

WATER CORPORATION — ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

Statement by Minister for Water

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Water) [9.14 am]: I rise today to inform the house about new measures being taken by the McGowan government through the Water Corporation to advance reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Western Australians. On Monday, 11 March 2019, I had the pleasure of launching the Water Corporation's fifth reconciliation action plan. Working towards true reconciliation in Western Australia is an important goal for the McGowan government. The Premier recently released a new set of priorities for this government, one of which is to improve Aboriginal wellbeing in this state. In WA we still have a long way to go to achieve a society in which Aboriginal people are treated with the respect that they deserve, and have the same opportunities and life outcomes enjoyed by non-Aboriginal Western Australians. As the Minister for Water, I want to ensure that I do everything possible to drive reconciliation through the water services sector. The reconciliation action plan seeks to do this in a number of ways. It includes improving employment opportunities for Aboriginal Western Australians in the public water utility, setting progressive procurement targets, better customer relations and, importantly, providing water infrastructure in remote communities. In a nation in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are three times more likely to be out of work, the Water Corporation has pledged to employ a workforce that is representative of the entire Western Australian community. Exceeding its 2018 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce target of 3.2 per cent, the utility has now set a new target of six per cent by September 2021. With nearly 60 per cent of its Aboriginal employees working outside the metropolitan area, the Water Corporation will continue to employ Aboriginal people regionally, enabling them to remain on country and connected to their communities. Since 2007, the Water Corporation has awarded more than \$7.8 million in contracts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers across the state. To continue to increase this participation, and in line with the state government's targets, the utility has committed to achieving a three per cent progressive procurement target over the next three years.

Tomorrow is World Water Day and this year's theme is "Leaving no one behind". It is a fitting theme for us to announce our plans for a \$23 million project to improve water services for remote Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley region. The Water Corporation will upgrade water and wastewater facilities in each community and supply ongoing water services in the first community, Mowanjum, by mid-2020. Bayulu and Bidyadanga will follow. As a result, community residents will have access to the same safe and reliable drinking water and wastewater services that are experienced in Perth. These upgrades will also create a range of employment opportunities for Aboriginal people and businesses. I want to congratulate the Water Corporation on this work and its reconciliation action plan. I look forward to working with the Water Corporation to deliver this plan.