

KARIJINI NATIONAL PARK — GUMALA ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Statement by Minister for the Environment

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for the Environment) [2.05 pm]: On Friday, 30 May 2008 I had the opportunity to travel to Karijini National Park in the Pilbara to officially open a new ecotourism facility on behalf of Gumala Aboriginal Corporation. This is a most impressive development, which will provide a model for similar developments elsewhere in the state.

Karijini Eco Retreat contains 50 tented cabins, many with ensuites; 82 self-drive camp sites; five group camp sites; a dining facility; amphitheatre; staff accommodation; and a services and utilities area. Gumala Aboriginal Corporation operates the site under a 21-year lease agreement with the Department of Environment and Conservation. The corporation also has a further 21-year lease option to progress the development. Facilities such as this ensure that best-practice environmental and social outcomes, including training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people, can be achieved in the nature-based tourism industry.

This industry continues to grow at a fast rate, with an estimated 130 000 people visiting Karijini National Park last year. This represents more than one-third of all visitors to the Pilbara region. Karijini is the state's second largest national park and is renowned for its gorges and waterfalls as well as its diverse range of native plants and animals.

I congratulate Gumala Aboriginal Corporation for its initiative in developing an outstanding resort and its partnership with ecotourism accommodation operator Ecomodation. There is no doubt it will attract more visitors to this remarkable area.

While in Karijini, I took the opportunity to join a team of conservation volunteers and mining industry employees from Rio Tinto who were undertaking a range of works in Weano Gorge to help tackle bushfires and invasive weeds. The project is part of a bushfire hazard reduction program. Bushfires are regarded as one of the major environmental threats to the nature of the region. Extensive fires, rather than the selective burning that was done by traditional owners, impact on large areas of natural vegetation and lead to the spread of invasive weeds.

The project is part of a \$1 million Future Volunteers partnership that was formed in 2006 between the Rio Tinto WA Future Fund, the Department of Environment and Conservation and Conservation Volunteers Australia. I acknowledge the generosity and commitment of the company and Conservation Volunteers Australia to protecting our natural areas.