

ESPERANCE LEAD POLLUTION

634. Dr G.G. JACOBS to the Minister for the Environment:

I refer to the minister's response to an opposition question on 6 September, the day on which the inquiry report into lead pollution in Esperance was released, regarding failures in the minister's government that resulted in the poisoning of some children in Esperance - the worst case in Western Australian history. The minister said -

I can assure the member that every effort will be made and every possible initiative that will address a number of the concerns and, indeed, failings of the department that have been highlighted will be closely responded to.

Given my desire for a remedy and the minister's lack of a formal response, I ask -

- (1) What specifically has the minister done to address the many findings and recommendations in the Education and Health Standing Committee report into the lead scandal that were critical of the minister's department?
- (2) Will the minister agree to table specific details of all actions taken to address each of the failings identified in the report; and, if not, why not?
- (3) Given the minister's lack of a formal response, as per Legislative Assembly standing order 277(1), six weeks since the report's release, what confidence can the people of Western Australia have that a similar event will not happen again elsewhere around the state?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN replied:

- (1)-(3) I thank the member for Roe for his question, and I acknowledge his ongoing concern - I am concerned and so is the government - regarding the issues that were highlighted in the parliamentary report that was presented to this place six weeks ago. Of course, as the member is well aware, part of the formal response process is a total across-government response to those issues. I can assure the member and the community of Esperance that this government, through its various agencies and under the responsibilities that those agencies have regarding the recommendations that were made in that report, is compiling those responses. Actions have already been put in place, as the member is very much aware, not only by the Department of Environment and Conservation, but also by the port and the Department of Health in accordance with their requirements. As the member is well aware, the government is required under the standing orders to ensure that the response is made within the 90-day period. I assure the member and the community of Esperance that a range of measures are already in place. The final formal government response, as required under the standing orders, will be presented to this place within that 90-day time limit.

The member will also be aware that a range of issues have already been responded to by my department. One example is the additional \$680 000 that the government has provided to fund a comprehensive health and ecological assessment of the town of Esperance. That is an ongoing measure, because we are very concerned about the ongoing monitoring of the health and wellbeing of the people who live in the member's community. With regard to resourcing, the member is aware that we have already increased the licence fees for port operations. That will result in additional resources being provided for the regulation of ports. We have already undertaken, as a statewide process, a review of ports across the state, because not only do we not want these sorts of events to occur in the town of Esperance, but also we want to ensure that this sort of incident does not occur in other parts of our state where important port facilities are in place.

I assure the member that my department and I, as Minister for the Environment, the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and the Minister for Health are working to ensure that the recommendations and findings are responded to in a comprehensive report. Much of that work is already underway. I will continue to assure the member regarding his concerns. We take this issue very seriously. The Carpenter government recognises the seriousness of this issue, and I assure the member that we are acting, and will continue to act, in a way that will benefit the health of all the people of Esperance.