. DAVIES replied:

I thank the member for the question. As a state government we have doing a great amount of work with the commonwealth to make sure it is aware of the programs running here in Western Australia to expand irrigated agriculture and our water investigations. With the announcement of the northern Australia white paper we are, as a state government, very keen to partner with the federal government in its water investigations, as it has stated in the paper, and I will be writing to the commonwealth on this matter.

Our vision for a diversified economy in the north of the state is taking a step forward with some of the projects we have under the Water for Food program. We have \$6.1 million invested in a drilling and water investigation program in the Fitzroy Valley and we are about to start groundwater drilling in that space. That is part of the broader \$40 million royalties for regions Water for Food program and is about accelerating groundwater investigations right across the state, whether in the north or south. We are doing work with growers in Manjimup and the member behind me is chairing a committee in the central Midlands. Because we are talking about the northern Australia white paper, we have a drilling company working in Fitzroy Crossing with a number of Aboriginal communities on the lands on the outskirts of Fitzroy Crossing and we are attempting to find sufficient and sustainable groundwater for a potential irrigated agriculture project. We will put in place monitoring bores and conduct a science-based investigation. We understand that there is quite a deal of interest in the Fitzroy Valley and the Fitzroy River. Everything that we do is done with the best science available and some of the best scientists we have on hand in the Department of Water. We expect that the aerial electromagnetic surveys will commence in August and include data collection for the Derby area, the May and Meda Rivers, the Willare–Lower Fitzroy River area, Fitzroy Crossing and the Oscar Ranges. That will give us a much better understanding of the West Kimberley hydrogeology.

As I said, it is really exciting. It is part of the broader project of Water for Food. We look forward to partnering with the commonwealth government to try to expand and fast track this because we know that fantastic opportunities are on our doorstep if we can have these sustainable projects that diversify that part of our state.