

MONTARA OIL DISASTER

535. Hon SALLY TALBOT to the Minister for Environment:

- (1) Is the minister aware of the recently released Environmental Protection Authority report into the Montara oil disaster?
- (2) If yes to (1), will the minister table the report?
- (3) Is the minister aware that testing the shores of the islands and mainland would not pick up contamination that has sunk to the bottom of the ocean, because that is precisely what oil dispersant is designed to do?
- (4) Has any testing been done to pick up contamination of areas other than the shore areas; and, if so, what is that testing?

Hon DONNA FARAGHER replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1) Yes. The report is marine technical report 3 of 2010 and is titled "Baseline petroleum hydrocarbon content of marine water, shoreline sediment and intertidal biota at selected sites in the Kimberley bioregion, Western Australia". It was published by the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority and posted on the EPA website on Friday, 6 August.
- (2) Yes. I table the report. In addition, the report is available on the EPA website under "Technical reports".

[See paper 2344.]

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: My answer continues —

- (3) Oil dispersant is used to break down surface slicks into small droplets to encourage mixing in the water column, increase the surface area available for physical and microbial degradation and maximise natural dispersive processes. I am advised that oil dispersant was not applied to all of the oil released during the Montara incident, and that even when oil dispersant is applied, it is never 100 per cent effective. The baseline survey was designed primarily to detect floating residual oil and wax. Notwithstanding this, dispersed oil was not detected in the water samples taken. In addition, the samples taken from the subtidal pearl oysters and subtidal rock oysters did not identify any exposure to dispersed oil within the water column.
- (4) The Office of the EPA has not completed any testing for contamination other than in state waters. I am not in a position to comment on any sampling being undertaken in commonwealth waters.

Point of Order

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Mr President, I want to take a point of order with regard to one of the answers that we received during question time today. I understand that the rule with respect to answers is that ministers can answer a question in whatever way they like. However, I wonder whether it starts to get to the point of misleading the house when a parliamentary secretary, in his answer to a question, refers us to a previous question, when that previous question did not answer the question but in fact actually asked us to ask the question again if we want that information. I wonder whether that is within the custom and practice of the house and whether it is not bordering on misleading the house; therefore, I seek some guidance from you, Mr President. I accept that when the government wants to hide information and does not want to be open about it, that is fine —

The PRESIDENT: Order! A point of order has to be directed to a direct point to get some sort of clarification. Does the Leader of the House wish to speak on the same point of order?

Hon Norman Moore: No. I think we have said enough.

The PRESIDENT: I am not privy to the information in front of me. On the surface it appears that there is no point of order, because whatever way the question may be answered, that is the answer. That does not mean that some people will like the answer and that does not mean that everybody has to agree with the answer, but that is the answer that is presented to the Parliament. I will look at the documents the member has referred to, and if my ruling on the point of order is any different I will notify the house.