

ESPERANCE LEAD POLLUTION

**465. Mr G.M. CASTRILLI to the Minister for the Environment:**

I refer to the findings of the parliamentary inquiry into the cause and extent of lead pollution in the Esperance area. Why did the government allow inadequate resourcing of the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Environmental Protection Authority to result in Western Australia's key environmental watchdogs having to rely upon industry self-regulation?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN replied:**

I thank the member for his question. It is important to acknowledge that we all accept that a range of failings resulted in the situation that was reported on this morning with regard to Esperance. In 2001, the Department of Environmental Protection, as it was then called, recommended that it close its regional offices. The then new Minister for the Environment of the Gallop government rejected that recommendation. I understand that Treasury was asked in 2000 to undertake an inquiry into the Department of Environmental Protection. Our government has recognised that the regions must be resourced. The Minister for the Environment of the new Gallop government highlighted that in 2001 by rejecting the proposal to close regional offices. Of course, the amalgamation of the Water and Rivers Commission and the Department of Environmental Protection delivered increased resources to regional areas. However, this does not mean that I do not acknowledge or accept that appropriate resourcing is a critical issue. Clearly, in terms of the recommendations that have been made, that issue will be very carefully considered by the government and me as part of our response to this very important inquiry.