

VASSE–WONNERUP ESTUARY

899. Ms E. METTAM to the Minister for Water:

Two weeks ago the minister announced the government's response to a report into the Vasse–Wonnerup Estuary. Can the minister please update the house on what is being done to protect this important waterway?

Ms M.J. DAVIES replied:

I thank the member —

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Armadale, I call you to order for the third time.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the member —

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr B.J. Grylls interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cannington! Member for Pilbara, I call you to order for the third time.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the member for the question and I congratulate her on her election and her first —

Several members interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Members opposite are an ungracious lot and their behaviour yesterday was absolutely revolting!

I thank the member for the question. I congratulate her on her election and on her first speech to this Parliament.

The member is exactly right: there were serious community concerns about the Vasse–Wonnerup Estuary. It is a beautiful part of our state and the communities there place a very high value on their natural environment. It is a highly modified waterway and wetland. As a result, more than 12 months ago the previous Minister for Water and now Minister for Regional Development, in consultation with the then local member, commissioned an independent review, which was conducted by Professor Barry Hart. The main focus of the review was to provide recommendations to the state government on governance. We have been talking about some of the challenges that the Premier and the Minister for Environment have experienced with whales; there are similar cross-jurisdictional departmental issues on the governance of wetlands. It was becoming very difficult to understand roles and responsibilities, and the community desired that we look at that issue.

We were very fortunate to attract Professor Barry Hart to conduct the independent review. He is one of Australia's leading water scientists and has had extensive involvement in waterways and catchment management right across the nation. It has been a complex task, so it did take some time, and it involved significant consultation with all the stakeholders. We released the report two weeks ago, to which the member referred, and we outlined our steps going forward in response to the professor's recommendations. To the community's credit, more than 50 people turned up, as there was that level of interest at that time.

There are five key areas that we need to respond to in relation to governance, further research and planning, supporting the local groups implementing the work on the ground, and increasing the infill sewerage program in that part of the state. I have therefore established a ministerial task force that I will chair for 12 months and then pass on to the Department of Water to continue on. That is in direct response to Professor Hart's recommendation that we need a lead agency and someone to set down clearly the roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders. I was also pleased to announce that \$200 000 in funding was made available immediately to GeoCatch, which is the local environmental catchment group that has a very strong history in the community of delivering on-ground improvements through revegetation and working with community groups. The Department of Water and the Water Corporation are doing some work on drainage, and looking at the feasibility of realigning and redirecting water flows in drains and some of the rivers flowing through that area. We have also announced an allocation of a further \$5 million for infill sewerage to reduce the nutrient load going into the Toby Inlet. Of course, we will continue working on our water quality improvement plans through the Department of Water. Again, it is a complex issue with a complex solution. There is a seriously modified environment in that part of the state that has had 100 years of farming and community interaction, but these are the first steps we are taking and I look forward to updating the house as we progress.