

PERTH ZOO DOCENT ASSOCIATION INC

Statement by Minister for the Environment

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah - Minister for the Environment) [9.07 am]: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to inform the house that Perth Zoo's volunteer group, the Perth Zoo Docent Association Inc, has recently celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. The word "docent" comes from the Latin "docere", which means "to teach". This reflects its vital role as teacher of the Western Australian community about conservation and our natural world. Volunteers provide invaluable services to the operations of modern zoos around the world, providing support in the areas of conservation education and ancillary services. They also forge direct links between Zoo activities and the wider community. There were just a handful of volunteers in the first intake of docents in 1982 and, in the quarter century since, over 1 200 docents have passed through the association doors. Three members have been docents for the entire 25 years, and more than 80 have been docents for the past decade. The average longevity of a Perth Zoo docent is nearly twice the national average for volunteering. Docents have contributed more than 500 000 hours of unpaid service to the Zoo and to Western Australia.

The relationship between Perth Zoo and the docent association is a best practice partnership. It is a successful model that has been directly referenced twice in the government guidelines for partnerships between public sector agencies and volunteers. It relies on open communication, mutual respect and shared values. Perth Zoo supports the amazing contribution of the docents through the provision of accommodation, human and financial resources to assist in their administration and events, and access to Zoo expertise and information. In return, the docents work directly with Zoo visitors 365 days a year, taking tours and providing information. The Zoo docents also assist with raising funds for the Zoo's key community initiatives, and, over the past few years, have raised \$50 000 for project sun bear. Docents provide support to staff by monitoring animal behaviour, creating behavioural enrichment items, assisting at functions and events, and even helping out in the Zoo archives.

In this their twenty-fifth year of partnership with Perth Zoo, I am proud to be the minister bringing to the attention of Parliament this extraordinary achievement and this wonderful model of partnership between the government and the community.