

Division 72: Swan River Trust, \$12 422 000 —

Mrs L.M. Harvey, Chairman.

Dr G.G. Jacobs, Minister for Water representing the Minister for Environment.

Mr R. Hughes, General Manager.

Ms R. Spencer, River System Manager.

Ms R. Shadbolt, Manager, Strategic Programs.

Mr J. Wong, Business Manager/Chief Finance Officer.

Ms A. Fergusson-Stewart, Principal Policy Adviser, Office of the Minister for Water.

The CHAIRMAN: I call the member for Mandurah.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I refer to the significant issues impacting on the agency, commencing on page 912 of the *Budget Statements*. My questions relate to the first dot point, which is about water quality and ecological health. Will the government be implementing the previous government's fertiliser action plan? Is the fertiliser action plan under review? The minister may want to respond to these questions individually or as a whole. Due to the fact that the algal blooms that cause oxygen, and thus fish kills, are predominantly caused by highly water-soluble phosphorous fertilisers, will the government concede that the only responsible action to take would be to enforce the complete banning and sale of these products? How does the government propose to get manufacturers of these fertilisers to create other products without an incentive such as a compulsory program?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The state government is committed to reducing nutrients in our waterways. The new injection of funds is a key part of that commitment. A joint government and fertiliser industry working party prepared a fertiliser action plan. When I was sitting on the other side of the chamber in opposition, I heard about this fertiliser action plan. The Labor Party never did anything about it. We are committed to doing something about it. It is a joint effort between the Minister for Environment, the Minister for Agriculture and Food and me as Minister for Water to make a difference and to commit to reducing the nutrients in the Swan River and our other waterways. The Swan River Trust's contribution to implementing the intent of the plan is the Great Gardens program, to which \$100 000 has been allocated for 2009-10, and the development of water quality improvement plans, in which the Department of Water has an important role to play.

On 19 May the state government announced that it would invest \$610 000 into field trials aimed at minimising the effect of highly water-soluble phosphorous fertilisers in the Swan River, which is central to this issue of nutrients in the Swan River. Part of the member's question was how this would work. The funding extends the trial of alternative water-soluble, low-phosphorous fertilisers at Coolup and Busselton as part of a continuing effort to reduce the harmful nutrient run-off in the waterways. The project has three strategies: the adoption of improved fertiliser management through the fertiliser industries Fertcare program, and the Minister for Agriculture and Food announced the Fertcare program in the south west about two weeks ago; the development, evaluation and adoption of low water-soluble phosphorus fertiliser; and the adoption of soil amendments to increase the ability of sandy soils to retain phosphorus. The new funding is consistent with the Environmental Protection Authority's recommendations in the water quality improvement plan of the Peel-Harvey catchment, which the member would be particularly interested in.

The Swan River Trust has advised me that work on the fertiliser action plan is up and running and continuing. The Fertcare program that I referred to has already been launched, and this provides farmers with accredited advice on best practice use of fertilisers. I think it has much to do with all that as a culture; a culture to make a difference and reduce the nutrient loads and to adopt best practice use in fertilisers.

[9.50 pm]

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: So, is the minister committed —

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I am certainly committed.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: — to the former government's time line of phasing out highly water-soluble phosphorus fertilisers by 2011?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: We are committed to phasing out water-soluble fertilisers. As to a time line —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That was the commitment. The minister accused me of doing nothing when we were in government.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I sat over there for three and a half years.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The fact is that that accusation is untrue and it is incorrect. Our time line was 2011. It is a simple question: is the government committed to the former government's time line, or is it allowing that time line to blow out?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I would not say blow out. We are committed.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is the government committed to the 2011 time line?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I can be committed to 2011, yes!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister is committing the government to phasing out highly water-soluble phosphorus fertilisers by 2011.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The member should remember that I am not the Minister for Environment.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Can I just confirm what the minister just said?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I am representing the Minister for Environment in this place.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Is that right? I understand that the Minister for Water has just told me that he is working very closely with his colleagues. I am confirming that the Minister for Water is committed to the former government's time line to phasing out highly water-soluble phosphorus fertilisers by 2011.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I am committed to reducing water-soluble fertilisers.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: So now the minister is not committed to 2011, as he stated about two seconds ago. He is no longer committed to 2011.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I am committed.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, is the minister committed to 2011? This is very important, minister.

The CHAIRMAN: Members!

Mr J.E. McGRATH: He is not the minister!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, but he is part of the trio of ministers, in his capacity as Minister for Water, involved in the fertiliser action plan. It is a simple question: our time line was by 2011; is the minister committed to that time line?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I am committed to reducing the nutrients released into the Swan River from water-soluble fertilisers.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is not the question I asked.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The time line will be determined, obviously, by this work we are doing. In two years' time, when we have completed a lot of this work and there are variables in the process that mean that we cannot deliver by 2011, then the member is going to be very unhappy!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I will be extremely unhappy.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: But we are still committed to this plan.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have one final question which I am sure the director can answer: how much is the agency expecting to receive from the Burswood Casino levy in the 2009-10 budget?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: My advice is that it is \$3 million, and it will be \$3 million each year.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Gosnells has the call.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: My question relates to river protection notices. I would like to know how many have been issued in the past 12 months, and what resources are available to deal with the ongoing issue? River protection notices are a very powerful tool for controlling river polluters.

The CHAIRMAN: Which page and item number, please, member for Gosnells?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: This comes under the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006; one of the instruments of that act is a river protection notice.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the member referring to page 913?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Yes, page 913 of the *Budget Statements*.

The CHAIRMAN: The minister has the call.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: In the absence of any specific line item or note in the budget, I am not able to comment and believe that I cannot comment.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I have a further question. River protection notices are a key regulatory instrument —

Dr G.G. JACOBS: If the member gives us a line item and a page number, I will look at it, and, if I need to, I will refer it to my advisers.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The third dot point on page 913 refers to the act working with the adjoining land managers, and the fifth dot point refers to the act again, and its powers. The minister can refer to either of those headings.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: The general manager is happy to make a few comments. The member has drawn our attention to the river protection strategy. A section of the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006 is about the river protection strategy. I am advised by the Swan River Trust that over 40 government organisations independently manage different aspects of the Swan-Canning River Park. The trust will deliver an overarching blueprint for those different organisations to ensure better management of the whole system. The river protection strategy will clarify agency roles and responsibilities, and it will illustrate appropriate waterway use for each stretch of the Swan and Canning Reserve. I invite the general manager to make any other comments he wishes to.

Mr R. Hughes: In relation specifically to the river protection notices, the member is quite right—they are a very powerful instrument under the new act. No river protection notices have been issued at this stage. No specific resourcing is dedicated to that pursuit. What would happen is that if a particular circumstance arose, we would go through the processes of the act—which are pretty onerous—to put a river protection notice in place. Then it would go through our normal enforcement processes.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for South Perth has the call.

Mr J.E. McGRATH: Might I say that I am very disappointed that the Swan River has been given such a small allocation of time. I think it is a disgrace that this Parliament did not allow more than 20 minutes to talk about the health and future of one of the great icons of Western Australia, and one that I am very passionate about. We read in the newspaper and we hear commentary in the media that the river will be like a drain one day, which concerns me and concerns a lot of Western Australians, and here we are allowing only 20 minutes to talk about it. I think we should have a proper parliamentary review of, or inquiry into, the Swan River, and we should be giving the agency all the support that we possibly can as a Parliament. I think that successive governments have been accused of not putting enough funding into the Swan River, and I am really concerned about where we are headed.

I would like to ask the minister—maybe through the department—where does the Swan River Trust see the Swan River being in 50 years' time? Can it be saved and maybe returned to its former state of 20, 30 or 40 years ago?

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Does the member have a page reference?

Mr J.E. McGRATH: The reference is page 912 of the *Budget Statements*, under the heading of “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency”. My second question is that given that the Swan-Avon catchment area covers such a massive amount of land and takes in so much of inland Western Australia, has the Swan River Trust considered making an application for extra funding through the royalties for regions program? As I am sure that some of the problems with the Swan River might be starting from the Swan catchment in the regions, I think we should be considering whether the royalties for regions program should be putting some funding into the Swan River so that we can ensure that this river becomes healthy again.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I thank the member for South Perth for his question. I agree that this issue needs more time, but that is totally out of my control. I will ask the general manager to make a comment on the member's question

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: He had better be quick!

Dr G.G. JACOBS: As the member stated, the Swan River is not just what I see when I stay in the member's electorate in South Perth; it is much more than that. It comes from the Swan-Avon catchment, which is the size of Tasmania. That catchment does impact on the river, so it is not actually just the Swan-Canning River Park in isolation. I understand what the member is saying. Because of the constraints of time —

Mr J.E. McGRATH: I am happy to put it on notice.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, we are out of time.

The appropriation was recommended.

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 27 May 2009]
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Mr David Templeman; Dr Graham Jacobs; Mr John McGrath; Mr Chris Tallentire; Chairman

Committee adjourned at 10.00 pm
