

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT PROCESS REVIEW

Statement by Minister for the Environment

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for the Environment) [1.35 pm]: I inform the house of an important element in the Carpenter government's environmental regulatory reform program; namely, a review of the environmental impact assessment process by the Environmental Protection Authority. The environmental impact assessment process ensures that the protection of our environment is taken into consideration at an early stage of development proposals. The current resources boom has brought with it unprecedented demand for project approvals. It has become increasingly obvious that if we are to avoid backlogs, we must slash red tape and streamline the approvals process; however, this must be done without compromising the quality of the environment and protection of Western Australia's unique natural assets. Our system is widely regarded as among the best and most progressive in the nation, but that does not mean we should rest on our laurels. Our economy and our population are burgeoning and there is frenetic activity in the mining and the oil and gas industries that will only increase in the short term. Furthermore, growing complexity in the scope, range and technical aspects of development projects will further prolong the approvals process.

We need to take the environmental approvals process to a new level if we are to capitalise on the resources boom and ensure we continue to deliver environmental and social dividends for all Western Australians. The review of the environmental approvals process will identify ways to streamline the process and remove duplication; provide opportunities to better integrate environmental approvals with other approval processes; and identify innovations to better link developments to regional and sustainable environmental objectives. We need to look at how we can improve the process to ensure better results for the environment, industry, the economy and the community as a whole.

The review must not compromise the core values and principles that underpin the EIA process; namely, transparency, evidence-based decision making, predictability, proportionality and accountability, and, importantly, the public involvement that provides opportunities for public submissions and appeal rights on determinations. This is not about cutting corners; it is about improving the way we operate. We want to keep striking the fine balance between protecting our environment and promoting sustainable industry, and we want to maintain Western Australia's reputation as a great place to live and a great place to do business.

A reference group will be established with representatives from industry, government, academia, environmental groups and environmental consultancies under the chairmanship of the chair of the Environmental Protection Authority. As the review unfolds, this will ensure that a balanced approach is taken, that there will be opportunities for input and that proposed improvements will be examined in partnership with the community. It is anticipated that the review will be completed within six months.

Other policy setting reviews already underway or proposed include the marine impacts of dredging, resourcing and funding models, environmental management plans and a common-user environmental database. The findings will be incorporated into the main review so that early action can be taken on agreed priorities.