

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT GROUPS

Motion

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for its failure to fund natural resource management groups in a timely and adequate manner.

Throughout the budget process, and indeed for some time leading up to the process, we on this side of the house have been questioning the government's commitment to natural resource management. It is an important and vital area to the health and maintenance of our productive agricultural landscape, the maintenance and protection of our biodiversity, and the protection of our natural heritage and recreational assets such as the Swan River and other rivers and water bodies. The protection of our natural resources is such a fundamental thing, and that is what natural resource management funding should be about.

I am not sure whether this government really understands the purpose of NRM. Perhaps it is easier if I begin by explaining a little of the history of how we have come to have programs such as NRM. I think the origins of the program lie in the Landcare movement that was started back in the mid-1980s and reached a point of national significance when we had the merger of the Australian Conservation Foundation, at the time led by Phillip Toyne, and the National Farmers' Federation, led at the time by Rick Farley. A partnership was formed to develop a decade of the Landcare movement. I have to acknowledge the passing of Phillip Toyne in the last couple of weeks; he died too young at age 67. He was a man passionate about the environment and Indigenous rights. I recall he actually lobbied the Hawke government for Ayers Rock—now known as Uluru, of course—to be vested with traditional owners. Shortly after his death, I heard the replay of an interview during which he told the story of the false rumours that went around at the time that were suggesting that Aboriginal people would prevent everyone else from visiting Uluru; nothing could be further from the truth then or now. Phillip Toyne made a great contribution to this nation and the Landcare movement, which led into the natural resource management programs that we have to this date right across the country; they are testimony to his great work.

Rick Farley is another man who left us much too soon; Rick died in 2006 aged 53 years. The two of them were able to combine to bring together those people who are passionate about the environment with those who are often the landowners. It is interesting to note that Rick Farley was actually head of the Cattlemen's Union, and that is how he came to be head of the National Farmers' Federation.

Dr A.D. Buti: During the Mabo period.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It was during the Mabo period. He, in fact, following the 1992 Mabo decision, helped negotiate native title.

What visionary contributions these people made to not only Australian public life but also to our day-to-day lives. Their legacy lives on across the country, and today it is manifest in natural resource management programs.

What we are talking about here is a mindset and a way of working to protect the environment that works just as strongly with the social setting. So many regions of this state and other states have poured countless hours into the development of natural resource management strategies, whereby people have sought to identify areas of biodiversity assets, productive agriculture and precious water resources. They have looked at all the parameters that go into making a productive, healthy environment, and they have worked out what rehabilitation work needs to be done and what work needs to be done to protect the environment. We have spent many millions, if not billions, of dollars across the country on Landcare and on natural resource management. I think one of the findings from the decade of Landcare that ended in the late 1990s was that after 10 years of natural resource management through Landcare, we had really only begun the task. We had had the sell-off of Telstra and the National Heritage Trust phase 1 funding under the Howard government. That had gone some way to establishing a framework and the programs of work that needed to be done. Then we had NHT 2; again, there were some great programs there, but there was always that realisation that this was only just the beginning.

Indeed now, in 2015, there is still so much work to be done because we have so much degraded landscape and so much has been lost. I think this is the problem that we see on the other side of the house, and that is why this motion is with us today. I do not think people on the other side really understand the loss we have suffered—what the repair bill really is—and that is why they do not understand how significant or how important it is that we protect what is left. I notice that the Minister for Environment is learning quickly about a whole lot of environmental aspects of this state, but I do not think he has really been engaged in those out-in-the-field, on-the-ground natural resource projects—those NRM projects where we spend hours and hours, often in quite cold weather, involved with tree planting and involved in some sort of restoration project.

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Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I know he has done it for photo shoots and things like that, but if he really understood what bushland restoration was about, I think he would be one of the champions of this place, wanting to protect native vegetation, and he would not have allowed those ridiculous loopholes to emerge in our native vegetation protection laws that allow people to just knock over five hectares of land per year per property without any permit assessment at all. He would not have allowed this ridiculous situation of saying that if some vegetation was cleared in the last 20 years, then it is regrowth and people can knock it over again without any further assessment because he would have understood how hard—how mammoth—the task of restoration is. He would have understood how expensive that task is and he would have understood how much easier it is to go for protection.

But what we are talking about here with natural resource management so often is the restoration work that has to take place. Let us just consider this. On the one hand, if someone in a catchment is really pouring all sorts of hours of work—lots of money—into a restoration project, they might achieve five hectares of restoration a year. How wrong would it be then to allow someone else in that same catchment area to knock down five hectares—not to mention that perhaps the five hectares of restoration would have received some amount of public money? But this environment minister is prepared to just let destruction take place without assessment. He thinks that is a reasonable thing. It is completely wrong. It is a betrayal of the principles we have when it comes to natural resource management, which is about working with and protecting what is still left intact, and then enhancing, developing and rehabilitating things. That is at the essence of natural resource management.

I will come to a media release that was put out by Hon Ken Baston and the Minister for Regional Development over a year ago. On 27 May 2014 they made a big announcement about funding for natural resources. The headline of the media release stated, “\$24m commitment to State’s natural resources”. It went on to state that this money would be for natural resource management over three years. This media release happened over a year ago and I will demonstrate how we have seen nothing of this money. A complete failure in government process to deliver this money to those people who need it has resulted in leaving all of our state’s natural resource management groups waiting and wondering what is going on. They feel unsupported and wonder how they can design projects if they do not know what money they will get. It is a disastrous situation that denies the climatic realities that if a person is not designing their project in the first quarter of the year with a view to placing orders for equipment and contractors, or with the nursery for seed stock, seedlings or tube stock—all of that organisational work—and is not ready to do the bulk of their work now while the rains are coming through, that they will miss the boat. In 2015, this government’s incompetence has led to a write-off of natural resource management. These groups have missed out because the money that was talked about in this media release back in May 2014 has not been processed. I will go through the ridiculous processing that needs to happen, which has been the obstacle in this case and prevented people from receiving the money to get on with their extremely valuable projects.

The media release in May last year boasted about some of the achievements. It claimed that the program began in only 2009, which is not true at all. The whole State Salinity Council was created under the Court government and initially chaired by Alec Campbell. Its title was then changed to the Natural Resource Management Council under the Gallop government and I think its initial chair was Rex Edmondson. He is a farmer who has the most splendid property on the south coast. It is a model farm where we can see exactly how agriculture should be done in that quite difficult environment. We can see a nice blend between good, productive agriculture and a well-managed natural environment with the two helping one another along. By making sure that the natural environment is protected and well looked after, the agricultural production is actually enhanced. Rex Edmondson was the chair of the Natural Resource Management Council back in the Gallop government days, and then we saw the development of the State Natural Resource Management Office, again under the Gallop and Carpenter governments, that has led to this program, which, strangely, the current government claims to be the initiator of. The media release states, “Since the program began in 2009”. It is just one of the things that we have to wear I suppose; that people always claim credit for things. However, we accept that it is a successful and worthy program.

The promise was made that \$24 million would be available for natural resource management. I then noticed that Hon Samantha Rowe was onto this when she asked some questions in Parliament of the Minister for Agriculture and Food, given his media release of May 2014. She asked —

Why has an announcement not been made calling for new applications under the new program?

The one that had been announced the year before. She continued —

When will the announcement be made calling for a new round of applications?

Is the minister aware of the community anxiety caused by the delay in announcing the call for new applications?

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Back in April, Hon Samantha Rowe asked those questions, so one would have thought that would gee up the government, but the response that came back at the time stated —

Specific details of the funding arrangements for the NRM program are still being finalised. It is proposed that this includes royalties for regions funding, which requires the business case to go through the royalties for regions due diligence process.

We had the best part of 12 months from May 2014 through to April 2015, and we have been incapable of using this business case development process to take it through royalties for regions. All that time elapsed and no action had taken place. The response to Hon Samantha Rowe's other questions stated —

As soon as the funding is approved, an announcement will be made calling for applications.

We received that answer back in April, so a person would think that the government would have been really aware that there was a degree of urgency coming from the opposition asking such embarrassing questions of the government. A person would think that by the time we got to estimates there would have been a positive response or some sort of response that would have told us that things were moving along at long last, but that is not the case. The government has done nothing. It has still not progressed this matter. In estimates we asked what the situation was. In the chamber, the Minister for Mines and Petroleum acting on behalf of the Minister for Agriculture and Food quite rightly deferred the questions to the director general of the Department of Agriculture and Food, Mr Rob Delane, who then deflected it through to Mr Ruprecht, one of his advisers. The answer that came back during estimates on 11 June stated —

That business case is currently being prepared. It will include approximately \$1.2 million per year from the consolidated account—

So no business case required there —

and approximately \$6.8 million per year from royalties for regions. That business case is going through the government's due diligence process, and we expect that program to be approved in the coming months. At that point there will be a capacity-building program and local action community programs envisaged that will support community groups with sustainable natural resource management.

We can see how moribund and hopeless this royalties for regions business case assessment process is. It does not seem to go anywhere. It fails to get moving on such an important program that is very dear to the hearts of many people who live in the regions. My understanding is that, as a rule of thumb, about 80 per cent of the funds for NRM programs get spent in the regions, so what is going on here? The government is not interested in helping people who, I would have thought, are this government's constituency and support base. We pressed Mr Delane further about what is going on and Mr Ruprecht said that the amounts are in the budget, but that their business case has not been done. The budget shows amounts of \$6.8 million for 2015–16, \$6.9 million for 2016–17 and \$7.2 million for 2017–18 for the royalties for regions contributions that will be matched by some of the consolidated revenue. As Mr Ruprecht said, we are looking at a total of \$8 million a year, but it is not there yet. In fact, for this financial year, 2014–15, there is nothing at all, so the groups are left hanging and waiting. There is no security at all for their programs. In answer to a further question in estimates Mr Delane said —

I am sure that the member appreciates that the release of royalties for regions funding requires the development of a business case and consideration by cabinet. The natural resource management area, as it is called, involves the Minister for Agriculture and Food, the Minister for Fisheries, the Minister for Water and the Minister for Environment. Those ministers have jointly considered the development of that plan, but until that business case has been approved by cabinet, those funds cannot be released to those groups.

This is just a hopelessly heavy and ridiculous assessment process. It is a most convoluted process that will fail us and mean that many projects will not take place this year. After all, these people are volunteers acting in their own time, and so often these groups are powered by volunteers.

The general multiplier effect from community groups working on on-the-ground Landcare-type projects is somewhere between \$3 and \$7 for every dollar that is put in. I would have thought that members opposite would have understood the amazing leverage that is to be had in this area. However, the latest advice I have received is that the cabinet submission still needs to be signed off by the Ministers for Regional Development and Agriculture and Food prior to it being put through the cabinet process. There is only three weeks left of sitting and it is looking hopeless.

There is also real concern about staffing levels in the Department of Agriculture and Food. The Minister for Finance was representing Hon Ken Baston in the estimates committee hearings when we heard about the dramatic staff cuts to the Department of Agriculture and Food. In the biosecurity area alone, 18 staff will be

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shed. We were not able to drill down to how many staff will be lost from the State Natural Resource Management Office, but I am sure it will be significant and it will lose experienced people. On 30 June, in less than a week, a lot of people will finish their contracts and they will be gone, yet at best the money will not be available for another three weeks. By the time any money becomes available, inexperienced staff will have to be recruited—I will get to that in a moment. Some NRM projects are complex and assessments need to be made; it is a competitive process. The Minister for Environment cancelled the environment community small grants program long ago, which was one of the few remaining programs for environmental works in Western Australia. We have been messing people around in the most absurd way. The bureaucracy has been in perpetual chaos because we have not let them know what is going on and people are just waiting—hanging. While that goes on, staff disappear—they move on—and inexperienced staff are left behind, and we have managed to degrade the values and knowledge that existed in the entire program. Any government member who responds to this matter must explain what is going on with staffing arrangements in the Department of Agriculture and Food because that is a key component of this motion. If money is eventually authorised sometime in July, which bureaucrats will be responsible? The previous lot are gone so how will we get more and train them up in the time necessary? That is an important question.

I note the presence of the member for Moore in the chamber. I acknowledge his experience in this area as a board member of the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council WA—NACC as it is known—which has done some great work and been involved in some really important projects. NACC is really going places. It has all kinds of capabilities and has just taken on board new CEO Richard McLellan, who came from the World Wildlife Fund. I note that in Richard's address to his new employer he stated how productive agriculture is always there when people look after the natural resource base of agriculture. NACC has some really exciting projects, including restoration projects, the examination of carbon sequestration projects and coastal projects. The member for Moore will be able to talk about those projects in detail and he must be appalled that the people whom he oversees have to wait for money to get on with this year's projects. He must be absolutely disgusted that the organisation is left with this uncertainty.

I also note that I have been contacted by a constituent of the member for Bassendean and a member of an urban NRM group. There are seven regional NRM groups. I have already referred to the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council, but there is also the Perth Region NRM group. I note also that there is the South Coast Natural Resource Management group, the South West Catchments Council, the Avon Catchment Network and the Rangelands NRM. These groups act as overarching bodies for a lot of smaller catchment groups or "friends of" groups and help to mobilise and provide the funding, experience and administrative support for local community action groups. Paulina Wittner, who lives in the Bassendean area and who is also active in the one of the regional NRM groups, wrote a letter a few days ago, which states —

... Landcare funding has not yet been finalized. This is having serious and far-reaching effects on works in progress, plans and procedures for our all important environmental work around the state.

Therefore would you please request some action and an immediate release of the funding so that we can begin the process of applications, assessments, contracts, and finally ACTION for our 2015 programs.

This funding has already been budgeted, —

She is absolutely right; it is there in the budget —

so I'm told,—it's only a matter of State Cabinet being given the opportunity to approve the program and meet the commitments of the Minister for Agriculture.

That letter was from the president of a country Landcare group and resident in the Bassendean electorate, and I am sure that the member for Bassendean will mention more about her good work. We are seeing this occur right across the state where there are these great projects.

Another project in the member for Moore's electorate involves the Chittering Landcare Centre's work. I have met with Rosanna Hindmarsh and Sue Metcalf, the superb staff at Chittering Landcare Centre. Their knowledge of that area, the advice that they are able to give people, is absolutely outstanding, but we are messing them around and not giving them the funding commitment they deserve. I wonder whether the government would do this if those people were big-end-of-towners. Would the government dare try to mess others around in this way? That is a question we have to answer. I have seen the work done by the Chittering Landcare Centre and the Ellen Brook Integrated Catchment Group and its work to reduce the amount of nutrients that flow into the Swan River and the nutrient intervention sites that has created. It is brilliant work that members of the other side have talked and boasted about and have claimed credit for, but they are not prepared to give those groups the money to get on with the next stage of the job. It is so unfair. I look at things such as the Wannamal Lake Catchment Group and its work to make sure that the fragile lake systems and habitat of the western swamp tortoise is re-created and returned to good health. There are projects that link areas of natural bushland, such as the Bullsbrook biodiversity corridor and the

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reinstatement of land to good agricultural productivity and good grazing. There is control advice on phosphorous levels and levels of heavy metals in the Brockman and Ellen Brook catchments and there are programs to control the spread of *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. The range of activities of these NRM groups is amazing. Some programs look at pest animal management and the capture of feral cats and others are reserve management projects so that areas that have been designated as reserve and have weed incursions are managed. Of course arum lilies are coming out soon, if they are not already out. These are those sorts of programs that help to mobilise people to get involved in the weeding effort. There are many other Landcare centre works; the list goes on. They hold field days to enable people to see native animals and understand their native habitat. They do extensive community engagement work. The work that they do is outstanding. However, we are failing to provide those groups with the support that they need. That is disgraceful, and I am sure I will have the member for Moore's support in condemning the government on this. It is outrageous.

Much of work that needs to be done is in areas of global significance. The NRM groups are tackling the problem of declining annual rainfall and fresh water. Today we had another exposé of the Water for Food program. That program needs to be challenged. We need more information about whether the Water for Food program is examining replenishment rates and how that will work if we have declining annual rainfall. I am not clear on that. A lot of people used to argue that the Fitzroy River, to use the example of the Kimberly, should be dammed. That was a big project.

Mr W.R. Marmion: It was actually the Margaret River, which runs into the Fitzroy River.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Thank you, minister. People were very keen to see that river dammed. It seems that those people have now given up on that idea, but they are enthusiastic about the Water for Food program. We need to check that there are genuine replenishment rates under the Water for Food program. The Fitzroy and Margaret Rivers were often described as the upside-down rivers, because much of the water was under the ground for most of the year. It was only at the height of the wet season that there was water in the riverbed. It was always the case that the water was below the ground. Will there really be replenishment? That is something that we need to examine. It is certainly mentioned in the document "Western Australian Government: Adapting to our Changing Climate" of October 2012. The foreword of that document is by Hon Bill Marmion when he was Minister for Environment; Water. That document states that we face the reality of less fresh water and decreased agricultural production, potentially increasing the costs of both food and water and changing population distribution in regional areas. It states also that we face the problem of increased risk of erosion in areas in which low rainfall results in low biomass, especially in areas where overgrazing occurs.

Mr W.R. Marmion: Wise words!

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Those are very good points. However, how do we deal with this problem, and what sort of research is taking place? This is exactly where natural resource management groups come into play. They have a lot of work to do in this space, and we should be supporting them. We should be doing everything we can to assist them. That applies right across the state.

I will turn to some of the problems that Rangelands NRM has to face. A while ago I met with Gaye Mackenzie, the chief executive officer of Rangelands NRM. It is extremely challenging, but it is fascinating, to see the work that Rangelands NRM will need to tackle. This group will need to be resourced to enable it to make the call on whether projects such as Water for Food are feasible. I am concerned that we have a lot of media releases about a program that will not amount to very much, or, worse still, will so degrade natural values that we could see a lot of loss.

A lot of work is being done in the rangelands to look at sustainable pastoralism. That is an interesting area and one that I have talked a lot about. Members will have noticed that I was concerned that with the rollover of all 407 pastoral leases, covering about 37 per cent of the surface area of this state, we were missing an opportunity to bring about rangelands reform. However, I am now waiting for the rollover of those leases to occur, because I accept that once that is locked in, we will have to look at the opportunities to help people to, when necessary, diversify from the grazing of either cattle or sheep and set up business enterprises that are viable into the long term and will not lead to further erosion of the land that they are on. That is exactly the sort of work that Rangelands NRM would want to get on with. However, it is not being funded properly and receiving the support that it needs. Rangelands NRM was told in May 2014 that some money was on the way. That money still has not been made available to that group in June 2015, so we have a serious problem. We are failing to support and motivate community effort. That community effort is there, and it is very strong, but we must respect and nurture it, and properly fund it.

I have touched on the work of Rangelands NRM and the challenges that group is facing, especially with the Water for Food program. Other issues are sustainable grazing, and the fire regimes in the north of the state. Indeed, some

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good advances have been made with new fire regimes that are complementary to the grazing program and that lead to a lower loss of biomass and fewer emissions, which make for more productive cattle grazing. Some positive things can be done, and these NRM groups are critical in delivering those positive outcomes.

I touched on the work of the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council WA. The member for Moore will speak at more length about that. That group is engaged in planting exercises, preservation of malleefowl and Major Mitchell's cockatoo, biodiversity corridors, and the carbon neutral program and carbon sequestration. That is excellent work—just the sort of thing that deserves to be supported through an NRM program. However, we are failing to deliver. I mentioned Rangelands NRM and the Pilbara Corridors project and how that can link many areas of the state, whether we are talking about fire regimes in the Pilbara, weeds of national significance, the development of ecologically sustainable rangelands management systems, the absolutely essential connection with Indigenous people and their country, and the control of feral herbivores. Those programs are critical to the health of the national parks in the Pilbara, whether that be Millstream, Chichester or Karijini or any of the other national parks in that area. We need to have good land management on the adjacent pastoral leases to ensure that fires do not escape from pastoral country into a national park, and that there is not a weed incursion and a weed of national significance comes off a pastoral lease and takes over Karijini National Park, for example. Many things need to be done in that area. Rangelands NRM with its Pilbara Corridors project has set up the Pilbara Mesquite Management Committee, which brings together the various industry and resources companies that of course have such a presence in the Pilbara. Rangelands NRM is also doing work on cactus removal and monitoring, on feral herbivores, and on the baiting of dogs and cats and other eradication programs.

I want to move now into the Perth NRM territory, given that is where we are right now, and point out again the recommendations that were made by the Auditor General nearly a year ago, in August 2014. The Auditor General pointed to the need for the state to adopt a river protection strategy. A draft strategy has been in place for all the time the Barnett government has been in office. Why can the government not finalise a river protection strategy? Surely that, along with adequate funding of the Perth NRM group, would be a way of moving forward and getting into the right sorts of programs, to reduce the amount of nutrient going into the river and enable us to control things such as the speed of watercraft on the river as well as target and prioritise the restoration of the Swan estuary foreshore. All those works need to be done. I am envious of the member for Cannington. How tremendous the Canning River is, up to Masons Landing and beyond. It is magnificent and a demonstration of what the Canning River should be like all the way to Gosnells and beyond. The oxygenation plant that has been put in at Nicholson Road is only a bandaid solution, and is widely recognised as such. It is not something that we would say no to at all—it has a utility—but it is there because of a lack of oxygen in the water column and we should not have to face that situation. There should be enough water flowing so that oxygenation is not a problem. Within 200 metres upstream of the oxygenation plant, the river is very degraded. It is choked with blackberry and other weeds, and its water is stagnant and not even flowing at this time of year. It should be a real amenity to the area but it is not because it has just been neglected, and we are not supplying support given to groups like SERCUL—the South East Regional Centre of Urban Landcare. It is a tremendous group, and very active in the area. I am sure the member for Cannington will speak more about the work of SERCUL. What a shame that we are not giving it the funding it needs. When I speak to people such as SERCUL's chair, Pat Hart, and hear about all the work the group has done and the volunteer effort it brings together, it makes me realise how important programs such as natural resource management are.

Mr W.R. Marmion: They do a good job.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: They do a tremendous job. They do it with heart and commitment, and it gets back to the multiplier effect. These groups deserve all the support we can possibly give them, so to mess them around in this way for over 12 months is just completely wrong, but that is what we have done. We made a promise back in May 2014, and we talk about \$24 million being available, but in June 2015 the government is incapable of delivering that money. That is a real betrayal of these groups' goodwill, energy and efforts. We are letting them and the community down, and we are failing to look after our natural heritage. Natural resource management groups deserve the support they received under the Gallop and Carpenter governments. They deserve the support that Western Australians imagine they are getting from the government, but they are not getting anything of the kind at the moment, and they are suffering the consequences. We are going to lose expertise and energy and make people wonder what the point is. That is the real shame of this. I look forward to hearing the responses of other members on this, especially those in the National Party, who I think understand the significance of natural resource management funding. How have they allowed this absurd business case development process to drag on for so long? How can it be that we have used bureaucratic incompetence to upset people wanting to do really great work for our state? I commend the motion to the house, and I believe that the government stands condemned for its lack of support for natural resource management in Western Australia.

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MR W.R. MARMION (Nedlands — Minister for Finance) [4.44 pm]: I rise on behalf of the Minister for Agriculture and Food, because this is his territory. He has provided me with information, because his office looks after the natural resource management matters.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Are you the lead speaker, minister?

Mr W.R. MARMION: The Minister for Environment will be the lead speaker, because he is probably more directly related to the task.

The ACTING SPEAKER: It is important, minister, because there is a 30-minute time difference.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I do not think any of us will go for 30 minutes, Madam Acting Speaker.

Several members interjected.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I am not going to go through all the 150 projects. I am representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food in this house, and that is why I am speaking to this motion. The member for Gosnells mentioned Phillip Toyne. I would also like to pass on my condolences to Phillip Toyne's family. I did not know him well; we clashed a couple of times when I was representing the state government and he was representing the federal government in the environment. I understand that he would have been probably deputy secretary under Roger Beale at that time in the commonwealth Department of the Environment and Heritage. He was very passionate about the environment, as the member knows, and we sometimes clashed, when I was the state representative on international treaties. He was a strong supporter of centralised environmental control.

I will be opposing the member for Gosnells' motion. The Minister for Environment will also speak on the motion from our side, and the member for Moore, who is a passionate supporter of natural resource management, will also speak from this side of the house. When I was Minister for Environment, the office of the Rangelands NRM group was opposite my electorate office. The chairman at the time, Bill Mitchell, would make sure that I went along to a lot of its meetings, so I have an intimate role with that group. The state government strongly supports the work done by community groups right throughout Western Australia for the contribution they make to preserving and protecting Western Australia's valuable natural resources and environment. This government has a history of supporting NRM, and has spent more than \$70 million in this space since 2009. That equates to some 570 projects over that time, which have looked at everything from preserving our precious waterways to eradicating environmentally damaging pests and weeds. In this financial year we awarded \$2.7 million through the community grants program to 98 projects to enable them to undertake this important and crucial work throughout the state.

It always has been important to the government that those community groups are supported and helped to grow through not only the community grants process, but also the assistance the State NRM Office can provide. Last year we announced that we would continue to fund and support the state NRM program to the tune of some \$24 million over three years. About 80 per cent of that funding, or \$19.2 million, will be contributed by royalties for regions, which reflects the level of work being undertaken by community groups in regional areas of Western Australia. Consideration of a business case to secure that funding is well advanced. That is the advice I have from the Minister for Agriculture and Food. Once the business case is approved by cabinet, the State NRM Office will initiate the grants process.

Mr C.J. Tallentire interjected.

Mr W.R. MARMION: These are notes that have been provided by the Minister for Agriculture and Food, so I cannot take interjections. I am just providing this information to the house. I might be able to answer some questions, but the Minister for Environment, who is actually one of the signatories to the program, along with the Minister for Water and the Minister for Agriculture and Food, might be able to answer some specific detailed questions or interjections that the member might like to throw across the chamber.

As I said, once the business case is approved by cabinet, the State NRM Office will initiate the grants process. The State NRM Office is in regular contact with many of these community groups and the time lines that the member is concerned about, I understand, have been communicated to them. It is worth noting that once approved, that \$24 million will provide a more secure funding stream for community groups right across the state. Not only that, the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council has been very clear on this point: this funding will be completely focused on community groups to help them tackle issues that are priorities for our state's natural resources. In that regard, an overall strategy has been approved by the Minister for Agriculture and Food. That is very important. The funding for these projects falls under an overarching strategic plan for the whole state so that there are no overlaps or gaps. There will be a focus on building capacity within these community groups to help them with technical assistance and the governance that they need to be successful. This financial year we estimate those community groups contributed in the order of \$6 million of

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their own time and effort. That shows how important these groups are because that is the value we place on their time and effort. That contribution is worth supporting through a properly designed and considered business case.

So that members are aware of some of the valuable work done by community groups that this government has supported, some of which the member for Gosnells has outlined, here is a snapshot of projects that I want to bring to the house's attention. An amount of \$50 000 has been provided to help track and eradicate feral pigs in Chittering Valley. This will help protect the natural assets of the area, which includes valuable native species such as the yam. There is also \$30 000 to help bushland in Parkerville, Stoneville and Mt Helena recover following devastating fires and to help allow native species regenerate, both plants and wildlife; \$25 000 will help teach our next generation of environmental scientists and volunteers about how to control dieback, as the member for Gosnells mentioned, caused by *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, through an education package for primary school students; and \$40 000 will help the Bardi Jawi women rangers in the Kimberley collect native seeds to create a seed bank. The funding will also help train and support Indigenous community groups establish a nursery so that local native plants can be used to revegetate the land.

In the member for Gosnells' electorate, the government has provided an \$11 000 grant for the revegetation of Mary Carroll Lake. This project builds on previous grants projects and aims to increase biodiversity and create habitat for native flora and fauna by revegetating the islands within that lake. Added to this is the thousands of dollars to fund numerous projects to control everything from weeds of national significance to eradicate introduced predators and cacti. There are projects aimed at saving vulnerable species—one of my favourites—such as the western ground parrot. The notes I have say that there are only 150 in existence. When I was Minister for Environment there were 200. It is a real worry if we have lost 50.

Mr W.J. Johnston: The new minister is not doing a good job!

Mr A.P. Jacob: I will address that.

Mr W.R. MARMION: It is very hard to count. There is a margin of error in how those numbers are counted.

Mr A.P. Jacob: The minister will be glad to know we have established a breeding program now to ensure we get back the populations.

Mr W.R. MARMION: That is fantastic. Well done, minister. The government is working on that one. Hopefully in two years' time those numbers will be double. Maybe we will get up to the 1 000 mark by 2020.

Without going through any more projects, I think both sides of the house understand that the NRM program is a fantastic program to fund. The state leverages so much money out of what we put in. It is great for the community. The groups also deliver community spirit. A couple of groups in the western suburbs that I see do some fantastic jobs not only in suburbs in my electorate, but also in the electorate of Cottesloe.

To provide more figures, the following amounts were allocated to the state NRM program: in the 2014–15 budget, \$9 million was allocated to 140 projects, and in the 2013–14 year, \$15 million was allocated to 171 projects.

To conclude my comments, I will give an update. As members know, there is a business case requirement with the royalties for regions program, which is signed off by cabinet. Apparently, that has been prepared for a \$19.2 million NRM grant bid. I understand that has been prepared and is on its way through the process.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: It was promised over a year ago.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I do not know where it is. I am reading from the notes provided by the Minister for Agriculture and Food. I cannot really comment on any interjections. If the member wants me to tell him what the minister has provided me, I will.

This is currently with the Department of Regional Development—now the member for Gosnells knows where it is—for due diligence and submission for cabinet approval. The royalties for regions business case review process is rigorous and requires due diligence to ensure funds are spent appropriately and efficiently. That is what the opposition demands, and so do we. The Economic and Expenditure Reform Committee also requested a high-level strategy to guide investment in the state NRM grants program. The Western Australian natural resource management strategy was prepared by the NRM senior officers group and approved by the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Ken Baston, fairly recently—on 16 June. The recommended priorities for state government investment in NRM community activities are on-ground local community action and improving community capacity, including project governance. These priorities were developed with input from community groups through the state Natural Resource Management Office, which is located within the Department of Agriculture and Food WA. Once the business case is approved by cabinet, the NRMO will initiate the grants process. The member will realise this is a new state NRM grants program. When new NRM programs were

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initiated by the commonwealth government, such as the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and the Caring for our Country program, there were similar delays in approvals and calls for grants. It is important that we do not fast-track this and take away the importance of carrying out due diligence and cabinet sign-off.

In terms of the motion moved by the member for Gosnells, I think that the Barnett government should be congratulated for its commitment to the NRM program. When I was Minister for Environment I got nothing but pats on the back from not only all the groups in my electorate, but also all the groups in every other electorate. I go back to the western ground parrot program; it is really important that we support that. All the community groups in Albany and at Cape Arid National Park really appreciate the strong commitment that the Liberal-National government has to the preservation of the environment.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington) [4.56 pm]: I am happy to contribute to this debate. I rise to support the member for Gosnells in his resolution that this house condemns the Barnett government for its failure to fund natural resource management groups in a timely and adequate manner. I was very surprised by the Minister for Finance's contribution to this debate. As he said in his contribution, I understand that all he was doing was reading out the briefing note provided to him by the Minister for Agriculture and Food. I would have imagined that after 12 months, the Minister for Agriculture and Food would have been able to make a decision on these funding arrangements. In his briefing, the minister was able to specify all the great things that are done by the natural resource management groups and clearly, by implication, how essential it is that those groups receive funding. But, somehow or other, after 12 months the minister's briefing note did not include anything about actually delivering funds to the groups.

Before I go any further I want to return to a comment made by the member for Gosnells. It is important to understand the implications for these groups not knowing whether their projects will be funded. Even before they get the money, they need to plan. One of the most important pieces in that planning is to order the tube stock that they are going to use on their projects. The plants, whether it is trees, grasses, sedges or whatever it is that they are going to plant, need to grow in a natural cycle. That natural cycle has nothing to do with funding arrangements and it has nothing to do with the dates on a calendar; it has to do with the natural progression of the seasons. Because the government has not been able to give advice to these groups about whether their projects will be funded or not, they have not been able to order the stock that they need to get the volunteers to work on the ground. This is not a 12-month delay; it is a two-year delay, because these projects cannot get the plants they need to do their work on the ground that the government has said, through the Minister for Finance, has been so valuable. There is nothing the government can do—the business case of these things does not matter. It is about the natural progression of the seasons, and if that is not done, there is no alternative. The stock the groups need cannot be grown other than by being put through natural processes of the environment. There is only a limited number of suppliers for these plants that the groups use, and this limited number of suppliers needs to be confident that they will have the orders for the plants before they will spend their money—as they are small businesses—to do all the work required to grow that stock. It is not like just walking down to Bunnings, buying a couple of native plants and taking them home to plant in the garden. These are major projects with hundreds and often thousands of plants being planted on these sites chosen by the natural resource management on-ground groups. This is a major problem.

I want to quote an email I received from one of those groups in the electorate of Cannington. As the member for Gosnells so kindly pointed out, the Canning River Regional Park is the advert for these local groups who have worked over 10 or 15 years, some for 20 years, to raise the quality of that regional park. They work in cooperation with government agencies and the City of Canning, but the real grunt, the real difference, is made by those volunteer groups using that maxim that for every \$1 invested by the public in those groups through volunteer labour and effort, there is a \$7 return—there is another \$7 of effort. Part of the email from one of these groups states —

The issue at hand is stalled State NRM funding release of the next round of committed funding. Every community Landcare group relies in a large or small way, directly or indirectly, on the WA State NRM Program funding.

In the May 2014 Budget the State NRM Program allocation was some \$24million for the next three years.

The next round of funding has not been finalised apparently due to delays at senior levels within the Dept of Agriculture, even though the detailed program was developed and submitted by the State NRM Office early in 2015.

Our State Government through Minister Baston MLC made the funding commitment 12 MONTHS AGO!

Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Lisa Baker; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr Shane Love; Mr Terry Waldron; Mr David Templeman; Mr Albert Jacob

I read further —

This funding has already been budgeted—it's only a matter State Cabinet being given the opportunity to approve the program and meet the commitments of Minister Baston MLC Minister for Agriculture, food and fisheries

So, the organisation is pointing out that the government has already allocated the funding, it has already put it into the budget, not even this year, but last year, and so it is only about allocating the funds and getting on with the program. The email continues —

... State NRM Office This office and its team need to have an assured future as they have been very successfully delivering and managing State NRM funds for many years and the mold should not be altered in our opinion.

The State NRM Office is separate from the Dept of Agriculture and must remain independent and not be absorbed or become part of the Department of Agriculture core business and daily operations. This is what we are hearing in the community.

That refers to the threat that the NRM will be absorbed. It is interesting that if anyone goes to www.nrm.wa.gov.au, the government's NRM website, there is a link there to a media release from the Minister for Environment—but there is nothing; the website is not available. That raises an interesting question: has the government made the decision to shut down the state NRM office but simply not put out the media release? Otherwise, why is the website no longer available? Why is it taking over a year to make a decision to allocate funds off the budget to the community so the community can get on and do the hard work on-ground—not through media release, but through sweat equity in raising the standards of these important catchments? I continue with the email —

SNRMO —

The State Natural Resource Management Office —

has built excellent relationships with community Landcare groups over a number of years. The funding that is administered for Landcare generates the well known figure of \$3-7 for each \$1 of public money, and the environmental and social outcomes and benefits are enormous and most importantly the process is user(community groups) friendly and fully accountable with independent auditing for each grant upon acquittal. It will not be done better if the Government department gets a hold of it in our opinion.

...

This State NRM money for ...

The group in question —

has provided funding for 5 projects in the last four years and it has allowed this good funding model to generate many more value added benefits and stakeholder bringing additional support to ... the ... community and ... Group.

Members can see that is what is being said by the people on the ground. It is interesting that in his contribution on behalf of the Minister for Agriculture and Food, the Minister for Finance did not go to any of the issues being raised by these groups in Western Australia. I point out that the Department of Agriculture and Food website says that the NRMs were set up in 2003 and asks users to click on a link—www.nrm.wa.gov.au. I went to the DAFWA website, I clicked on the link on that website to this other government website and it said “site not found”. What is happening with this state NRM office? Is the government surreptitiously closing it down and bringing it back into the Department of Agriculture and Food? As I said by interjection to the Minister for Finance, he was able to charm some of the groups when he was Minister for Environment, which sets him apart from the current Minister for Environment who is not seen as being across the detail of the hard work that has been put in by these on-the-ground groups.

The core of my electorate is on the Canning River and, as I say, the Canning River Regional Park is an outstanding piece of community infrastructure. It has a high standard because of the actions not just of successive state governments and the City of Canning, but more importantly the volunteers who spend their weekends in the park doing the work. After the fires, it was the volunteer groups that went into the park to prevent the spread of weeds; it was the volunteer groups that went into the park to plant native vegetation and restore it; and it was the volunteer groups that over those 10 and 20-year periods have been working away to change drains from being fast running outlets for refuse to being natural environments that slow down the flow of water and allow sediments to be removed before they get into the river. We have to thank professional organisations like the South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare—SERCUL—which has worked and continues to work so hard, but needs certainty. As

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the member for Gosnells pointed out, the Minister for Environment has already cancelled the small grants program, and the minister also, of course, cancelled the community environment awards after he asked everybody to nominate for them. I point out the volunteer groups that are doing on ground work alongside SERCUL like the Canning River Regional Park Volunteers, Wilson Wetlands Action Group, Banister Creek Catchment Group, Friends of Queens Park Bushland and the Friends of the Brixton Street Wetlands. These groups are out there on the weekends giving up their spare time to make a difference. Of course, they need funding from government. To the extent that the government funds these programs, it should get some credit. But the problem is that it is the multiplier; it is the benefit provided by those volunteer groups that really translates that small amount of money funded by government and makes it have a real impact on the ground in the community. It is bizarre that it takes 12 months for a government to make a decision—that it takes all this time for the government to actually decide to spend the money. The money has already been allocated, it just needs to spend it. I do not understand why it would allocate the money in the budget and then not spend it. It does not make any sense. It is not helping the environment or these important community groups, and the government needs to properly explain itself. It was very worrying listening to the Minister for Finance reading his briefing note because there was actually no commitment to make the funds available. These are major issues for the local groups. It is not good enough for the government to get up and go through what it did in the past, rather than what it is doing now and into the future. If it is happy to put out the media releases and claim the credit for the allocation of funding, why is it not prepared to actually get away from the media release and get on with the real work that is actually not done by the government or minister but by these on-the-ground groups out in the community with all the work and sweat equity that comes from those groups?

I will make an observation. The member for Gosnells highlighted the history of the Landcare and natural resource management process, and there was the fact that it was partially funded out of the sale of Telstra all those years ago by the Howard government. This was actually an opportunity for the Liberal Party to provide some green credentials. The problem for the Liberal Party, of course, is that the green credentials have been trashed because the local groups can see that the Liberal Party in government in Western Australia is not prepared to do the work needed to get the funds out the door to these groups so that they can do their work. How could any minister think he could take over 12 months to make a decision given all the negative impacts I have already outlined, such as the groups not being able to properly plan or order the stock they need to do the work on the ground and that they have probably missed this year's opportunity to do plantings because they have not been able to tell the suppliers the stock and have it made available to them in the future? The government has messed this up, and that is why the government needs to be condemned. It needs to be condemned because it is not managing this properly.

This will be really interesting. As I say, the Minister for Finance, when he read out the briefing note in such a charming manner, did not actually deal with the issues in front of us. I bet you, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr N.W. Morton), that that is what the next minister will do when he gets up to speak. He will not tell us when this decision will be made and on what date the groups are going to get the funding and can actually start doing the work they need to on the ground. It is no good just reciting some glib lines that have been written by somebody else. The member actually has to do the work to be a minister. That is what ministers need to do; they need to deliver the work on behalf of the community.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is not about the media release or standing in front of something to get a photograph; it is about making sure that the environment of Western Australia is being protected. It is making sure that the groups out there in the community have the support they need to do the work that is so valuable in our community. The oxygenation plant beside Nicholson Road bridge is, of course, very welcome because of the lack of flow of the river, and we all understand that the oxygen levels in the Canning River are not high enough. If a patient has had heart failure and their heart is not pumping enough oxygen through the blood, it is well understood that if they go into hospital they get a little mask on their face that provides oxygen, or if someone has a severe fainting spell and a first aider is there that person can end up with an oxygen mask on their face. So, instead of getting, say, 20 per cent of oxygen out of the atmosphere, they get, say, 40 per cent of oxygen because they are having the oxygen pumped directly into their lungs. Because that person's heart is not working efficiently enough for whatever reason—heart failure or whatever—the extra oxygen provided into their lungs compensates for the fact that their heart is not working properly. That is what the oxygenation plant at Nicholson Road bridge is doing; it is part of a life support system to stop the absolute collapse of a river. It is not a solution to the problems of the river.

Mr A.P. Jacob: So what is the solution?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The solution is to, over a long period of time, fund these types of groups so that we improve the standard of the catchment. It is about banning phosphorus from fertilisers in the wheatbelt. That is the solution to these problems.

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Mr A.P. Jacob: How does that bring the rain back?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It is about having a long-term plan so that we do not need mechanical aids to keep the patient alive. If someone is in hospital on oxygen and their heart is working so feebly that they need a constant supply of oxygen, they will not be sent home; they will be kept there and stabilised. Sure, if someone has emphysema they might stick them at home with an oxygen bottle in a little handcart and they can walk along and go shopping with it with tubes up their nose while they run around with their little oxygen bottle. Of course, that is good for the emphysema patient, but it does not actually treat the emphysema, it is making sure the person does not die. That is what the oxygenation plant at Nicholson Road bridge is doing; it is overcoming the fact that the system is not functioning properly. The way to solve the problem is to make the system function. Yes, it has taken us 150 years to damage the system to the state it is now in, but it might take 30 or 50 years or longer to recover the system back to where we want it to be. But it cannot then be argued that the oxygenation plant that is keeping the patient alive is the solution. No; all we are doing is keeping the patient alive while we work to recover the system, because unless we recover the system we are always going to need to do something else—there is always going to be one more problem—because the system will continue to work against the interests of the river.

The minister says, “Oh well, we have declining rainfall.”

Mr A.P. Jacob: No, I agree broadly with that.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Of course we have declining rainfall. Why do we have declining rainfall? That would be an interesting story. It would be great for the Liberal Party in Western Australia to acknowledge why we have declining rainfall. Member for Southern River, it is global warming caused by anthropogenic carbon emissions. That is why we have global warming. Every reputable scientist in the world has explained that, so it would be great for the Liberal Party in Western Australia to say that. The government of Western Australia advertises on television on behalf of the Water Corporation to tell us that we have declining rainfall, but I would love to see the Liberal minister tell us about the cause of that declining rainfall; it is because of the anthropogenic contribution to carbon emissions. That is what is causing it.

Mr A.P. Jacob interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Why does the minister not step up and admit that?

Mr A.P. Jacob: That is the climate change policy that the member for Gosnells just read out. That is exactly what we have done.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I remember the debate here on the geosequestration bill, when a number of members made contributions and interjections saying that there is no such thing as anthropogenic climate change. It would be great to see the Liberal Party come to a landing on that. It should tell us what its views are and whether or not it thinks these are important issues. I invite the Liberal Party to do that and tell us what it is going to do about it. When the Labor Party was in government, we had a minister for climate change and now we do not. Why is that? It is probably a reflection of the fact that the Liberal Party does not think climate change is important; that is my view, otherwise it would have kept that role. Let us look at these things and the river systems. Let us get the phosphorus out of the catchment. Of course, we know that the phosphorus is going to be there for a long time, because it has taken a century to get all the phosphorus out of the fertilisers and into the soil, but let us not keep putting more in. At the time of the 2008 election, the Labor Party had an agreement with the manufacturers of the fertilisers to ask the government to ban the phosphorus in the fertilisers on the basis that none of the fertiliser companies would do it unless they all did it, and the only way we can guarantee for them all to do it is to ban it. We need to ban it for not only the metropolitan area, but also where most of the load comes from, which is the wheatbelt. If we do not stop putting more phosphorus into the system at the top, guess what? It is not going to stop going to the bottom. That is just the way systems work. I am no climate scientist, riverine scientist or geologist, but it just makes sense: if we put the stuff in at the top, it comes out at the bottom. It is called gravity; it is amazing. I do not understand why that is such a complex issue. It is just commonsense. One does not have to be very bright to work that out, so the minister should get on and do his job. He should do what should have happened years ago and set a date for when phosphorus is going to be removed and after which there will be no more phosphorus put into the top of the system.

The government spent \$330 million creating 14 000 hectares of agricultural land in the Kimberley through Ord stage 2. Imagine if it had spent \$330 million dealing with salinity in the wheatbelt. Every Landcare group in the wheatbelt should understand that the government made a deliberate decision not to provide funding to their work but, instead, funded the creation of 14 000 hectares of agricultural land in the Kimberley. Is it five million hectares in the wheatbelt?

Mr C.J. Tallentire: It is 18 million in total and potentially six million will go to salinity.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Eighteen million hectares of land in the wheatbelt, and the government crows about creating 14 000 hectares in the Kimberley for \$330 million! Politics is about choices. It was interesting to read today in an article in *The Australian Financial Review* comments by the Productivity Commissioner, Peter Harris. According to the article, he made the point that —

If politicians made their decisions based on hard analysis, they would opt for hundreds of smaller investments over one or two big bang projects.

I endorse Mr Harris's comments. The government is happy to crow about \$330 million for 14 000 hectares in the Kimberley, but it has missed the opportunity to make a difference for the 18 million hectares of farmland in the wheatbelt that we already have. It could have spent that money down here, dealing with the problems we are discussing today, but it chose not to. We can spend the money only once, and the Liberal government of this state chose not to spend that money on the work that is needed in improving productivity in the wheatbelt; it chose instead to make a tiny, uneconomic contribution to land in the Kimberley, and it has not been able to make an economic case for any agricultural production in the Kimberley.

We all remember the rice bags that were thrown around this chamber during the first term of the Liberal government by the member for Pilbara; I have talked before about the questions on notice on that matter. In the end, the minister just ignored the questions on notice because he was so embarrassed by what had happened up in the Kimberley. Not only was it not as productive as land elsewhere in the state, but also the rice ended up being given away to Papua New Guinea because there was no market for it in Australia. In the end, the second and third crops were all eaten by pests and birds, and what a shock, because 30 years ago we tried to grow rice in the Kimberley and the exact same thing happened! Where is the planning? As the Productivity Commissioner said, if politicians made their decisions based on hard analysis, they would opt for hundreds of smaller investments over one or two big bang projects. Where was the hard analysis on spending \$330 million in the Kimberley instead of making a contribution down here in the catchment areas of the wheatbelt, where most of our agricultural productivity is?

This is a real challenge for the member for Moore. Where does he stand on investment in the agricultural sector? Does he want to make a big difference for the farmers in his electorate, who are struggling with the ravages of environmental change and all the implications of that, or does he like these fancy projects that make no difference to the agricultural survivability of this country and will make effectively no contribution to the amount of food we produce in Australia? Fourteen thousand hectares is just ridiculous. I think the minister once said—not that it would ever do it—that the Kimberley might one day produce 50 000 tonnes of rice. He should go and have a look at the millions and millions of tonnes of rice grown in other countries; I do not have the figures in front of me, but 50 000 tonnes would not even be one-tenth of one per cent of the amount of rice grown in Indonesia. In fact, it would not even be one one-hundredth of one per cent of the rice grown in China; it is just irrelevant in terms of global food supply, yet the government puts out media releases and spends \$330 million when it could have actually taken action here in our catchments in the wheatbelt and in the metropolitan area to make a real difference to the long-term survivability of these systems. Instead of just adding an oxygenation plant to keep the patient alive, it could have actually done some work that, over the real long-term, over a generational time frame, could have worked to recover the systems that we have taken 150 years to damage.

MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands) [5.26 pm]: I rise in support of this motion. I have worked with my electorate on the Swan River for many years and, as members know, about eight or nine kilometres of the river run through my electorate, which is on one side of the river; the other side of the river is other people's business—Belmont, for instance, and the like. The Swan River has been a subject of great interest for all of my residents since I was originally elected. Members will remember that Dr Judy Edwards preceded me in the electorate of Maylands and was, of course, the environment minister for some time. She championed the old-growth forest projects and other things in her day, and did a remarkable job. She was around to see a number of really innovative policies brought in by the Labor Party. Going on her comments, in 2001 she was involved in bringing in the riverbank restoration program under Labor. She said that the state's finances at the time were tight and that she had to work very hard to get that money released for the riverbank restoration program. She was also around in 2006 when the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act came into effect. Again, that legislation played a significant role in developing strategies to directly address the health of the river.

Since I have been elected, it has been my practice to run regular forums in my electorate around the health of the Swan River. Over the years it has been very evident to me that it is very important to not only the people with whom I work every day but also to Western Australia. It is an iconic part of our state. It is a remarkable river and when we look at some of the other rivers around the country, I suppose we are quite lucky because it has been quite healthy compared with some I can think of in other states. Nevertheless, programs such as the natural resource management program have been developed and, along the years, gently nurtured. I think the minister's government

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introduced the NRM in 2009. It was a good program with great promise. However, it replaced some projects, and that was sad because every time a new set of ideas are brought in with a different energy we end up losing lots of people in the transition. We lost volunteers when the change was happening. Nevertheless, I give credit where credit is due: the NRM strategy was a good idea, in my view, and has delivered some very positive outcomes.

We have heard from our shadow environment minister about some of the good things the state's natural resource management program is meant to be doing. It is meant to be helping our biodiversity, biosecurity, water quality and land-use planning in Western Australia. Of most relevance to me, after water quality, of course—maybe before water quality—is the link that this program has to the community. It is simply impossible to address the health of the Swan River unless we involve the people who live alongside it, work with it and recreate around it and on it. It is just not possible to address some of the endemic problems without that level of engagement. The NRM program is meant to do that. It has been trucking along for few years doing quite a good job. The community has gradually built some confidence in what has been happening and developed a sense of commitment to it. As a result, the community has put up its hand and formed really positive groups in my community, and has been making use of this grant program. People on the ground are ready and waiting to move forward on projects. Some have already started with funding from previous years and are waiting for the next round to be approved so they can continue their good work. Some of the challenges they work on in the community area are weed infestations, particularly around some of the wetlands that run through my electorate. The Eric Singleton bird sanctuary is one, but just off that is the Baigup Wetlands, a very sensitive area, on which an intrepid group of volunteers work. A remarkable group of people led by Penny Lee and others spend an inordinate amount of their spare time working on planting sedge and weeding the Baigup Wetlands of kikuyu, couch, blackberry, bridle creeper, Arum Lily and Watsonia weed—you name it. They are attacking it with vigour and getting on top of it. They do fantastic work. The motivation to start that work and continue is the knowledge that the government is supporting them and recognising what they are bringing to this incredibly fragile environment. The government should want to support their work and get behind them and help them to achieve great things. At the moment we are seeing real erosion of their confidence in this program and that is not to be sneezed at. That is a very serious situation. Groups who have received natural resource management funding in the past and who have been working to address some of these issues are at sea at the moment. They do not know what is happening. They have volunteers in my electorate but in many electorates there are paid staff. If they are not funded through this program, they are funded through other areas, but they are waiting to get on with activities.

I have heard other members talk about the mere planning side of things. When a group of people put in a submission for funding, requirements are attached to it that need to be ordered in advance so that there is a good lead time to get projects going, not the least of which is healthy tube stock. Volunteers need to be kept engaged while they are waiting for those kinds of things to arrive. We see quite clearly that the government is taking away certainty from this group of people. I heard from the minister representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food that they are in train; they will be released at some stage, which is very good. I am looking at my colleague the member for Moore who does some very good work in this area. Several people have acknowledged his work.

The Swan River flows through my electorate. The riverbank restoration program was cut by \$1 million in, I think, the second year this government was elected, in 2009. The minister should go back and have a look.

Mr A.P. Jacob: I doubled it last year, member for Maylands.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Well done; he made up for the difference then and that is a very good thing. If he cut it by \$1 million back in —

Mr A.P. Jacob: I am not sure that was the case.

Ms L.L. BAKER: It was the case. I can give the minister the background to it. Does he remember the Burswood Casino levy?

Mr A.P. Jacob: Yes.

Ms L.L. BAKER: That was an interesting creature, because it was set up to direct funds to the restoration of the river.

Mr A.P. Jacob: It still does.

Ms L.L. BAKER: It was about \$1.9 million. Does he know what it is at the moment?

Mr A.P. Jacob: I think around \$1 million from that fund, and the government has put in \$1 million a year.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Yes, it was \$1.9 million in total, so it is about \$2 million. Before the member for Ocean Reef was the minister, admittedly—I think he had only just been elected, as I had been—I remember very clearly that

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cuts to, I think, the waste levy were proposed, as were cuts in environment spending, as well as cuts to spending in other areas, including the Swan River Trust funding. Some of that funding was redirected to departments to help prop up full-time equivalents at that time. That is going back a bit now. In the subsequent year, the recreational use of the Swan River study was undertaken, which looked at the impact on the river of boat speeds and tidal flows. A number of studies on the health of the river have been conducted by various universities and experts from around Australia. They have looked at all sorts of issues impacting on the river such as the nitrate phosphate load, organophosphates, heavy metals, chemical content and run-off into the river. I could go on listing them. Reports were also done on the dolphins in the river. It was a very topical issue because there had been a number of dolphin deaths in the river, so work was done to identify what had caused that. All of these studies are valuable in planning the future of the river. However, we also need the resources on the ground to help the community respond to some of those challenges.

I think the recreational use report is the most recent report I am aware of about the river as it flows through my electorate. It looked at impacts from boat use, skiing, diving, fishing and rowing, which I was doing for a while until, unfortunately, the early mornings got to me, not to mention a lack of balance on the scull boats. The rowing clubs on the Swan River as it flows through the electorate are very well frequented. They have a very strong membership base. A couple of high schools have their rowing headquarters along the riverbank. The recreational use review looked at all those aspects of the river. It recommended lowering boat speeds and much more effective policing of those boat speeds. That had not been implemented last time I checked, but I have been a bit recalcitrant; I have not checked this year. I will check to see whether boat speeds have been lowered and are being policed effectively.

What is critical for me in this discussion is making sure that the money flows through to community groups. I want to bring members back to that point. I have worked with community groups all my life and I have seen what happens when we build up intellectual property in a not-for-profit group. We build up the energy and the motivation, we get people to come regularly to meetings, there is a good structure, the governance is set up, and there is a regular program of activities. However, there comes a time when we cannot just meet and have coffee and pull up weeds but need to enact the plans that we have put in place to correct what is going wrong on the edge of the river. For example, we need to buy the tubestock and plant it out, and we need to pick up rubbish. Those things will not wait. We therefore need this funding to flow through far more quickly than the government is doing.

For all not-for-profits or community groups, for every \$1 that the government puts into a program, the return on investment is, on average, \$5 million in terms of the resources, the labour and the valuable contributions and inputs from community members. It is essential that we consider that. I hope that when the business cases come out for this, the Maylands electorate will be represented in some of the funding for the Perth NRM. I have looked at the report for the state NRM program for 2013–14. Not many projects were funded in the electorate of Maylands, which I was a bit sad about. However, that does not surprise me. When I began my contribution, I said that if the funding does not flow to community groups and they do not appear to be getting support from the government of the day, we lose the motivation of those community groups. It is fair to say that a few years ago when I went to the Riverbank restoration program awards night and the grants were announced, several grants were given to restoration work along the riverbank from Maylands almost up to the border of Bassendean and back down the river a bit. However, that has not been the case in the last few years. I am concerned about that, because I think we are losing some of the energy and motivation from the community groups.

I want to reflect also on the work that is being done by the most strong and vibrant non-government organisation around the environment that I have in my electorate. That is Environment House, run by Brenda Conochie and a range of incredible people who have a huge presence and work tirelessly to address environmental degradation. Environment House does amazing work. Environment House operates from a property located on the border of Eric Singleton Reserve that it leases from the council at a peppercorn rent. People can go there and buy any number of products that help address environmental degradation, ranging from washing products, garden products, seeds and organic products, to waste disposal systems.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L.L. BAKER: Five years ago, the staff and volunteers at Environment House were ticking along nicely and doing amazing work, particularly with vulnerable people who were in crisis around their utility bills, by helping to deliver what was at the time the hardship utility grant scheme.

Mr D.J. Kelly: It is a fabulous organisation.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Yes, it is. However, members may remember that back when Hon Christian Porter was the Treasurer, he announced that the hardship utility grant was a load of nonsense and he would not be funding it anymore.

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Several members interjected.

Ms L.L. BAKER: I can tell members I did not feel like giving him any kind of hugs on that day! I remember it well. I think that was one of his less glorious moments.

Along with the loss of that program went 16 trained environmental auditors at Environment House. These people were trained to work with people who were in crisis. They had a big power bill or gas bill, and they could not cope. They were struggling. Of course financial counselling was a key element in this as well, but it was all wrapped up in one package at Environment House. This team of trained auditors would work with individual clients to help correct what was going wrong. I remember one story in particular about an auditor who worked with a woman who had a small property. She was an older woman—a pensioner—and she found herself with thousands of dollars' worth of electricity bills. She was living alone in her house and had no idea why she was incurring this kind of expenditure on electricity. The auditor—it was Alan Ben, I think—spent a whole day with her at her house, trying to work out what was going on. She was quite distraught, as of course we would be if we owed thousands of dollars and were on a pension. He eventually went to the outbuildings and found some old stables that had a hot water heater that was faulty and was running 24/7. She had not been in the stables for 30 years because she did not have horses anymore and they were not part of her vicinity, so she had not even thought about the hot water heater. He was able to fix the problem and save that woman from incurring further debt. That may sound like a small thing, but it is very important. Environment House ran 16 energy efficiency auditors, and they delivered an incredibly valuable service to help the most vulnerable people in my electorate, and outside my electorate as well, manage the cost of living. However, unfortunately the Treasurer of the day decided to cut that program, and all those skills and all that expertise has gone—disappeared—and that service is not there anymore. I used to be able to put out to my community the offer—it sounds as though I am stalking them—that I would send an energy auditor around to help them manage their bills through Environment House. It is an amazing program, but it has gone compliments of the Barnett government's first round of budget cuts back in 2009–10. That was a very sad day.

Environment House is still there, right on the edge of Eric Singleton Reserve and doing wonderful work in my community. It still has volunteers and incredibly dedicated people working there. However, I think it would be fair to say that it is not the strong, vibrant and thriving organisation that it was several years ago when it had access to positive government programs aimed at helping the most vulnerable to do better in managing their homes and their lives. I am hopeful that Environment House will put in for a grant. I do not know whether that will be the case, because I have not seen some of the staff and the volunteers there for a while. The last time I was there, the minister had just announced additional funding for Eric Singleton Bird Sanctuary and for the water filtration system that has been put in place. That is well-nigh time. We should have done it. So, well done for doing that. Environment House is right in the middle of that, waiting to see how it goes. The organisation has not done as well as it should have since the present government was elected. I level a very clear accusation at the government for this, because that wonderful not-for-profit lost a huge amount of support when the funding for the hardship utility grants program was discontinued. It has really struggled to keep its head above water, and it is only because of the incredible dedication of the people involved as volunteers in the environment movement that it continues to do its good work to this day. I encourage all the wonderful people in Environment House to stay put. I hope that we have seen the last of the cuts to a range of environmental programs in Western Australia.

I hope this government does not take money out of the community-based environment groups in my electorate or anyone else's electorate to try to fill the budget holes of its own making. I cannot tell the government how important it is to hurry up and sort this problem out. It has already created an undue delay for the groups waiting to pick up the reins and move forward on these projects. It is overdue. It is well-nigh time that the government got on with this and announced that the funding is still available—I am hoping it is \$24 million—after the lengthy process of reapplication, and too much red tape. As a conservative government that prides itself on trying to cut red tape, I am not sure what it was thinking when it demanded all these things. Transparency, yes, but not all the red tape these community groups have been put through in trying to access \$24 million of urgently needed natural resource management funding.

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean) [5.52 pm]: I rise to speak in favour of this important motion put forward by the shadow Minister for Environment, the member for Gosnells. I have a number of very hardworking community groups in my electorate, and I will say a bit more about them in a few minutes. We are really talking here about this government's lack of support for local environment groups. I do not think this government takes protecting the environment seriously at all. The government is keen, when the opportunity arises for a good news story, to send the Minister for Environment out to cuddle a native animal or anything that he can get his hands on, but when it comes to doing the hard work —

Ms S.F. McGurk: No native animal is safe!

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Mr D.J. KELLY: Yes, no native animal is safe when the minister is around!

When it actually comes to placing environmental protection at the heart of what it does, this government is really missing in action, largely because many members on the other side of the house do not believe in protecting the environment.

Mr T.K. Waldron interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! The member for Wagin.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The member for Wagin has gone to the backbench because he is putting himself out to pasture.

Quite frankly, many on the government side do not see protecting the environment as a priority. There are some quite extreme views on the other side of the house. Let us not go into the view of the member for Southern River on climate change. Quite frankly, there are many in the government who just do not see protecting —

Mr S.K. L'Estrange: What's your view on coal mining?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Is Kate Lamont interjecting on me?

Mr S.K. L'Estrange: That's very droll, but what is your view on coal mining?

Mr D.J. KELLY: The ghost of Kate Lamont —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Churchlands, he is not asking for interjections, but, member for Bassendean, if you direct commentary at the member, it is very difficult for me to protect you.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Thank you very much, Mr Acting Speaker.

The Premier has made some bad decisions during his time as Premier, but he was spot on the money with his choice for the new member for Churchlands. Unfortunately, he could not get that choice through the Liberal Party machine, and we ended up with the current member for Churchlands.

Anyway, I will get back to the environment. One of the products of the lack of importance that this government places on the environment is what it has done to the state's natural resource management program. On 27 May 2014, the Minister for Agriculture and Food put out a press release proclaiming that \$24 million would be spent on the natural resource management plan over the next three years. The government would be using that money to support diverse projects carried out mostly by volunteers. In the press release, the minister said —

“This is good news for many diverse projects, most of which involve volunteers, which play a key role in ensuring the protection, restoration and sustainable use of Western Australia's natural resources, tackling threats to their condition and productivity,” —

The minister, Hon Ken Baston, went on to say —

“Since the program began in 2009, —

I think it was much earlier than that —

more than 180 groups and organisations throughout WA have achieved impressive results with the support of State NRM Program funds.

That was the promise. The press release continues —

Regional Development Minister Terry Redman said the program was made possible with the funding support of \$19.2million over three years from the State Government's Royalties for Regions program.

The Minister for Regional Development went on to sing the praises of the program. Two ministers came out in May 2014 and said what a great job the government was doing supporting local environment groups with \$24 million, and here we are in June 2015 and not a cent of the money has actually flowed to those community groups to protect the environment, as was promised.

I have had a bit of correspondence in my office from people who were expecting that money to flow, and they are bitterly disappointed. Before I go to this correspondence, I was in the Serpentine–Jarrahdale area the other day, and I spoke to a small business operator, a woman who runs a native nursery. She said that the failure of this government to support local environment groups in doing their work had really damaged her business. She was anticipating that, through this funding, local environment groups would come to her native nursery to purchase tube stock and the like to conduct their planting programs for this winter. That just has not happened, because the environment groups have not got the funding. The lack of support for this program has caused great pain for the environment groups, but it has also affected a lot of small businesses who would have benefited from that

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funding—the native nurseries who would have provided material for those local conservation groups to do their work. Small businesses are being hurt by this. We might say that just a few months more, just to get it right, is important, but because of the delay we will miss a whole 12 months of work, especially for replanting. Everybody knows that replanting is not done in the middle of summer. Planting is done now while there is rain to support the seedlings. By delaying it, the minister has missed a whole 12 months.

I want to refer to some correspondence my office has received. I received a letter from Bill Bennit, the board secretary of Warren Catchments Council. He sent me a copy of a letter that he had sent to Hon Ken Baston, Minister for Agriculture and Food; Fisheries. That letter is dated 11 June. I quote from that letter —

Dear Sir,

Warren Catchments Council ... has an enviable record of assisting local landholders—and to a large degree, public estate landholders—address environmental threats. These include control of invasive species (plant and animal), and improving biodiversity connectivity and resilience. WCC began as Manjimup LCDC and continues active involvement in innovative sustainable agriculture practices.

WCC's archives record over twenty five years' of education, awareness raising, community engagement and on-ground action in the protection and enhancement of our environment and in the sustainable use of agricultural resources. Local expertise built up over many years is an invaluable resource but the absence of grants greatly diminishes capacity to employ this knowledge.

Now we get to the point —

The current delays in releasing State NRM Office funds as budgeted in 2014/15 is placing the very existence of WCC under threat. Years of reduced allowance (10%) for administrative purposes is compromising the organisation's ability to maintain staff for adequate governance once office accommodation and IT lease are paid to Department of Water ...

WCC urges the Minister to adopt the program as presented by the State NRM Office and expedite the release of the budgeted funds. The application, assessment and contractual phases mean it will be many months before groups such as WCC have an opportunity to undertake vital work in our extensive region.

WCC is also concerned with the rumoured suggestion that the State NRMO is to be subsumed into the Department of Agriculture and Food.

He goes on to the second concern about the restructure and the potential loss of the independence of the state NRMO. Mr Bennit finishes off by saying —

The community-governed Warren Catchments Council urges the Minister to act on this matter.

He sent that letter to not only me but also Hon Colin Barnett, Hon Terry Redman, Hon Albert Jacob, Hon Mia Davies, Hon Nigel Hallett, Hon Robyn McSweeney, Hon Col Holt, Hon Barry House and to a number of opposition MPs.

Every point that the opposition makes in this motion is being echoed by the Warren Catchments Council. It has a 25-year history of work in this area. The very existence of the Warren Catchments Council is being threatened because the government cannot get its act together. It promised \$25 million in May 2014 but not a cent has flowed to groups such as the Warren Catchments Council. It is an absolute disgrace. The only excuse we have heard is because the bulk of the funding will now come from the royalties for regions program, the government has to go through some business case process that has not yet been completed. Yes, this money needs to be properly accounted and, yes, there needs to be a proper process, but the fact the government has put in a process that is so cumbersome that the money has not flowed shows that it is a failure.

The government has funded other projects through the royalties for regions program. I would love to see the business case when the government spent all that money on the Pelago apartments up north. I would love to see the business case for that. The now member for Pilbara was the candidate for the Pilbara and all of a sudden a huge amount of royalties for regions money was funded to underwrite the Pelago apartments in that electorate. Was that the business case for that expenditure of royalties for regions money? The government did that and that was a highly speculative and highly contentious project, clearly with an eye to the politics with the current member being the candidate at the time. The government got that through in sharpish time so that the project could be underwritten and up and running so that the current member for Pilbara could run around and promote it as part of his campaign to win the seat of Pilbara. It managed to do that with royalties for regions funds, but there are hundreds of local community groups hanging out and whose very existence is threatened because the

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government cannot put together what it is calling a business case to support it, even though it publicly announced the money back in May 2014. The contrast is staggering.

My electorate office also received correspondence from Paulina Wittwer who is the president of a country Landcare group. She wrote to me on 25 May and said —

Two matters have been brought to my attention via a group that I belong to. This matter concerns Landcare and State NRM funding.

As I understand it, budgeted funding from 2014 for Landcare funding has not yet been finalized. This is having serious and far-reaching effects on works in progress, plans and procedures for our all important environmental work around the state.

Therefore would you please request some action and an immediate release of the funding so that we can begin the process of applications, assessments, contracts, and finally ACTION —

She put “action” in capital letters. I think that shows a degree of frustration on her part —
for our 2015 programs.

This funding has already been budgeted, so I’m told,—it’s only a matter of State Cabinet being given the opportunity to approve the program and meet the commitments of the Minister for Agriculture.

Ms Wittwer goes on to raise a second issue about uncertainty around the tenure of the existing model of the state Natural Resource Management Office. I will not go into that. She is frightened that the independence of this organisation will be threatened. She finishes off by saying —

Don’t let the government eat its children. A strong Landcare movement is a strong country with an international reputation.

Please raise these matters at your next possible convenience.

I have raised those issues tonight in Parliament. Paulina’s comments repeat the frustrations that are out there in the community on this issue.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr D.J. KELLY: This echoes the frustration of the community about the lack of support from this government on environmental issues and support for these environmental groups.

I will finish with some comments about two local groups active in my electorate. One is the Bassendean Preservation Group, of which Steve McFarland is the current president. It does tremendous work repairing some of the damage we have done to our native environment. It is particularly active on the banks of the Swan River. I was with the group not last weekend but the weekend before when it did some planting to try to repair some erosion damage on the banks of the Swan River at Ashfield. It does a remarkable job. It has what is called the Grow Centre, where seedlings are propagated. For 2015 it has a target of 4 000 plants. It is an absolutely incredible effort from a volunteer group. There are a lot of very committed people who are part of that group, and of course, I have already mentioned Steve McFarland who is the current president. A lot of dedicated people are part of that group—we mention some people and we should mention others—and I want to mention Ted and Carlie Bentley who have been a part of a group for over 30 years. They were recognised by the Town of Bassendean recently for volunteering for over 30 years. They are an incredibly passionate couple who have done an enormous amount of work to help protect the environment. I was with Ted a few months back and he gave me a tour of the Grow Centre. He gave me a copy of every report, and there is a bundle of them, done on measures to protect the Swan River. That area of Ashfield Flats is prone to erosion and one of the problems is boat wash and the like. He has just done an amazing amount of work, and they do it all for nothing. They do not get any financial gain out of it, but they work tirelessly and have done for many years. The other group I finally want to mention is the Ashfield Community Action Network. It is not just an environmental group, it involves itself in a whole range of local issues, but it takes a keen interest in the Ashfield Flats and it has participated quite extensively in the planting and the like that has gone on, and works with the Bassendean Preservation Group. Lucy Bromell, who is the current president of AshfieldCAN does an outstanding job. There is a really good committee that supports her and I want to recognise their work.

Both of those groups have as one of the key focuses the Ashfield Flats. That is a Bush Forever site. One of the great frustrations is that although it is a Bush Forever site, there is no comprehensive management plan for that site. Most of that land is owned by the Western Australian Planning Commission and despite representation over a long time from the Town of Bassendean, the Town of Bayswater, the Bassendean Preservation Group and AshfieldCAN, this state government has refused to accept its responsibility and put in place a management plan

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for the Ashfield Flats. The WA Planning Commission simply says that it is effectively holding land until the government determines an end-user for it, and it will then be the end-user's responsibility to come up with a management plan. All the WAPC does is some basic maintenance, but it does not do any long-term environmental work to that land. I am glad the Minister for Environment is in the chamber, because the community would like the government to take its responsibilities seriously in respect of the Bush Forever site at the Ashfield Flats and determine who the end-user will be. If it is not to be the Planning Commission, it is probably not the appropriate end-user. If it is another entity, the government should transfer that land and put the money up in place so there can be a comprehensive management plan and the environmental values of that land can be properly protected and enhanced. At the moment they are not.

There is also, of course, the issue of bushfire management. There was recently a bushfire on the Ashfield Flats. That day we were very lucky that we did not lose houses on Hardy Road. The pergola of one house caught fire, but luckily, I think, a neighbour put it out. Had it not been for the helitankers that came in at the last minute, we could have seen in the middle of Perth a row of houses on Hardy Road go up. The residents quite rightly ask who is in charge of bushfire management on that piece of land. WAPC is the landowner and says it has put in place the bare minimum, the firebreaks, but it has not put in place a comprehensive plan for the whole site and residents are rightfully sceptical that the risk of fire affecting their homes coming from the Ashfield Flats is as low as it could possibly be. The risks can never completely be eliminated, but residents have a right to know that bush like that is being properly managed. The buck-passing that currently exists between the WAPC and other government agencies just means that the residents do not have that confidence. Imagine if there were half a dozen houses in the middle of the metropolitan area destroyed by fire that has come from government land. How embarrassing. It would be tragic for people who own the houses, but how embarrassing it would have been for the government. I have previously raised this with the Minister for Planning, but I also urge the Minister for Environment to take seriously not only the environmental and community values of Ashfield Flats, but also the safety aspect as well. I commend this motion to the house and I fully support the hard work that the member for Gosnells does in this area.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.18 pm]: I would like to make a brief contribution on this motion put forward by the member for Gosnells. I have been listening to some of the matters raised by members who have spoken thus far and although the Minister for Environment is here and will no doubt address most of those points, there are a few matters that were raised that I would just like to touch upon briefly before I talk in some more general terms.

First of all, there is the idea that the member for Gosnells raised in his speech about the changes brought in to clearing restrictions or regulations and that they were in some way serving to counter, if you like, what was a good natural resource management process. I would like to point out to the member that those types of clearing arrangements are generally only allowed—I am talking about the five-hectare rule—in areas of land that are not known to be environmentally sensitive or have protected species within them. There are restrictions; it is not an open-ended right that farmers have, but certainly it goes some way to balance what was a very cumbersome process for farmers. Generally speaking, farmers have looked after the land that they hold. Yes, there have been mistakes made in some areas, but I think most landholders want to see the land that they hold remain in good condition to be passed down to future generations—not necessarily their own—of farmers in as good a condition as they found it, if not better. The change to the 20-year rule really brings us back only to the point when the clearing allowances were in place when the 10-year rule was first introduced 10 years ago. It has not actually greatly increased the scope of clearing that can be done in rural areas.

Once again I will point out that that was adversely affecting businesses—private landowners—on their private land going about the business of farming. Farming is not a static operation; things change and people need to make changes to their landform. I hope that many landowners take advantage of incentives—for instance for fencing, with the recent changes announced by the federal government—to take action that may lead to the protection of areas on their farms that are of less economic value. Certainly, we have to let farmers make the decisions that they need to make to stay profitable.

There was some discussion about the Water for Food program and whether it in some way represents a risk to the water resources in the areas in which it is being rolled out. Water for Food is a \$40 million program that is part of a \$300 million commitment to agriculture by this government and is funded by royalties for regions. I cannot talk about all the areas in the state that this program is rolling out, but I have a fair bit to do with the \$4.7 million Midlands project operating within my electorate, because I chair the community reference group that is looking at how that project should be directed. In the area that we are operating in, at least, there are allocation plans. Nothing under the Water for Food program will change the water allocation planning that has already been done, except, as I will outline in a while, because those allocation plans are set and need to be adhered to. Generally speaking, they are calculated on gaining an understanding of the rainfall in an area,

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making a good assessment of the infiltration rate into the catchment and then trying to judge what is a sustainable flow to come out of that area. That allocation system has been in place in WA. Yes, there have been areas where there has been over-allocation of water in the past, but I think there is a much greater understanding now of the pressures that are placed on water resources as development occurs. Certainly, both the environmental needs plus the need to provide public drinking water are taken into account when determining the water availability for the Water for Food program. The only rider I would put on that is that substantial money is available under the Water for Food program for further investigation in specific areas to ascertain the true hydrology of that particular area. Although water allocation plans are based on an extensive amount of work that has been done over years, there is no doubt that there are gaps in our knowledge in certain key areas, and we would like to home in on those areas that have potential to support an irrigation industry in the future without seeing a risk develop to the sustainable water resource.

Comments have been made about this government's general commitment to agriculture. Water for Food is one part of that program. Today I asked a question in Parliament about the Doppler radar initiative. I understand that the Doppler radar is a \$23 million initiative, as outlined by the Minister for Regional Development today, aimed at getting to farmers better information on climate and weather events. It is married to a program that has rolled out in excess of, I think, 100 automatic weather stations throughout the state, although I will not be quoted on that figure. Anyone with access to a smart phone can hop online and use the Department of Agriculture and Food WA app to look at the weather situation in any of those areas. That information will be greatly enhanced with the arrival of the Doppler radar, which will cover pretty well all the grain-growing areas of Western Australia at the moment. As the minister said, that will greatly enhance the ability of agricultural producers to make decisions about the best use of their resources and to make better decisions about spraying and fertiliser use and what cropping operations to undertake. Naturally, I would think it would have some sort of payback in improved natural resource management results, generally speaking.

Furthermore, there was discussion about the process of allocation of money under royalties for regions and an attack on the system in place that requires business cases to be developed for any expenditure. First of all, let us understand that that is not necessarily a block to projects being developed or funding being made available. Since its inception, \$6.1 billion has flowed through the royalties for regions program and 3 600-plus projects have been developed. Each of those projects would have required a business case or, in some cases, a number of projects may have been lumped into one business case. However, each of them has been supported by an extensive business case regime that is aimed at ensuring that royalties for regions is not subject to attack by persons who do not think it is a worthwhile program. That regime ensures that the projects put up are defensible and based on evidence that demonstrates the need for the expenditure and seeks to ensure that the expenditure is very well targeted.

I would like to talk very briefly about natural resource management in my area and my understanding of just how important it is to my electorate. As the member of Gosnells outlined, most of my electorate is covered by the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council. Yes, I am a board member of that group. I am also a foundation member of what was known as the West Midlands Natural Resource Group and has now morphed into just the West Midlands Group. That group has now become more of a producer organisation for the farming people in the area, but for most of its time there was a very strong environmental section within that organisation. In addition, many other groups operate in my area, including many small coastal councils, groups such as the Moore Catchment Council, and even shires, such as the Shire of Chapman Valley, which has a very long history of engagement in NRM projects. At some stage or other they have all relied upon funding from state and federal governments. Because of that, I and others, I am sure, ensured that government decision-makers were aware of the need for an ongoing program and commitment to natural resource management. There is roughly an \$8 million commitment per year going forward over the next three years that was always to be rolled out in 2015–16; it was never intended to rollout in 2014–15. In fact, if members look at last year's budget papers, they will see that it is in the out years for 2015–16. We are working through the flow-through period on the previous NRM expenditure that was funded quite substantially by royalties for regions, and royalties for regions is in fact paying roughly 80 per cent of that \$8 million over the out years.

I would like to draw members' attention to the budget documents. It is no secret that some of the initiatives being supported by royalties for regions have an importance for natural resource management. If we look at page 209 of budget paper No 3 of the current budget documents, the Kimberley science and conservation strategy, for instance, will be funded in 2016–17—so not this year, but a year moving forward—with \$500 000. Marine parks management will receive \$2.1 million.

Mr A.P. Jacob: There will be a total of \$81.5 million over these two terms of government.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It will be a total of \$81.5 million over two terms of government. I thank the minister; that is a very substantial contribution to the NRM program throughout the state.

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Boosting biosecurity defences falls under the Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture policy. It is listed as being a \$16.9 million investment over the forward estimates, including \$6.5 million this year. I have already outlined the Water for Food program; it is \$31.3 million over the forward estimates, and it is anticipated to be a \$40 million program over its life. Page 212 of budget paper No 3 has a line item “Regional Development — Water and NRM Initiatives”, and a whole list is outlined there. That program that is still flowing through will receive \$12.3 million in 2015–16. An amount of \$6.4 million will kick off these grants, and we have been discussing the royalties for regions component of this money in 2015–16 flowing through for the next three years.

We then see that there is investment in things like the state barrier fence, with an amount of \$5.7 million in the period from 2013–14 through to 2016–17—a very substantial contribution indeed to NRM generally. It is a bit hard to say that the government is not committed to NRM programs; it certainly is.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Why is it easy to get the business case through for things like dog-proof fences, but not for community groups that have good projects?

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is not necessarily easy to get any business case through. Each business case has to go through a rigorous process, and I guess in the fullness of time the business case for the NRM program will certainly be brought through its process and we will see that program rolled out. But it was only ever intended to roll out this particular tranche of that money in 2015–16—the next financial year—not in 2014–15.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: It was announced 12 months ago.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, there is no doubt that back in 2014, it was announced that there would be this money; it was actually in the budget documents last year as well.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: So, there won't be any projects this year because people haven't got their orders in for seed stock and tube stock.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The 2015–16 financial year will run through until 30 June next year, so I think it is a bit of a long bow to say there will not be any projects on the ground. I think we will have to wait until this time next year to determine whether there have been projects on the ground.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: You can't just put an order in now to do planting in a couple of weeks; you're going to miss it. It will be next year before you can get your order in.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I suppose planting could be done in June of 2016 as well; it is still within the same year. Also, I do not know that every project relies upon the planting of seedlings. There is a wide variety of projects that people might apply for that do not necessarily rely upon revegetation programs. I think the member is guessing which projects might come forward based upon what the member may see as priorities, but a wide variety of projects will come forward. I am very keen to see these projects supported. That is why I am very pleased, personally, that royalties for regions is playing a part here; I am certainly very supportive of that happening. I would love to see these projects announced very quickly, but there is a long list of projects that royalties for regions funds and the process of getting them through, although it may seem cumbersome, is designed, as I said before, to ensure that the programs are defensible and go through a strong due diligence process. It is not intended to deliberately frustrate groups: it is there to ensure that the money is well spent. I am sure that money will be well spent when that program is complete.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Thirteen months following an announcement, and then it is going to be a call for projects, and then it could be months before people know whether their project has been successful. It is totally unacceptable.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I think the main thing, member, is that the money is there. The money is in our budget documents and the commitment is there from the government to undertake this program. The message that should be sent to the groups is, yes, the money is going to be provided, it is just when. Wait and see. Wait for the call for projects and wait for the announcements from government. But instead of perpetuating the myth, if you like, that the money will not be forthcoming, it would be better to let them know that money is in the budget, it will be coming, and that they should be ready to put forward projects. There is no doubt that the projects put forward will come from a wide variety of sources, as they usually do —

Mr C.J. Tallentire: And they have to compete, so they don't know whether they are getting the money until you've actually gone through the competitive selection process.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is a normal process for a grant round to have many people applying for it, and there are selection criteria and somebody has to decide what is actually given the go-ahead. I do not think any of the groups out there would expect anything different; certainly none of the groups I talk to. In previous years, as the member would know, some money was put to the various NRM groups such as the Northern Agricultural

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Catchments Council. I do not think that program will be the type of model that is followed; this will be more of a grant round for the groups to actually apply for in what is basically, yes, a competitive but, I would hope, highly well-supported and beneficial outcome for NRM programs throughout the state. That is pretty well all I have to say, so I thank members very much.

MR T.K. WALDRON (Wagin) [6.36 pm]: I will be fairly brief, but I want to make the point about the importance of natural resource management and NRM groups right across the state and in the electorate of Wagin that I represent. That importance is recognised by the support this government gives through this funding. I make that point right from the start.

I also acknowledge right from the start the work of local groups. Like most things in regional Western Australia and across Western Australia, where would we be without volunteer groups? The country would grind to a halt without volunteer work. In this area, there are some fine groups right across my electorate; I am not going to name them all, but there is a whole heap of them. A couple of those groups have aired their frustrations about waiting for this funding and the applications et cetera to be announced. I understand that, but it does take time. I will not go into all the reasons for that as they have been outlined well by the member for Moore, but I have followed up on that, and I understand it is progressing pretty well and that at some stage it will go to cabinet and then the program will be up and running. That is a wonderful thing. People can say it is slow et cetera, but it is there and it is a happening thing, which is really, really important. I know that those groups will utilise the funding well.

I want to touch on a couple of points that have been raised about the business cases slowing it up et cetera. I have to say to the opposition that royalties for regions, which makes up 80-odd per cent of this funding, is probably the most scrutinised fund I have seen in Parliament since I have been here. There is a requirement to make sure everything is right because it is okay for the opposition to say we need to speed it up when it wants something through, but then if they think something is not right they ping it and say we do not scrutinise it enough. The opposition cannot have it both ways. The fund is scrutinised hard, and I think that is a good thing, but that can take time, particularly when working across departments.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Member —

Mr T.K. WALDRON: Member, I want to give the minister time.

Nevertheless, I have actually spoken to the minister's office about making sure we can expedite it and get it done as quickly as possible. I will make one point, though: members need to be careful when, like the member for Bassendean, they come in and say this government does not care and is useless and has placed no emphasis on things. Members lose credibility if we look at what has happened over time, and what the government has done in places like the Kimberley conservation areas. If I look in my own area, there is the Living Lakes program and the funding in NRM over years in Fitzgerald National Park, which I am involved with quite closely.

Mr A.P. Jacob: It is \$40 million.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: That funding has been put in there. Members opposite should acknowledge that, because if they did, when they do have a gripe, it would actually mean something.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: How much are you doing with community groups, though?

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I work with my community groups all the time; that is what the funding is about.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: You personally, but not government.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: No; that is what the funding is about. The funding is there and maybe the member can say that it could have been provided sooner, but if we had rushed it and it was not right, you guys would be saying that the government had wasted taxpayers' money without any scruples. Members opposite have to be realistic. I am being realistic. I do not doubt the member for Bassendean is a smart person or whatever, but quite frankly he loses credibility when he talks as he did, because everyone knows that is not real.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: People are very upset by these delays.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: The member for Bassendean made the point that we had not done anything in this area and we had no focus on it at all and we did not care about it. The member for Gosnells is a good person and knows that that is not right; he knows the government does care.

I want the minister to have time to reply, but I want to mention a couple of other things, too. Farmers come up a lot in this place, and members opposite mentioned farmers. I think that 98 per cent of our farmers are the best conservationists we have. Most farmers are great conservationists. There is always the odd one who spoils it for the rest. Just as we might get a bad schoolteacher or politician, there will be someone in any sphere who can spoil it for the rest. I heard a farmer speak after he had been challenged. He said that people pay farmers no

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respect but they are the best conservationists. That has particularly been the case over the last 30 years. I want to acknowledge the work of farmers in our volunteer groups. They do a terrific job. I mention the Katanning Land Conservation District Committee that has done a lot of work with Lake Ewlyamartup—they keep me on my toes over this stuff. I thank Jill Richardson, Ella Maesepp and all the others there for their excellent work. I do not understand the motion, because this funding is excellent; it is what we need in country WA to continue to help the groups that we are talking about.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [6.41 pm]: The minister will get his turn. I will do 10 minutes and then the minister can speak.

Mr A.P. Jacob: Five minutes!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will give the minister five minutes.

The reason the member for Gosnells brought this motion before the house in private members' time is because of the feedback that many communities and, indeed, many members have been receiving about the uncertainty over the flow of dollars to projects that they see as priorities. I do not think we can discount that feedback, despite my learned friend the member for Moore's comments that the money is there. The fact that the significant dollars do not come in until 2016–17 cannot be brushed away. As the member for Gosnells highlighted, community groups, like any organisation that is seeking to implement important programs in their area, need the certainty of being able to plan. The member for Gosnells made an appropriate highlight in his interjection to the member for Moore about the simple fact that there were many planting-related projects that would normally have been delivered this winter, but we know that will not happen because the funding is not there for a significant number of possible plantings. That is just an example.

The natural resource management program has an interesting history. As a former environment minister, there are many members in this place who are well aware of the importance of community organisations in the on-the-ground works that they do in the various catchments and NRM areas in the state. It is interesting to note the announcement late last year, which is something that I applaud, that the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council was an entity in its own right. That was implemented this year through the launch of its blueprint. That is a very important step for us in the Peel region, particularly in the ongoing protection of the Peel–Harvey system and the catchment that feeds into it and the importance of protecting significant Ramsar sites. Australia, and the state, is a signatory to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The whole focus of Ramsar into the future needs more attention. An auditor's report a few years back—I am not sure exactly of the year—highlighted that WA was not fulfilling its obligations under the Ramsar Convention. The Peel and other sites in Western Australia, including Roebuck Bay in Broome in the Kimberley region, are significant Ramsar-listed wetlands that are home for parts of the year to migratory birds, many of which have travelled from South-East Asian and North Asian flyways to Australia. One of the things that has always frustrated me to be honest, from a local member's perspective in Mandurah and even as a former environment minister, is that I do not think my community fully understands the significance of the Ramsar status of the Peel–Harvey system. It is something that has huge potential. Its importance needs to be further explained and outlined so it is understood by not only the local population that lives there and will live there into future, but also the increasingly significant number of people who are bird lovers and who travel the world seeking to witness the migration and the nature of the bird life that are the migratory species. I know that the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council is very much focused, as one of its objectives, on enhancing the understanding and significance of the Ramsar listing of the Peel–Yalgorup system and also to play an enhanced role in educating the local and wider communities of its importance.

I want to acknowledge the work on the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council of the former Mayor of Mandurah Paddy Creevey, who worked very hard and very closely with the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council leadership team and board to secure the NRM status for the Peel–Harvey, remembering that it was a subregion of the south west NRM group. The argument was put very cleverly and succinctly to the powers that be that the Peel should be recognised as an NRM entity in its own right. I acknowledge the work of the federal member for Canning, Don Randall. Don and I had a few clashes on the way, but he deserves acknowledgement for his work at a federal level to ensure that the federal environment minister, Greg Hunt, carried through with an election promise, which is a very good outcome for the Peel. Underpinning the work, current and future, of the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council is the access of that group to NRM funding into the future. At the moment it has been funded, particularly by the federal government, and it now has on board some senior science expertise. It has very effective administration and fieldwork coordinators and it is feeding into Landcare-based works, but it is also an integral connector to the local community organisations that exist on the ground—those that have in the past and will want in the future to put forward very good projects that are funded through the natural resource management groups.

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It is important to note that there are numerous local groups of dedicated people, including friends of the many reserves in the Peel region, coast care groups, groups that work within the Shire of Murray and those groups that work further up into the catchment area as far as Pingelly, Wandering and Boddington. There are a number of groups that are very well-placed to deliver some of these important works on the ground. It is very interesting to see the focus of the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council in terms of works in the outer catchment and the work it has been doing in places like Wandering and areas east of Boddington and Williams, and the way in which it has been able to engage with landowners, many of whom have been on the land for a long time. I think the partnerships that it is establishing are very effective and, indeed, very positive. But the funding will be the issue, and we know that they need surety. Whilst the funding for the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council seems reasonable and stable at this stage, it is only for the next year or so. If we are going to continue to see a turnaround in the health and wellbeing of the catchment into the future, then that funding will need to be sustained and, indeed, ramped up.

I am very mindful, as I hope the Minister for Environment is, of the demands that will be placed on the Peel–Harvey system by the Directions 2031 strategic planning document. The Peel region will be required to accommodate a significant number of people into the future in terms of population growth. I know the minister is aware of the fragile nature of the system; the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council has released a couple of reports in the last couple of years on the health and wellbeing of the system, and in its latest report it continues to point to various indicators that are a cause for concern, including nutrient levels, sediment levels, issues associated with fish stocks and the health of the Serpentine River, which remains a major concern. It was not long ago that one particular document certified that the Serpentine River was, effectively, a dead river. That is an emotive thing, but those who live in the region and love it dearly know that the health and wellbeing of the system will directly impact on the sustainable nature of the Peel–Harvey system, the people who live there, and the flora and fauna, some of it unique, that is found there.

It is also important to note that there have been some very poor planning decisions made in recent times. One of them I will speak on in a future debate—that is, the Point Grey proposal, to which the government’s federal counterparts gave final planning approval. There are significant issues associated with what is planned for Point Grey. When we look at some of the recent dredging-style developments in Western Australia, there is not a good history. We need only look at the debacle at Port Geographe down in Busselton and even the marina situation up in Jurien Bay, where significant dollars now need to be spent because the water quality and flushing capacity of that marina continue to cause concern. Before any approval is given for major marine proposals, the —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz): Member, I do not want to interrupt you, but do you still want to give the minister an opportunity to speak?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, I will.

The precautionary principle should be one that is very closely adhered to in respect of those considerations. We have an interesting coastline and interesting waterways, and when we approve developments that are inappropriate, they can have lasting impacts on the health and wellbeing of the system into the future.

MR A.P. JACOB (Ocean Reef — Minister for Environment) [6.55 pm]: It is a bit unfortunate to get only five minutes at the end of this debate, but I will start out with the contribution made by the member for Bassendean, which I think was the most egregious. He made a particular attack on this government’s record on the environment. First of all, the measure that he used was the community green groups’ perception of this government’s record on the environment, and I will come back to that in just a second. The contribution made by the member for Wagin was particularly perceptive; the member for Wagin has already —

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Can you focus on support for community groups? That is what this motion is about.

Mr A.P. JACOB: If the member wanted a full answer, the opposition could have given me more than four minutes. I will address the comments that were raised.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr A.P. JACOB: I am going to come back to a topic I addressed yesterday. I will start with the flagship environmental program of this government, although there is a range of work right across this space such as Parks for People; the Fitzgerald River; the threatened species recovery programs; the Eradicator program; and the incredibly important work that this government does and the investment it makes in the Swan River, such as the doubling of the Riverbank Program last year. But I will first go to the Kimberley science and conservation strategy, that \$81.5 million investment program, and again remind the house that sometimes —

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Mr C.J. Tallentire: That's all you ever talk about!

Mr A.P. JACOB: Sometimes simply agitating does not really achieve the outcome that I think the member is trying to achieve.

Some groups protested at the point that we actually finally delivered the management plan. If they are the groups that the member is talking about that are unhappy, and they are unhappy at the point that we finally deliver the management plan —

Mr C.J. Tallentire: NRM groups are unhappy, minister. That's what this motion's about.

Mr A.P. JACOB: If the member for Gosnells wants to bring it particularly to that, I am only raising this off the comments that he brought up. On the NRM issue, it is fully funded, with \$8 million a year rolling over for the next three years, and his contribution was a litany of great projects that have come through that program.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: The money's not there!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Gosnells, I will have to call you if you persist.

Mr A.P. JACOB: The member for Gosnells went through an extensive list of programs that have been delivered under the NRM program, including some particularly good ones and some even in my own electorate of Ocean Reef, which I found particularly interesting. Those funded up to this point include the Mullaloo Coast Care Group and the Friends of North Ocean Reef–Iluka Foreshore Group, which received \$11 000 and \$10 000 respectively in the last round. I am sure, from experience of my dealings with those groups over many years, that they will apply again. It is a particularly important section of coastal heathland in the Ocean Reef electorate, and if time afforded me a little more opportunity, I would talk about the dual-use path and the fact that that little project, which I know very well because it is a local project for me, is a very good example of the community funding benefit provided by these NRM programs and the benefit of broader community access into natural areas. That is a key plank for how this government has approached everything it does in environment; hence the Parks for People program and the \$40 million investment into the Fitzgerald River National Park—from the member for Wagin—the \$7 million into the Kalbarri in-road and upgrades at Nature's Window and the Z-bend. They are all projects built on the basis that we get a great conservation outcome and stronger community group engagement in looking after areas of land when we facilitate proper, formal and appropriate public access. Public access and appreciation of our natural environment is the key first plank in building the conservationists of the future. Hence there has been strong investment from this government.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: It has nothing to do with NRM.

Mr A.P. JACOB: This government is continuing to fund the NRM.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: No; the money isn't there.

Mr A.P. JACOB: It is there, member for Gosnells. It is a bizarre motion.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Gosnells!

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.