

CONSERVATION SCIENCE FUNDING

Statement by Minister for the Environment

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah - Minister for the Environment) [12.06 pm]: Western Australia is recognised as one of the most biodiverse areas on the planet. The south west of the state is one of 34 international biodiversity hot spots, and the state has eight of the 15 national biodiversity hot spots. The state has more than 12 500 species of flowering plants, 300 species of mosses, 7 500 species of algae and perhaps around 140 000 species of fungi. However, these figures are estimates because even today there are still around 3 000 species of flowering plants that have been collected but are waiting to be scientifically described. Conserving these species is indeed a challenging task. As part of meeting this conservation challenge, the University of Western Australia and the Department of Environment and Conservation have signed a memorandum of understanding to share funding for two positions in the university's School of Plant Biology and the department's Western Australian Herbarium. The MOU reflects the cooperation and respect shared among scientists in Western Australia. It also demonstrates the commitment that the state government has to working with the community to achieve long-term sustainable outcomes. It also lays the foundation for further collaboration on conservation science in Western Australia.

The state government has allocated \$13 million in 2007-08 towards a \$25 million investment in flora conservation with the building of a new conservation science centre and herbarium at the department's Kensington complex. The existing herbarium is inadequate and the government recognises that a new facility that meets the needs of twenty-first century science is clearly needed.

I also am pleased to inform the house that DEC also has upgraded its FloraBase Internet site by including an interactive program that will enable people around the world to identify plant species in nearly 200 families and more than 1 000 genera. This new feature will be especially helpful to voluntary conservation groups that play such an outstanding role in protecting remnant bushlands within their local communities. It also will assist the resources sector in carrying out its environmental assessments. The development of this new feature was funded through the \$15 million Saving our Species biodiversity conservation initiative, which is boosting efforts to protect the state's flora, fauna and ecosystems. This is yet another example of how the Carpenter government is acting now for the future to ensure that our distinctive environment is appreciated and conserved.