

PHOSPHORUS FERTILISERS - SWAN COASTAL CATCHMENT

Statement by Minister for the Environment

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah - Minister for the Environment) [9.18 am]: I inform the house of the government's progress towards the phasing out of highly water-soluble phosphorus fertilisers along the Swan coastal catchment of Western Australia. Our coastal waterways and wetlands are precious, and their environmental, economic and recreational values cannot be underestimated. It is a sad reality that the health of some of these waterways is significantly threatened by declining water quality. A major cause of this is the high level of nutrients that end up in our waterways and ultimately cause algal blooms, odours, low oxygen levels and fish deaths.

The government understands the need to fertilise the sandy soils of the Swan coastal plain to make them viable for agriculture and other purposes; however, a significant and unacceptable amount of this fertiliser, particularly soluble phosphorus, continues to enter our waterways.

In September 2006, the former Minister for the Environment, Hon Mark McGowan, MLA, made a commitment to phase out river-harming fertilisers in environmentally sensitive areas in the south west of Western Australia. A joint government and fertiliser industry working party, chaired by Dr Wally Cox, was tasked with developing an action plan to phase out highly water-soluble phosphorus fertilisers in these areas over the next four years.

The working party has recently presented me with a fertiliser action plan that recommends a number of things that need to be carried out to achieve this by 2011. The fertiliser action plan proposes the introduction by the fertiliser industry of alternative, low water-soluble phosphorus fertilisers, as well as clear directions to change the way we use phosphorus fertilisers in environmentally sensitive areas and on the coastal plain. However, before any decisions are made, a symposium will be held to consult stakeholders, including users, on the action plan. I have asked the Department of Environment and Conservation to organise the symposium, in collaboration with other relevant government agencies and stakeholder organisations, to take place on Tuesday, 3 July 2007 at the Burswood on Swan facility. Invitations will be sent to all stakeholders in the coming weeks.

I would like to thank the members of the joint working party for their efforts in drawing up the fertiliser action plan. I look forward to stakeholder input on the plan before presenting to government the final mix of actions required to phase out highly water-soluble phosphorus fertilisers by 2011. I will table the fertiliser action plan prepared by the joint government and fertiliser industry working party.