### PEEL–YALGORUP SYSTEM RAMSAR MANAGEMENT PLAN

5616. Hon Giz Watson to the Minister for Mental Health representing the Minister for Environment

I refer to the Peel–Yalgorup System Ramsar Site Management Plan, and I ask —

(1) What arrangements are currently in place with the Commonwealth and other stakeholders as to respective responsibilities for Ramsar implementation at the Ramsar listed Peel–Yalgorup site, including funding?

(2) Is the Minister satisfied with these arrangements?

(3) If no to (2), how is the Minister addressing his concerns?

(4) What funds were allocated to protecting the Ramsar listed Peel–Yalgorup site in —
   (a) 2009–2010;
   (b) 2010–2011; and
   (c) 2011–2012?

(For each answer, please provide full details of the provider and recipient of the funds and the purpose of the funds including identifying the specific strategy or action in the Peel–Yalgorup System Ramsar Site Management Plan intended to be addressed.)

(5) For 2012–2013 —
   (a) what funds have been allocated to protecting that site;
   (b) who will be the provider of the funds;
   (c) who will be the recipient of the funds; and
   (d) what is the purpose of the funds (please identify the specific strategy or action in the Peel–Yalgorup System Ramsar Site Management Plan intended to be addressed)?

(6) To date, which of the knowledge gaps identified in the Peel–Yalgorup System Ramsar Site Management Plan has been filled (please provide full details)?

(7) Regarding Table 15 (limits of acceptable change for the Peel Yalgorup Ramsar site) at pages 47 and 48 of the Peel–Yalgorup System Ramsar Site Management Plan, will the Minister please indicate —
   (a) in relation to each listed component that has a limit of acceptable change specified —
      (i) whether it may currently be outside that limit;
      (ii) whether it is currently within that limit;
      (iii) whether its current status is unknown,
   (b) in relation to each listed component where a limit of acceptable change is not specified due to lack of data —
      (i) whether a limit of acceptable change has now been identified; and
      (ii) if no to (7)(b)(i), why not?

(8) Regarding the contents of Table 3 at page 14 of the report by Ironbark Environmental to the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council ‘Catchment condition and priorities, Peel–Harvey Catchment 2011’ which identify the status of Yalgorup Lakes hydrology and water quality, Lake Clifton thrombolites, Lake Clifton fish, Lake McLarty hydrology and Lake Mealup hydrology as all being of concern —
   (a) does the Minister agree these are currently of concern to the site’s ecological character; and
   (b) if no to (8)(a), why not?

(9) What, if any, further or other concerns/emerging concerns regarding the ecological character of the site have been identified?

(10) Have all concerns/emerging concerns regarding the ecological character of the site been reported to the Commonwealth?

(11) If yes to (10), when?

(12) If no to (10), why not?
Regarding each concern/emerging concern regarding the ecological character of the site, what specific action has been taken to address the deterioration?

To date, has that action —
(a) arrested the deterioration; or
(b) reversed the deterioration (if yes, please provide full details)?

Regarding the Auditor General’s report ‘Management of Ramsar Wetlands in Western Australia’ published in September 2006, which identifies at page 21 a need for consistency in how different Ramsar sites are monitored and reported on to enable accurate information to be provided to the Commonwealth and under the Ramsar Convention regarding the biodiversity and health of Ramsar sites in Western Australia —
(a) what progress has been made on an agreed national methodology or indicators for the assessment of wetlands;
(b) what progress has been made in achieving consistency as to how Ramsar sites in Western Australia are monitored and reported on;
(c) how consistent is the Peel–Yalgorup System Ramsar Site Management Plan (including its Monitoring and Evaluation Guide) with —
(i) any agreed national methodology or indicators for the assessment of wetlands; and
(ii) the way other Ramsar sites in Western Australia are monitored and reported on?

Hon HELEN MORTON replied:

There is no formal arrangement with the Commonwealth Government. As the signatory to the Ramsar Convention, the Commonwealth is responsible for ensuring Australia’s international obligations are met and has legislated under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) to give effect to its responsibilities.

At the State level the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) has the lead responsibility for Ramsar wetlands, however responsibility for site management rests with the respective land managers.

The Government has supported the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council to lead the collaboration of stakeholders for funding applications. DEC and the Department of Water (DoW) both have representatives on the Peel–Yalgorup Ramsar Technical Advisory Group.

DEC carries out general reserve management, wildlife conservation and environmental protection responsibilities in and around the Peel–Yalgorup Ramsar site, but its budget management system does not specifically identify expenditure against the Ramsar site. DEC does not collate records of grant or other expenditure on the Ramsar site by other organisations.

The knowledge gaps identified in the Peel–Yalgorup System Ramsar Site Management Plan are broad and addressing them requires ongoing effort.

DoW’s Murray Groundwater Allocation Plan covers the eastern side of the Peel area up to the western edge of the Peel and Harvey estuaries, while the South–West Coastal Groundwater Allocation Plan, which is in development, will inform land-use planning west of this boundary, including the Yalgorup lakes.

Agencies involved in land-use planning provide information on environmental values in the assessment of development proposals and to assist those wishing to conserve wetlands. Examples include DEC’s Healthy Wetland Habitats Program which offers private landholders financial and technical assistance and its Urban Nature program which provides technical advice and on-ground support for land managers to protect, manage and restore bushland. The Western Australian Planning Commission’s “Guidelines for the Determination of Wetland Buffer Requirements”, the Environmental Protection Authority’s “Environmental Guidance for Planning and Development” and DoW’s “Stormwater Management Manual for Western Australia” provide relevant guidance.

Improvement in knowledge of the impacts of a drying climate on wetland ecosystems is being addressed by collaborations between government agencies including DEC and DoW and the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility based at Murdoch University. This collaboration has included a research project to better understand how science can guide policy decisions to assist groundwater dependent ecosystems adapt to the impacts of drying climate.
The most recent review of the limits of acceptable change for the Peel–Yalgorup Ramsar site in October 2011 indicated that one limit was exceeded, that being the cover of the weed Typha orientalis or bulrush at Lakes McLarty and Mealup. This was not considered to constitute a change in ecological character. Collaboration between DEC, DoW, the Lake Mealup Preservation Society and the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council has led to control of this weed and construction of a weir to promote a return to natural water regimes. Concerns have been noted by research scientists studying the microbial communities in Lake Clifton that changes in salinity and nutrient concentration are having a harmful effect on these communities. Research being conducted through Curtin University and The University of Western Australia is addressing how water quality is changing and what impact this is having on microbial and other biological communities.

DEC is implementing management plans for reserves under its management and assisting community groups for other areas. A further review of all of the limits of acceptable change is scheduled for 2014 and data being gathered on water quality trends and migratory bird numbers will assist in providing information on the health of the system.

While the extent of bulrush in Lakes Mealup and McLarty nature reserves was the only limit of acceptable change that was found to be exceeded for the Peel–Yalgorup Ramsar site, the evaluation of migratory bird numbers was based on a small data series and not all species were monitored. DEC will conduct another review of the limits in 2014 when further data will be available. There are some observations of deteriorating condition of paperbark trees around the perimeter of Lakes Mealup and McLarty and the Peel estuary and opening of the Harvey estuary. These have been included in a monitoring program for fringing vegetation condition and the results will be available in the next assessment of the site.

Bulrush in Lakes Mealup and McLarty is being managed by chemical and physical control, while long-term management includes the construction of a weir to return the hydrology to natural regimes which should prevent the spread of this weed.

Annual waterbird counts commenced in 2010 for the entire Peel–Yalgorup system.

DEC has produced a Monitoring and Threat Assessment Strategy for the Thrombolite Community of Lake Clifton (February 2008) and water quality data have been collected from 2010 for Lake Clifton.

The impacts of development in the Peel region on the Peel–Yalgorup Ramsar site are being assessed as part of the Commonwealth/State Government strategic assessment of the Perth and Peel regions under the EPBC Act.

Yes, deterioration has been arrested in the case of bulrush cover in Lakes Mealup and McLarty.

This is a matter for the Commonwealth Government. DEC contributes to a national approach through the work of the Standing Council on Environment and Water and through direct liaison with the Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

Ecological Character Descriptions exist for all Ramsar sites in WA and these include limits of acceptable change which are used to assess trends or possible changes in the ecological character of these sites.

Ecological Character Descriptions for WA Ramsar sites are consistent with the national approach as well as being consistent between WA sites.