

SWAN AND CANNING RIVERS MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2014

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean) [8.06 pm]: There is a bit of chaos.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz): Members, can we have a little shush, please, to give the member for Bassendean the opportunity to speak.

Mr D.J. KELLY: There is chaos on both sides of the house for a change, not just the government side.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr D.J. KELLY: I spoke earlier on the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Amendment Bill 2014. To summarise the position of those on this side of the house, we have grave concerns that this bill represents a substantial reduction in the level of protection for the Swan and Canning Rivers.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, there are still too many conversations going on. It is very difficult for me to hear up here and I am not sure how Hansard is coping. Please follow the previous Acting Speaker's advice and either be still or leave the chamber.

Mr D.J. KELLY: In our economy there are always competing pressures on environmental assets such as the Swan and Canning Rivers. In an environment in which there is very strong pressure on an environmental asset, it is important to have a strong independent agency to stand up for the catchments and ensure that the desire to develop and progress the economy does not end up trashing a very substantial environmental asset. Of course, the rivers are also a very important economic asset. Some people do not realise that protecting the environment can also generate substantial economic activity. It is not a case of what is good for the environment is bad for the economy or vice versa; we can actually have a strong regime to protect an environmental asset, which then becomes an economic driver in its own right. The Swan and Canning Rivers are a perfect example of that. Imagine the economy of Perth without the Swan River. For a start, the tourism industry would be much reduced. One of the benefits and attractions of Perth is that our city is beside a magnificent body of water. If that river system became degraded and visitors did not have a pleasurable experience when they visited Perth, imagine the negative effect that would have on the tourism industry.

It is important that people understand that it is not a case of what is good for the environment is bad for the economy. We can protect the environment and at the same time grow the economy. It does mean that at times government has to moderate economic activity in order to protect the environment, but in most cases that is in the best interests of the community as a whole. When Europeans first arrived here, they considered the Swan River a convenient place to deposit all their waste. The Swan River was a convenient system for both households and businesses to dispose of their waste. The Swan River has suffered greatly over the years of European settlement from businesses throwing their trash in it. One of the drainage systems with which I am familiar, the Bayswater main drain, winds its way through kilometres of our suburbs and a number of industrial estates and then flows into the Swan River. That drainage system was used by countless businesses to dump their waste, which flowed through the drainage system and into the Swan River. That did immense damage to the Swan River. Thankfully, some action has been taken to clean up what goes into that main drain and therefore what flows into the Swan River. Some people would argue that is an increased cost to business and a price they are not prepared to pay to protect the river. Thankfully, that is an argument that the majority of people in Western Australia would no longer accept, but there was a time when those arguments were made. We have to modify our economic activity to protect the river, but most Western Australians would now say that that is appropriate.

One of the concerns members on this side have about this bill is that at least one of the mechanisms that was there to moderate economic activity that affects the river has been removed—that is, the ability of the Swan River Trust to have a say over developments that impinge upon the river. Some people would say that they should be able to develop along the foreshore in a way that maximises economic activity and provides jobs, and therefore that is good for the community. Other people would say that the Swan River needs to be cared for as well if we are to protect its environmental and economic values. Some people in Perth have been completely frustrated—I can see the member for Belmont nodding—by the fact that the Swan River Trust has a say over development issues that affect the river. I think it is perfectly appropriate and is valuable in the debate we have around what economic activity is appropriate and what is not to have a strong advocate for the Swan River. One of the consequences of this bill is that that strong advocate for the Swan River is being, in all but name, swept away. Despite what the Minister for Environment might say, the Swan River Trust as we know it is being swept away. I say to the minister that he has a very important role to play in this government. He is the person who is entrusted with being the principal guardian of the environment in Western Australia. The Swan and Canning

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Rivers catchment is incredibly important, and I ask the minister to think seriously about what he is doing. I cannot see that what the minister is doing would come from people who have at the forefront of their minds the protection of the Swan and Canning Rivers. I believe this bill has come from those who want to weaken the protection of the river because they are frustrated by the advocacy that the Swan River Trust has undertaken on behalf of the river. The minister is in a government. He has taken on this portfolio. If this goes pear-shaped, as the opposition fears it will, it will be this minister's legacy. He will look back and ask himself, "Did I really take care of the river?"

In the few minutes I have left I want to mention a couple of community groups that participate in looking after the river. Some frustration has been expressed by some of those community groups about this bill. One of the comments that has been made to me is that when they work with various government agencies to get projects up and running that involve community groups to repair or promote a bit of the river, it is very frustrating when the government officials they deal with keep changing all the time. Community groups build relationships with government organisations and particular government officers, and then someone in government makes a change and everything gets changed—the personnel and the agencies. This bill is one of those changes. One of the community groups I was talking to asked whether this would mean they had to deal with different agencies and different personnel on projects they have been working on for a number of years. Their concern is that they will lose a year, 18 months or two years before they can get back to where they were. Many people in the community will find that frustrating.

I want to compliment in particular Recfishwest for the work it does in making sure that recreational fishing coexists on the river with a minimum of detrimental impact on the river itself. A few weeks ago the shadow Minister for the Environment and I went along to the inaugural Reel It In Fishing Clean Up Day at Hinds Reserve in Bayswater. It was a particularly rainy Sunday morning, but the member for Gosnells and I went along. There were representatives from Recfishwest, the Swan River Trust, the City of Bayswater, Clean Marine, Keep Australia Beautiful and the Native Animal Rescue Group and we participated in a couple of hours of cleaning up the river. On that morning we collected a kilometre of fishing line, 34 hooks, 148 bait bags and more than 47 bags of general rubbish. That exercise was very useful, and with the cooperation of the Swan River Trust, Recfishwest has now installed 22 units along the river to encourage people to deposit their unwanted fishing line or any fishing line they come across while they are out and about on the river. They are tremendous initiatives and set an example. The community really wants to care for the river; it just needs to know that the government is going to back it.

The other group I wanted to mention was the Bassendean Preservation Group, which was recently awarded a certificate by the Town of Bassendean recognising its 30 years of volunteer work defending the river and promoting the foreshore, along with AshfieldCAN, which is a residents' group in the Ashfield area. Both the Bassendean Preservation Group and AshfieldCAN raised with me erosion on the foreshore of Ashfield Flats. I wrote to the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Planning about that issue a couple of weeks ago. Basically, several hundred metres of foreshore is badly eroded and a line of mature trees will fall into the river unless action is taken immediately. I raised this the other night with the Minister for Planning, as the Western Australian Planning Commission owns the land. The minister undertook to investigate that issue. I would be grateful if the Minister for Environment, along with the Minister for Planning, could have another look at that issue. It is not an issue that can wait another 12 months. We are in danger of losing a whole line of trees straight into the river because of erosion. I have raised it with the Minister for Planning; I am now raising it with the Minister for Environment. I trust the ministers will get their heads together and consider that issue and see if they can come up with some action to deal with the erosion on Ashfield Flats. The minister has a big job. The Labor Party has grave concerns about this bill. I hope the minister has listened to the arguments we have put.

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington) [8.21 pm]: I rise to make some remarks about the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Amendment Bill 2014. I start off by making the observation that the Canning River is actually at the heart of my electorate. Even in my inaugural speech, I made observations about the fact that the Canning River is the essential heart of the electorate of Cannington. I am very lucky to have such a wonderful waterway through the middle of the electorate. The Canning River Regional Park in the City of Canning runs from Wilson through to Cannington and Ferndale. I call it the Kings Park of the east. If people use the park, they will find it is absolutely fabulous. It is a great place to be with nature. It is a great place to bird-watch and see the other animals that live there. It is also a great place to go for a walk with the kids. People can paddle on the river. It is fabulous. It was highlighted on Channel Nine's *Postcards WA* a couple of weeks ago. It showed a number of recreational opportunities on the Canning River. Situated on the Canning River is the Canning River Eco Education Centre, a great achievement of the former member for Riverton, Tony McRae. He worked very hard on that project. He got it funded and completed, and it is now used constantly by schools in the south east region to provide education on environmental issues. We are fortunate that the City of Canning has funded the operations of that centre because the operations were originally co-funded by the state government and the City of Canning. Unfortunately, when the Liberal government came in in 2008, it did not renew the ongoing funding

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for the operations of that centre. Without the City of Canning stepping up to the mark, that centre would have closed. It would have been a ridiculous position—having spent millions of dollars to build the centre, it would have sat unused, but, fortunately for everybody in the south-east corridor, the City of Canning was prepared to step up and fund the operations.

I want to note a comment made by the member for Bassendean in his commentary on this bill. He talked about the environment and economic activity. In modern economic theory, there is the idea of environmental services—that is the benefit that is provided to society and the economy on the basis of the actions of the environment. For example, trees take in carbon dioxide and exhale oxygen. That is an environmental service. Wetlands can be used to clean up drains, which also is an environmental service. We do not want to say that the Swan and Canning Rivers are simply part of the environment; we want to say they are part not only of the environment, but also of the necessary ecosystem that we live in. Without a healthy river, we are all diminished and our economy will suffer.

The Noongar name for the Canning River is Dyarguu and, as most people know, the Swan River is Derbal Yaragan. I want to pay respect to the fact that for thousands of years the Indigenous inhabitants of the Swan coastal plain actually managed the Swan and Canning Rivers. It is not a good idea to undermine the role of the Swan River Trust. I know some people talk about the restrictions that are placed on the use of the river by the Swan River Trust, but we also have to think about the benefits. The Liberal government has made a number of key mistakes in the management of the Swan and Canning Rivers. When it came to power, one of those mistakes was not to continue with the previous Labor government's decision to remove phosphorous from fertilisers. When the Labor Party was in government, the manufacturers came to us to say it would cost additional money to remove phosphorous from fertiliser, but, once it is done, there are no additional costs. The government has to regulate the removal of phosphorous from fertiliser, because then everybody will move together and no company will have an advantage over another. Given that most of the phosphorous load that gets into the river is from agriculture—agriculture is a very important part of Western Australia's economy—allowing the removal of phosphorous on a voluntary basis means that no-one will ever do it because nobody wants to move first. The fertiliser industry asked the Labor government to ban phosphorous from fertiliser. One of the first decisions of the incoming Liberal government was to reverse that decision. Guess what? Phosphorous is now not out of the system. Until we reduce the amount of phosphorous entering our waterways, we will never get rid of algal bloom problems. This is a very critical part of management of the Swan and Canning Rivers. It reflects the fact that this government does not seem to understand the real challenges facing the river. This bill is another reflection of the fact the government does not get it when it comes to managing the Swan and Canning Rivers.

I am very lucky, as the member for Cannington, and our local community is very lucky, because a number of organisations in our community work very hard to not only protect, but also improve the Canning and Swan Rivers. Of course, at the heart of those organisations is SERCUL—the South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare. Its headquarters are in Beckenham, in my electorate, alongside the Canning River. SERCUL has great leadership in its chairman, Pat Hart, and its CEO, Julie Robert. In fact, it won an environmental award in 2012. When the minister invited nominations for the 2013 environmental awards, SERCUL again nominated.

Of course, the minister cancelled the awards after he had called for nominations. It is very interesting that he wrote to the community groups in the environment space asking them to nominate organisations and people for an environment award to recognise the hard work of these organisations and then after—not before—he had written to them inviting them to nominate for the awards, he put out a media release announcing that he had cancelled the awards. I do not know what the minister was thinking, but it was certainly very embarrassing for him in the community environment space to have done that.

The great thing about the South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare is that it has real strength that it shares with other organisations in the local area. There are a number of pure volunteer groups, including the Bannister Creek Catchment Group, the Two Rivers Catchment Group, the Friends of Brixton Street Wetlands, the Canning River Regional Park Volunteers, the Friends of Queens Park Bushland and the Wilson Wetlands Action Group. SERCUL supports a range of other volunteer organisations, but they are the ones that specifically operate in my electorate, so they are the ones that I want to highlight.

I want to make some points about the things that SERCUL highlights on its website as essential issues in the management of the Swan coastal plain. The first issue it highlights is the algae problem and excess nutrients. I will not read it all out; members can go to the website and read about how the high levels of phosphorus and nitrogen in the Swan and Canning river system promote the growth of algae and the impact that has on the rivers and the environment. It makes the point —

Nutrients accumulate in the environment as a result of human activity. Nutrients entering the Swan, Canning and wetlands originate from:

- Fertilisers

- Plant material (especially grass clippings and leaves)
- Soil
- Dog faeces
- Detergents
- Leakages from septic tanks
- Bread fed to water birds
- Intensive agriculture and industrial sources

To deal with the problems of algal blooms, they need to be fought at the source, and that is what the Swan River Trust is able to do when it is independent. However, when the government does not understand the environmental needs of Western Australia, and the minister takes control over what happens in the Swan and Canning Rivers, which is what he is proposing to do, none of these issues will be dealt with because the minister does not have the commitment to the environment that is needed.

SERCUL goes on about some of the other issues involved in managing the river, including erosion and sedimentation. I know that the minister is very proud of building river walls along the Swan River, because he says that that is the way to fight erosion. However, I am advised by specialists in these issues that other problems arise from simply building river walls. In some places, river walls will be needed, but at other times there are better ways of handling erosion along the sides of the rivers. When we look at the Canning River and its rehabilitation since farming stopped along its banks through Cannington and Beckenham, we can see that there are other ways to handle these issues. We need to think about the decisions, and that is why we would probably want a specialist organisation such as the Swan River Trust making decisions rather than a minister who does not know what he is doing.

SERCUL also makes comments about non-nutrient contaminants and pollution; weeds—I will talk about weeds when I talk about some of the individual groups—climate change; pets and feral animals; and fires. They are the sorts of issues that SERCUL highlights as being critical to the management of the rivers.

I want to draw the attention of the chamber to one particular program run by SERCUL called Clean Drains River Gains that I think is really interesting. From 2003, when the former Labor government funded SERCUL, it has been working to overcome the problem of contaminants entering the river through drains. When there is a large storm, often there is complete run-off from car parks, and all the spillage from cars leaking oil et cetera and the refuse that has been left by different people or dropped by accident get washed into the drains. Where do the drains go? They end at the rivers. I make the point that SERCUL is not just talking about these things; it is getting out there and working with the community to change what is happening. I also highlight its Living Stream project. I particularly refer to the Bannister Creek Catchment Group, which has been working for a long time to protect Bannister Creek—the bit that I am interested in is the bit that flows through Lynwood and Ferndale—and not just allow it to be overgrown by feral weeds, to be degraded or to be turned into a fast-running drainage ditch. It has been working to make it a living stream so that native plants can be regenerated along the banks to ensure that there is less sediment run-off into the river and to use the natural activity of the plants in the environmental services that I talked about at the start of my comments to make sure that the environment is improved, not just protected. The Bannister Creek Catchment Group has been doing wonderful work over a long period and it is to be commended for that.

The same applies with the Two Rivers Catchment Group. Each year on National Tree Day, I enjoy going along with the Two Rivers Catchment Group to the Canning River Regional Park to plant trees. They are great people who are always so friendly, and they are making a real difference to the Swan and Canning Rivers.

I make the observation that the Brixton Street Wetlands are actually in the electorate of Forrestfield, but many of the people involved with the Friends of Brixton Street Wetlands are from my electorate. The wetlands are actually on the boundary; the rail line is the boundary and they are immediately on the other side of the rail line. It is natural that many of the people involved with the Friends of Brixton Street Wetlands have built a relationship with me and my office, and I am very pleased about that.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The Canning River Regional Park Volunteers has done a fabulous job for the river and the park. I note that its general meeting is being held tonight, and if the government had not decided to sit beyond 7.00 pm, I would have been there. It has some fabulous people, including Dick and Jo Stone, who have been working in this area for a long time. Dick and Jo are very well recognised in the environment movement and they have been doing a fabulous job. There is really good work going on there.

The Friends of Queens Park Bushland recently had its tenth anniversary. It is working very hard to improve the standards of Queens Park, which runs along Welshpool Road, and to breathe life back into that bushland, which has been degraded over time. It does great work. As I have explained, all these areas are connected to the river. It

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is interesting of course that after Queens Park, Cannington, East Cannington and Beckenham were settled and the trees were cleared—it was always swampy land when it was managed by Indigenous people—the land would have been impossible to manage except by digging drainage ditches because the watertable is so close to the surface. Right through my electorate, including Ferndale and Lynwood—although it is less of a stark issue there—the drainage ditches are the only measures that prevent people’s houses from being flooded. However, it still means that all these areas are connected. Therefore, the work that the Friends of Queens Park Bushland is doing at the northern end of the suburb of Queens Park is just as good for the river as is the work done by any of the other groups.

The final group that I will mention is the Wilson Wetlands Action Group. Again, that group of people formed in the garage of a local resident when they were trying to resist the development of land owned by the Christian Brothers of Castledare. Although they were not able to prevent that particular development, over a long period they have been able to bring together hardworking local people who have made an incredible difference. Recently the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Gosnells, who is the shadow Minister for Environment, came with me to visit the Wilson Wetlands people on one of their work mornings and we then joined them for a barbeque.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: At Russell Gorton’s place.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Yes, at his parents’ house—Russell Gorton is the president of WWAG—where we joined them all for brunch. They took us that day to the BMX track site where they have made an incredible difference. If members look on the South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare website, they will see photos showing the change in that area from 2001 to today. The members of that group have taken it from a grass riverbank to what looks like virgin bushland. They have done a remarkable job and a great service to the environment and to the people of my electorate, as has each of these groups.

I also want to mention that the Bannister Creek Catchment Group is working with Lynwood Senior High School. Lynwood Senior High School is actually in Parkwood. High Street is the boundary between my electorate and the electorate of Riverton, and Lynwood Senior High School is just across the road but it obviously services Ferndale, Lynwood and Langford as well as Parkwood and other areas. I am therefore very pleased to support Lynwood Senior High School. Lynwood Senior High School has a program called the LEAF program—Lynwood Environmental and Academic Flexible learning program—to engage students at school to be active in supporting the environment. The school works with the Bannister Creek Catchment Group, but it also goes way out even to the wheatbelt to plant trees and works to help the environment recover. Last year, BP gave Lynwood Senior High School a grant to create a wetland in the school grounds. The LEAF students are working to make that a living part of the environment. Together with Bannister Creek Catchment Group, SERCUL and others, they are doing a great job. The students are learning practical skills while they are at school and they are benefiting the environment. Lynwood Senior High School is very lucky to have Gary Anderson as its principal; he is a hardworking and dedicated school leader. The chair of the school board is Tanya Pope, who also is a prominent member of the community. She works hard for the community at not only Lynwood Senior High School, but also Bannister Creek Primary School and in other local community groups. I note that I am a member of the board and that the member for Riverton was previously a member of the board. Obviously since he has become a minister, he has not been able to regularly attend meetings, but I am sure that he would like to see even more improvements at Lynwood Senior High School. Giles Nunis is one of the senior officials at the Department of State Development and is actually a graduate of Lynwood Senior High School. He is on the board as well and he makes a great contribution.

Mr C.J. Barnett: A good guy.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: He is a very good guy.

Members can see therefore that a range of issues affect the river.

I will make an observation—I do not get these opportunities often—that at the time of the 2008 election, the Liberal and National Parties made a commitment to look at the possibility of desalinating the brackish water in the wheatbelt. Many people in the wheatbelt wonder why we cannot desalinate the water that is causing problems in the wheatbelt and, perhaps because Perth is downhill from the wheatbelt, see what opportunities there are to pump it to Perth. The Liberal–National government commissioned the engineering company URS and on 29 June 2011 it released a report called “An independent feasibility study of treating large saline reserves east of the Darling Escarpment”. I do not know whether I am the only member of the chamber who has read the report, which was tabled almost a year later, but when it was tabled I got a copy of it and read it through. It is quite interesting because, obviously, we cannot talk about the Swan River without talking about the catchment area. I think the member for Bateman said that the catchment for the Swan and Canning Rivers is larger than Tasmania.

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Mr M.H. Taylor: It is about the size of Tasmania.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Yes. Naturally, we cannot look at managing the river without looking at the wheatbelt.

Members should read this report, if they do not already know about it. It is very good, as we would expect from an important engineering company that knows what it is doing. The report determined that it was too expensive to treat any of the water in the wheatbelt for the city. It explained why it is very expensive to move the water from inland to the coast and also why it is very expensive to desalinate the water. It explained how a desalination plant on the coast can effectively return brackish water back into the ocean. I understand that within a couple of metres of the outfall at the Kwinana desal plant the difference in salinity in the water cannot be measured compared with the ocean surrounding it; whereas in the results of the saline from the wheatbelt it was pointed out that there is no effective market. Even if salt could be created out of the brackish water, there is actually no market for that salt as opposed to the grand-scale salt works in the Pilbara. It is a very good report and I make the point that for members who are interested in catchment management it is probably worthwhile reading that report. The report effectively shows that the environment actually has to be managed and that having mechanical interventions to do that is not the best way. The best way is to try to manage the problems at their source, remove the hazards, reduce the use of phosphorous from the environment and look at fixing the nitrogen problem and getting it out of the river system. That is the best way to deal with it. Sure, engineers can do anything if we are prepared to pay them enough, but that is not always the best option. We need to take a catchment approach and have a look at every input into the river and make a decision about how we can step that up. The most professional way of doing that is through a properly resourced Swan River Trust. We need to take the politics out of managing the river and to keep focused on the needs of the river. The government must make sure that what it is proposing is affordable and effective. It may not necessarily be a good photo opportunity for the minister but it should be in the best long-term interests of the river.

I will finish with the fact that there is a lot of nervousness in the volunteer sector at the moment—people who are on the ground doing the work—about what will happen with their grants. These volunteer groups take a small grant from the state and federal governments. They will lose all the federal natural resource management grants. What can they do? They can take a small grant, add volunteer labour, and make a huge difference. Anyone who walks around the Canning River Regional Park can see writ large how the community groups can do that. It is the people on the ground who are making the difference. They are saying very strongly that they do not support the government's proposal for the Swan River Trust. They do not support the government's Swan and Canning River Management Amendment Bill 2014. I think it is worth the government not talking about it but listening.

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle) [8.51 pm]: I too want to use this opportunity to speak about this Swan and Canning River Management Amendment Bill. Largely, my concern is about the abolition of the Swan River Trust in its current form and that much of its work will be subsumed into the general government Department of Parks and Wildlife. I begin by referring to the launch of a website I recently attended during Reconciliation Week, called Nyungar Wardan Katitjin Bidi Derbal Nara. I hope I have pronounced that correctly. It was put together by the Curtin University sustainable policy unit and the Cockburn City Council. I think state government funds were contributed via Coast West towards developing the website. It is an excellent resource that people have not quite discovered. As the website says, it looks to embody Noongar representations of country, stories and family. It contains a range of resources. In this instance, I want to refer briefly to the Nyungar Boordja, the people's country in relation to the Whadjuk—the people from around the Swan River. All their lives were reliant on the Swan and Canning Rivers or the Derbal Yaragan and the Djarlgarra as they called them. In reflecting on the traditional life along those rivers, I refer to Dorothy Winmar, a traditional owner, quoted on the website. According to her account, life in the area was relatively comfortable as it was lived traditionally, before white settlement. According to my notes she says —

My grandmother told me—the way she told it to me it sounded like it was paradise. They didn't want for anything. They lived off the land and the fish from the water. They got kangaroo skins pegged out and cut them up to dry them and sew them to make coats—Yongaka booka or Kangaroo coats—took our bags out of them, rugs to sit in. They were quite contented with their lives. Yes, they used to catch their fish with spears—didjis. They used to hunt with spears, catch possums and all sorts of animals with fur on them to make kids clothes out of them, those bookas. Without the booka it was very cold in the winter. They even made shoes out of fur. They were very clever people. We're still very clever. They hunted for their living and lived off their land.

I have referred to that website and that description of what traditional life was like, according to the traditional owners, because without the life that came from the river and the interaction of the river and the land around it—in fact, the catchment areas we heard about from the member for Cannington—life for the traditional owners of the land would have been very different. Therefore the responsibility we have to properly manage the Derbal Yaragan is very important.

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When the Swan River Trust was established in 1989 it was done with the view to providing the best possible protections for the condition of the river and in acknowledgment of our responsibility to protect the river from the encroachment of population and development in and around the river. It was formed, I think, with very important sentiment to try to put the best possible protections in place. In a motion to which I spoke previously before the house on this matter, I referred to Bruce Hamilton, the inaugural head of the Swan River Trust, and to a report in *The West Australian* on 29 September last year in which he was critical of the abolition of the Swan River Trust in its current form. Mr Hamilton said it was a retrograde step that would lead to worse environmental outcomes. The report states —

It came after the trust's latest annual report showed nutrient levels and indicators of algal growth were above acceptable limits in many parts of the river system.

Abolishing the trust meant there would be less accountability for managing the rivers, while there was also a risk the DPAW would struggle to give them enough money and attention.

I think that is at the heart of the concern about the decision to subsume the work of the trust into the general department. Already the management of the river system is very challenging, with resources always in demand. The Department of Parks and Wildlife's work of general conservation management contained within its brief is also very challenging without including the responsibility for looking after the very precious and sensitive environment around the Canning and Swan Rivers. There is a real concern that work will be compromised. Not only has that been echoed by members on this side of the house about the work of volunteer groups and their understanding of the environmental challenges facing the sound management of our metropolitan river systems, but also there is concern by the local councils whose jurisdiction abuts the river foreshore. Those councils have to deal with not only council amalgamations and the uncertainty and upheaval that have come along with that process, but also the very real prospect that they will be left holding the baby on this issue at a time of restricted resources generally within the state government. There will be less money, less coordination and less expertise given to them by the state government to do the work it previously relied on the Swan River Trust to do. Councils are concerned that they will be left to foot the bill and, as we know, the state government has already done some cost shifting onto the councils as part of the local government reform process.

The mouth of the Swan River on the south side that adjoins my electorate is a very important part of the river, as members can imagine. The particular involvement that I have had with the river has been with the Friends of East Fremantle Foreshore. It is a local community group that has been active in trying to ensure that the foreshore is protected. It is not only worried about the degradation of the foreshore system generally, but also frustrated that a lot of good work is going to be wasted because that work is not being followed up. For instance, last year, on a visit that I had with the Friends of East Fremantle Foreshore down to the area near the Swan Yacht Club, opposite Leeuwin Barracks near the Zephyr Cafe, we could see very clearly very advanced trees, the roots of which were completely exposed. Alongside them was sandbagging and smaller bushes and shrubs that looked to be further eroded, so the work that had been put in place to ensure that that area of the foreshore was protected is literally being washed out into the ocean. As far as I know, the frustration of that community group has continued from last year to this year. It has had some clean-up exercises down there. Unfortunately, I had another commitment and I could not get to one, but I am sure that all along the river, a lot of that sort of work relies on volunteer organisations doing clean-up work, planting and lobbying to ensure that the important work of protecting the foreshore is drawn to the authority's attention. On that group's behalf, I can say that I share its concerns that, without the trust, that sort of protection of the foreshore will be put at risk.

I am not sure what motivation the government has in abolishing an independent trust and subsuming that trust's work into the general department. What motivation can the government have other than to save money and try to cut corners in the important work of protecting the river? Efficiencies are one thing, but to take away the independence of the trust and the important stand-alone authority that the trust has in its current form is, I think, a real loss in the protection of our river system. We have a responsibility to ensure that the river is given the best care possible in light of what we know are increased pressures on that river system, partly through phosphorus levels and all sorts of pollution pressures that go along with the population pressure on the foreshore, as well as the ongoing use of the river by boats and the degradation of the riverbank that the river relies on to stay healthy.

As I said, I want to add my voice to the concerns about removing the independent work of the trust. It will leave the trust as some sort of empty shell. If the government wants the trust to continue its work in only an advisory capacity, it is a real shame and, frankly, is insulting to the people who have done that work for a number of years. I would like to hope that I am doing my job in keeping an eye on the state of the river and ensuring that it continues to get the resources that it needs, but I think that abolishing the trust in its current form is a real step backwards.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [9.05 pm]: I rise to speak on the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Amendment Bill 2014. I note some of the very good contributions and points that my colleagues have made

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about respective parts of the river in their electorates. There is no doubt that all parts of the Swan and Canning Rivers are important, but I particularly want to focus on those areas of the Swan River that are within and about my electorate. Probably the main focal point for my electorate is on the Swan River at Guildford, and the Helena River also at Guildford. I think that people who have perhaps arrived in Western Australia more recently and are not familiar with the history of this state forget that before this area was Perth, it was the Swan River Colony. Before it was determined to have the settlement at Perth, when the settlement on the western side of Western Australia was established, it was known as the Swan River Colony. In fact, sometimes people query why there is an anchor on the coat of arms of the City of Swan, because they do not see the City of Swan as being a port like Fremantle. However, from the time of white settlement, the earliest ports in Western Australia were in my electorate at Guildford and also at Midland. Again, people do not see Midland as a riverside suburb, but it is. The Helena River goes through Woodbridge along the side of the Midland railway workshops site, and of course the river curves around in the other direction and goes through Guildford and Caversham. A lot of people in this place are probably more familiar with Lilac Hill and the river in that location. It is a very historic area. It is not by accident that the City of Swan has an anchor on its coat of arms. In fact, early transport in this colony was mainly on the river.

A history of Guildford was commissioned for the 175th anniversary of Guildford Primary School, and it refers to Guildford as a treasured island. People do not necessarily see Guildford as an island, but in a sense it is very much an island in that it has a river on effectively three or more sides. A lot of people would be familiar with the river crossing between Bassendean and Guildford. There is another river crossing when people take the other approach from Great Eastern Highway. In that direction, a bridge brings people into Guildford. To get into Guildford from Bassendean, people have to cross a bridge, or they can cross the bridge on the Belmont side. If people go along Great Eastern Highway from South Guildford to Guildford, again they have to cross the Helena River at that point. If people contemplate where Guildford Grammar School is positioned on the other side of the railway line at Guildford, of course the river goes around there, and the river also flows between that area and Caversham. Governor Stirling Senior High School was rebuilt and is located there. It now focuses on the river, and people can look across the river there to the vineyards opposite in Caversham. The river is certainly very significant in my electorate.

In addition, some tributaries of the river that go through my electorate are very significant, such as Jane Brook and Blackadder Creek. I certainly commend those people who do their best to maintain these waterways and keep them as free from weeds as is possible. However, I do think we need to contemplate the significance of the river to the history of this state and, indeed, for the present and the future. It is the very reason that the colony was established here in the first place. The colony's first Governor, as I pointed out, was Captain James Stirling, after whom Governor Stirling Senior High School in my electorate is named. He explored the upper reaches of the Swan River as early as 1827. For people who are not very familiar with the history of the settlement of what was then the Swan River Colony, I note that in 1829 that was its name; it was not called the City of Perth. In fact, Guildford Primary School is particularly historically significant because it is the oldest continuously operating state school in our state. Some other schools might claim to be nearly as old or about as old, but they have not been continuously operating. Indeed, the school actually still retains part of the 1868 structure that was built on that site. It certainly is a most significant building to people who live within the Guildford area surrounded by the river.

The health of the river is important. The Swan River Trust has not always protected our interests as well as it should have done. Although we were pleased to see the aeration pumps and so forth go in some years ago, we were very concerned about the ugliness of the structures that were placed on the banks of the river in Guildford. These structures, I note, still remain. The river, too, was significant prior to colonisation in Western Australia, and some of my colleagues have dwelt on the Aboriginal history and the river's importance to Aboriginal people. Although for white settlers part of the reason that the early settlement occurred at Guildford was the access to fresh water, particularly at Success Hill—which my colleague, the member for Bassendean may have already referred to—for Aboriginal people, the river has even more significance. I note that from a project with the Swan River Trust back in 2010, as part of a student work placement by Curtin University, quite a good document was compiled by Debra Hughes-Hallett. The document provided an interesting read, given the research she did, which I found to be most informative. As part of that project, she states —

At the time of colonisation, **Mooro Nyoongars** considered the western section of the precinct part of their **boodjar** or country. **Beeloo Nyoongar** considered the eastern banks of the Swan River and the Helena River as part of their boodjar or country. It is believed that at the time of colonisation, the land from Mount Eliza to just past Broun's farm was the land of Munday's family. From Bassendean to the head of the Swan was considered to be the province of **Wiap**.

Nyoongars believe the **Waugal** is present at the section where Bennett Brook enters the Swan River below Success Hill ...

Nyoongar believe that Blackadder Creek was formed through the creative activity of the Waugal who still lives there. A corroboree ground was located on the eastern bank of the Swan River near its junction with Blackadder Creek. The exact location of the site is not known and the area has been dramatically altered and the creek diverted several times.

As has been noted —

The relationship of Aborigines to the land and their notions of land ownership are such that Aborigines consider themselves guardians of the land, and custodians of its stories, songs, rituals and ceremonies, sacred objects and religious associations ...

In 1981, near Midland Brick, stone artefacts were found which are believed to be around 40 000 years old. The site held over one hundred stone artefacts of different materials including chert and dolerite. The artefacts are believed to have been hand held implements including scrapers and other tools.

That, I think, gives us a brief insight into the history of the Noongar people in that region. No doubt they were using that area as a camping ground for the same reasons that the white settlers did when they came here in 1829; they were attracted to that area of the Swan River because of the access to fresh drinking water.

According to a reflection by Jean Boladeras, she says —

“This part of the river [place at Guildford] is called the **Nanook** or the neck of the river and it’s where the end of the salt water comes up to the river and it’s a place for the Waggle, a sleeping spot. That’s his nest for him there, where he stays, it’s one of his resting places, so it’s pretty important that place, to us, and always will be”.

There are lots of personal reflections and stories of that nature about the area. I mentioned, too, that Jane Brook is a very significant area in my electorate. The document also states —

The abundance of water in the area would have meant that before colonisation, the precinct would have been an important location for food resources. It was noted by Captain Stirling on his 1829 exploratory voyage that at Ellen Brook where the river ceased to be navigable, the river bank was pitted with diggings for yam.

Jane Brook is recorded as a mythological site and also is the location of three scattered camping areas. One recent camping area was a seasonal grape pickers’ camp located south of Dale Road near the confluence with the Swan River. A second camp was placed west of the present Searle Street ... and a third was located outside of the precinct adjacent to the crossing of Toodyay Road and Jane Brook. The third camp was used by families who earned money cutting timber for contractors supplying the Midland and Caversham brickworks early this century.

Nyoongars speak about the existence of a creative Waugal in Jane Brook. The upper reaches of the tributaries that flow from Red Hill are **Winnaitch** areas. This means that Nyoongars avoid these places due to the evil influence of **wurdaatjis**. **Wurdaatjiss** are spirits who live in the forests ...

Such spirits are noted in some of the history, in any event, in that area. I suppose the point I am really making is that the areas of the Swan River in and around my electorate—as in the Swan River, the Helena River, areas of Jane Brook and Blackadder Creek—have been significant since the early times of colonisation, but certainly well before that. I think the reference to the artefacts being found in the vicinity of Midland Brick, through Middle Swan, are certainly evidence of 40 000 years of settlement by the Aboriginal people.

If I can also enter the Swan Hills electorate, the section of the river between Bells Rapids and Moondyne Brook was extensively used by the Whadjuk tribe for campsites. Archaeological evidence suggests that it has been used by regional tribes for over 6 000 years. Again, quartz and dolerite form rocks strewn in riverbeds and on hills were used by the Noongar for a variety of tools. The abundance of food and high-quality mylonite and quartz made that site an ideal camping area.

Some people will know the Walyunga pool and will have visited Walyunga National Park. That is believed to be an old Noongar camping site and Noongars say that the Wagyl took a wrong turn at this part of the river; the Wagyl squeezed through a crack in the range, stopped and vomited, leaving the stone for tools.

The SPEAKER: Member for Midland, I am finding this exceptionally interesting, but how is this germane to this bill? We have heard a lot of history now about this.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am referring to the history and importance of these areas. I am clearly concerned that with the abolition, as I see it—I am sure the minister does not like that term and he calls it an incorporation—of the Swan River Trust into the Department of Parks and Wildlife, we will see a lack of focus. I want to make it clear to the minister and the government how important the river and its tributaries and watercourses are in my electorate to Aboriginal people and others, not only in the current day but also at the time of colonisation. It

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seems there is a focus here on financial efficiencies and doing things cheaper. My view is that when we do things cheaper, we do not necessarily do them better. We need to respect the heritage of the river and ensure that the river is kept healthy. I am not confident that the restructure will allow for that. It might please Mr Speaker if I refer to some of the comments that the minister made in his second reading speech.

[Member's time extended.]

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The minister states —

These proposed amendments will allow the management of the iconic Swan Canning Riverpark to be integrated with the conservation, protection and promotion of Western Australia's unique national parks, marine parks and reserves already managed by the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

The minister claims that the bill will improve resourcing capacity and combine the expertise of the two agencies. He says that the three key points are to transfer the day-to-day operations of the management functions of the Swan River Trust to the chief executive officer of the Department of Parks and Wildlife, to more closely align the functions of the Swan River Trust with those of other similar vesting and advisory bodies and to transfer current staff to DPAW. Effectively, we are seeing the Swan River Trust absorbed into the Department of Parks and Wildlife. Although it may be true that the minister has some good intentions, and he may well believe that the primacy and functions of the Swan River Trust will be adequately catered for within the Department of Parks and Wildlife, that is not the view of many others in the community. People had more confidence when the Swan River Trust had that sole task and focus, rather than it being absorbed into an agency that has a multifaceted focus.

Some of my colleagues have made some references to the minister's second reading speech. I see that the minister has outlined in his second reading speech what he considers to be the roles and functions of the trust. At its worst, this bill has the potential to be change for change's sake, but I think that what has driven this has not been a better outcome for the management of the Swan and Canning Rivers and their various tributaries, the real impetus for this has been financial constraints and the government thinking it can do things cheaper and more efficiently. Cheaper is not necessarily always better. If the opposition was confident there would be no diminution of the functions of the Swan River Trust or the protections that the Swan River Trust currently offers, it would be more supportive of this amalgamation. I am sceptical about the motivation for this amalgamation of the Swan River Trust with the Department of Parks and Wildlife. The Department of Parks and Wildlife is a much bigger agency with many more staff and no doubt a bigger budget. I know that arguments have been made and will continue to be made about the "efficiencies" that can be achieved by absorbing the Swan River Trust into the Department of Parks and Wildlife. The minister can refer to it as an amalgamation if he likes, but I certainly do not see it as an amalgamation; I see it more as an absorption of the Swan River Trust into the Department of Parks and Wildlife. I do not think that is a good thing. I am concerned that although the staff will initially be transferred there and we may be able to see those separate roles for a year or so, over time we will no doubt see those roles become more and more subsumed into the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

I fully appreciate that this will end up being a debate in which one says yes the other says no; one says is, the other says is not. The minister will claim that suddenly the trust has more resources than it had before, and it has a broader brush and more integrated approach. He can use a lot of buzz words to suggest that somehow this is going to be bigger and better. My view is that bigger is not always better. The Swan River Trust has operated very effectively—not perfectly, but very effectively—since it was established by legislation in about 1989. Since 1989 we have had an agency that has been separate that has had a separate role and a single focus on our river systems. We will now lose that and have it effectively absorbed into another bigger department. I do not support that.

Although I know some people are interested in my historical comments about the history of Guildford and of Aboriginals' involvement, I think there are people who are unaware of that and there are also people who are unaware of the real significance of that river to Aboriginal people, which is different from the significance of the river to the rest of us. Those of us who have a sense of heritage and history also realise its significance in the development of the Swan River Colony. I know time has passed since then, but it has never been more important to be mindful of the health of our river. I think that if we polled people in Western Australia, one of the things they would be highly concerned about is the health of our river system. They want to see a river that is clean and free of algae and that industry is not leaching materials into the river that cause damage to our river. People are also concerned about the riverbanks and foreshores within their areas, and there are a lot of considerations there.

The Swan River Trust has successfully looked at a whole range of matters over time, not just environmental matters as people might imagine, and as part of its brief it has also focused on matters of heritage and historical significance. I have been mindful of that, because the Swan River Trust has been involved when planning applications have come before the City of Swan in my electorate. It has been very significant through Middle Swan and around Guildford.

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One area of concern has been the 100-year flood plains that basically surround the suburb of Guildford. People have attempted to put structures there. Even now there are people who think that building onto those 100-year flood plains would be okay. Just because people cannot remember a flood there does not mean a flood will not occur. As the member for Midland, which includes the suburb of Guildford, I have certainly had many representations over the years from people concerned about development on the flood plain and about protecting floodplain areas in Guildford. In fact, the floodplain very much constrains the building envelope at Guildford Primary School, and rightly so. The school is able to use that land as playing fields but it is not able to be built on.

Although the government has the numbers and this bill will be passed in the lower house and will no doubt go through the upper house as well, I would certainly like to ask the minister to be mindful. I think it is at least technically possible for the Swan River Trust to operate independently and with integrity within the Department of Parks and Wildlife. That will be the case only if the Swan River Trust continues to enjoy proper support and maintains at least the current level of budget and staffing, and can continue to be an independent voice within the dialogue in Western Australia. I certainly ask this Minister for Environment, and future ministers, to be very mindful to not subsume the views and voice of the Swan River Trust but to, as much as possible, give it an independent voice and allow it to strongly take up its role as an advocate for our river and river systems. I think that the community of Western Australia will fully support that.

MR F.M. LOGAN (Cockburn) [9.33 pm]: I rise to add a few words to tonight's discussion on the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Amendment Bill 2014. The second reading speech refers to the intention of the bill. The minister told the house —

This initiative will strengthen the management of Western Australia's environment and river parks by providing a more focused conservation and parks department.

How can it be more focused when it is within a larger department than it was before, as a stand-alone department?

Mrs G.J. Godfrey: It will have more money.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Oh! Is the member for Belmont claiming it will have more money?

Mrs G.J. Godfrey: Yes.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Does the member want to elaborate on that? Tell us exactly how much it will get.

Mrs G.J. Godfrey: I do not know how much.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: In that case, member for Belmont, there is no point interjecting with a claim that cannot be backed up.

Mrs G.J. Godfrey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Belmont, that is enough; thank you!

Mr F.M. LOGAN: There is no point interjecting to make a claim that cannot be backed up. If the member knows what she is talking about, interject; if she does not, just sit there and listen.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cockburn, thank you; through the Chair.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The member for Belmont clearly cannot back it up because when I asked her how much extra money the trust will get, she said she did not know. In that case, if she does not know what she is talking about, the best thing to do is listen.

I make the point to the Minister for Environment that in his second reading speech he said that incorporating the body into the larger Department of Parks and Wildlife would somehow create a more focused conservation and parks department. I cannot see how that is possible. People cannot be more focused on the Swan and Canning Rivers catchment area within a larger department in comparison with being a stand-alone body, the sole objective of which is to look after the health and wellbeing of the Swan and Canning Rivers catchment and the river itself. A comparison can be drawn between the work of the Swan River Trust and that of Cockburn Sound Management Council. Cockburn Sound Management Council, which was established during the former Labor government's term of office, was modelled on the Swan River Trust. It was not modelled exactly on the Swan River Trust, but primarily it was —

Mr A.P. Jacob: It is actually closer to what we are now changing the Swan River Trust to.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: It is still a stand-alone —

Mr A.P. Jacob: The Swan River Trust will still be. The Cockburn Sound Management Council is a perfect example of what we are turning this into. Thanks for raising it.

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Mr F.M. LOGAN: It will not be; the minister knows that. That is not correct. The minister is misleading the house. Both organisations are statutory bodies. The Swan River Trust was a statutory authority and so is the Cockburn Sound Management Council. I understand the minister is putting to the house that the work and authorities of the Swan River Trust will not change. The work of the trust, its powers over the use of the rivers, the impact of the catchment and the settlement of the catchment on the rivers will not change. The minister is saying to the house that that will not change and it simply will be part of a larger organisation that the minister is arguing will be better resourced.

Mr A.P. Jacob: No. It will be based more on the model of the Cockburn Sound Management Council, which has statutory authority. The statutory authority will remain and it will have that reporting or feedback role that the Cockburn Sound Management Council currently has. The Cockburn Sound Management Council does not have 50 stand-alone staff who report to it; it is a statutory authority body. That is actually what we are changing the Swan River Trust to be like.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The point I was making is —

Mr C.J. Barnett: He will run out of things to say soon!

Mr F.M. LOGAN: No, not at all. I am drawing a comparison between the two authorities. I understand from what the minister has put to the house so far that the work of the Swan River Trust authority and what it was doing will not change; that is, its powers over the usage of the rivers, its powers and advice over building close to the rivers, its powers over tributaries to the rivers and its powers over various usage of land beside the rivers in the catchment basins will not change. The minister is putting to the house that that will not change. It is just that the entire authority and the work of the authority will be within the department; is that correct?

Mr A.P. Jacob: It is in the operation of staff, yes.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: The powers will not change whatsoever, for the moment. I do not know whether or not the minister knows, but, as time goes on, various CEOs come to ministers with different ideas about how an authority should work, and about the staffing and funding of that authority. That is what happens. We see it time and again in government. Whether it is this minister or another minister, the department's CEO will say, "I have a small area here that looks after the Swan and Canning Rivers catchment area. I think we've got too many people in it. You've asked me for cuts so here are a number of areas in which we can achieve cuts." That is what happens.

Dr K.D. Hames: We deliberately made the Water and Rivers Commission independent for exactly the same reason, but you guys amalgamated it with the Department of Environment and Conservation.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is correct. I know; I agree, minister. That is the point I am making. That is exactly what happens, and it happens on both sides of the house. I agree with what the Minister for Health has just told the house. We are no orphans in amalgamating bodies and seeing efficiencies. Both sides of the house do that. And here we are doing it again.

This side of the house is still to be convinced that the efficiencies and benefits the Minister for Environment claims will be gained as a result of basically a takeover of the entire body of work of the Swan River Trust by the Department of Parks and Wildlife will be beneficial to the rivers themselves in the long run. All we have heard from the minister is that the work that is currently done by the trust, and will be done by the Department of Parks and Wildlife, will not change. After this bill is passed, the trust will be subsumed into the Department of Parks and Wildlife. In a year or two when further cuts are requested of ministers by Treasury, and if the minister is not a strong minister who tells Treasury and the Treasurer to go and get nicked and fights for his department, he will simply carry out the orders of Treasury, because that is what cabinet directs ministers to do, and he will find ways to make further cuts. When he says to the CEO of the Department of Parks and Wildlife that he has to find another \$50 million worth of cuts and asks him for some options to achieve that, the CEO will come back with options such as getting rid of half the people who worked for the Swan River Trust and cancelling three of the five or 10 programs that were implemented in the Swan River catchment area. That is how it goes. Ask the Minister for Health. The Minister for Environment will experience it very shortly; he is experiencing it now, as he knows from the current cuts that he has to implement in his departments.

That is the way it goes, and that is why the opposition is speaking up about this bill and the way in which the minister has proposed to get rid of the Swan River Trust. He can argue until he is blue in the face about the efficiencies and benefits that will be gained from this amalgamation of the Swan River Trust and the Department of Parks and Wildlife, but in the long run we will see the diminution of the work undertaken by the trust and the diminution of the number of staff employed by the trust. I will argue that it will probably occur within the rest of the term of this government, because that is how governments work, particularly those governments that do not have good balance sheets. This government has a shocking balance sheet, and it will become worse every year as debt piles up. We are heading towards \$30 billion worth of debt, so the Treasurer is absolutely dedicated to

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trying to find cuts wherever he can. Those cuts will be foisted onto government departments. One of those departments will be the Department of Parks and Wildlife and, hey presto, the work that was undertaken by the people in the Swan River Trust, who will be transferred to the Department of Parks and Wildlife, will be slashed, because that is how it happens.

Basically, who will suffer from that? The Swan River Trust looks after the health of the river, so of course the health of the river will suffer at the end of the day. We have seen the Liberal–National government’s supposed commitment to the health of the river. The program that was put in place by a Labor environment minister to phase out the use of water-soluble fertilisers applied to both the household use of water-soluble fertilisers and the commercial use of water-soluble fertilisers. That is one of the main factors causing problems within the river catchment area. The minister knows that, the house knows that, and most people in Western Australia who have an interest in the Swan River catchment know that. What did the Liberal–National government do upon getting elected in 2008? It phased out the program so that the ban on the use of water-soluble fertilisers now applies only to households; it does not apply to commercial operations. It does not apply to councils, businesses, farms or market gardeners. The government got rid of that program. What is one of the main causes of algal bloom? It is fertiliser run-off. What did the government do? It phased out the program that would have helped to end that problem. What faith can we put in the Minister for Environment when he brings to the house a bill to merge the Swan River Trust with the Department of Parks and Wildlife and says, “Don’t worry; all the work that it did before will continue without any impact whatsoever”? What faith can we have in the minister when his own government took a decision to reverse a program that was improving the health of the river system? We cannot put any faith in this government when we see the minister’s decision to get rid of the Swan River Trust. The government made a single decision to reverse the phasing out of the commercial use of water-soluble fertilisers, and the government has not raised with the farming community in the upper catchment of the Swan River the issue of changing the fertiliser structures that are applied to the wheatbelt and the grain-growing areas so that the effect from those grain-growing areas does not flow down into the Swan River system and thereby lead to further damage to the health of the river. The minister has done nothing in that area; in fact, he has made it worse by reversing the decision on the use of water-soluble fertilisers.

We do not trust the government with this amendment bill. We certainly do not believe that merging the operations of the Swan River Trust into the Department of Parks and Wildlife will improve the health of the river. In fact, the Liberal–National government’s lack of input to improve the health of the catchment area of the Swan and Canning Rivers over the last six years leads us to say that things are going to get a lot, lot worse for the Swan River.

MR A.P. JACOB (Ocean Reef — Minister for Environment) [9.48 pm] — in reply: A range of comments have been made on the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Amendment Bill 2014. What I found particularly interesting is that, in most of those comments, the myth has been perpetuated again and again that somehow the Labor government was the only government that ever delivered for the environment. That is an absolute myth, and I will take a few moments to briefly address this mythology. The idea that Labor members are the only ones who ever care or deliver for the environment is, quite frankly, absolute rubbish. They are certainly very good at the symbolic gesture side of it. However, when it comes down to actually delivering, I am very proud to stand in this house and stand on the record that this government already had in the environment portfolio, and I will be standing on our record in environment when I say that this bill will lead to better outcomes for the Swan and Canning Rivers management system. I will give the house two very quick examples of what the Liberal–National government has been doing in the environment space. The Kimberley science and conservation strategy is, again, not just a strategy but backed up with more than \$80 million of funding. I do not think members will find another state government, let alone a Western Australian state government, that has invested that heavily in environmental outcomes—invested in actual environmental outcomes, not symbolic gestures. In that program alone we will see in this term of government a 200 per cent increase in our marine park gazetted areas. Of course, one that I also love to speak about is our Parks for People program, our \$21.5 million program with a further caravanning and camping program. There are projects such as Fitzgerald River National Park. As I said, I am very happy to stand in this house on our record as a Liberal–National government in the environment space in actually delivering outcomes, and it is on this record that I will be commending this bill to the house.

Going back to the Swan River and in particular the matter at hand, a question asked this evening a number of times was where the idea for this bill and this particular change came from. It needs to be remembered that this is really only a machinery-of-government change; it is not unusual. The Minister for Health outlined a machinery-of-government change that occurred with the Water and Rivers Commission when members opposite were in government. It is a simple fact that with this bill the machinery-of-government change requires legislative impetus. However, I will tell members where the idea for this bill originally came from.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: The Premier’s golf club!

Mr Dave Kelly; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Simone McGurk; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Albert Jacob

Mr A.P. JACOB: One place it came from, member for Gosnells, was indeed the “WA Labor FINAL platform 2011” that I have previously read from in this house. It was very interesting to note that the member for Gosnells at one point said that I was verballing him by reading it out. That document was also quite clear, and I will read out a couple of clauses —

However, Labor believes that our state’s oceans, estuaries, waterways and catchments lack the robust, comprehensive governance mechanisms, which are needed to deliver the policy, ...

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Nor does that say put it into DPaW.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Ha, ha! It continues —

To that end, Labor will replace existing, separated jurisdictional responsibilities for management of oceans and rivers with a system which will be the basis for whole of government policy direction supported by dedicated implementation and service delivery.

Mr P.B. Watson: Why don’t you talk about what you’re going to do, not what we were going to do? You’ve done nothing!

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany!

Mr A.P. JACOB: Not one person opposite addressed this, Mr Speaker. It continues —

Labor will as a matter of urgency:

...

...Revise the governance provisions relating to the Swan Canning river system —

Mr C.J. Tallentire: Integrated catchment management.

Mr A.P. JACOB: That is a very good point, member for Gosnells.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: You are misrepresenting things.

Mr A.P. JACOB: I am misrepresenting things by reading out the Labor Party’s own policy platform to the member for Midland. That is very interesting —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I am sorry, just hold it a minute. I just want to hear the minister.

Mr A.P. JACOB: The member for Midland made the point that she believes this to be change for change’s sake. I put it to the member for Midland that I suspect this is opposition for opposition’s sake. She is a member of the opposition and that is her right but, again, nobody addressed those comments.

In terms of integrated catchment management, member for Gosnells, the point was made by the member for Bateman that the catchment for the Swan and Canning Rivers system is somewhat around the size of Tasmania. So, yes, we agree that it would be a far better outcome if we have a dedicated conservation agency managing that whole area. That is exactly what this bill does.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: DPaW’s not going to be managing this.

The SPEAKER: Member for Gosnells!

Mr A.P. JACOB: If it makes it any easier, the member for Gosnells can think of us having merged the Department of Parks and Wildlife into the Swan River Trust and just renaming the whole lot, because he could sort of see that either way. However, that is essentially what we are doing here today.

Several members interjected.

Mr A.P. JACOB: As I said, this bill was accused of being change for change’s sake. The question was asked where the idea came from. One of those sources was indeed the “WA Labor FINAL platform 2011”.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr A.P. JACOB: I put it to members opposite that this is opposition for opposition’s sake, but that is fine; that is the way the system works.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bassendean!

Mr S.K. L’Estrange interjected.

Mr Dave Kelly; Mr Bill Johnston; Ms Simone McGurk; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Albert Jacob

The SPEAKER: Member for Churchlands!

Mr A.P. JACOB: I will come back to what is far more important, which is what we as a government have committed to and what we will do. Clearly, part of our 2013 election commitments was to create a dedicated conservation agency in a broader sense. That has been done with the creation of the Department of Parks and Wildlife, which was created on 1 July 2013. The amalgamation of the Swan Canning Riverpark management with the now Department of Parks and Wildlife is indeed a logical next step well in keeping with that election commitment, and it will create a single, focused agency responsible for managing national parks, reserves, state forests, conservation and marine parks, and indeed riverparks. Amalgamating the staff and the functions of the Swan River Trust with the Department of Parks and Wildlife will, as I have said, improve resources for the management and the protection of the Swan Canning Riverpark as well as increase efficiency, and it will reduce duplication. The new joint workforce will bring together scientists, conservation workers and ecosystem management experts, planners and project managers, all with expertise and all who can now work together delivering significant outcomes on the ground for the improvement of the Swan and Canning Rivers system, and I absolutely commend the bill to the house.

Division

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (28)

Mr P. Abetz	Mr M.J. Cowper	Dr K.D. Hames	Mr P.T. Miles
Mr F.A. Alban	Ms M.J. Davies	Mr C.D. Hatton	Mr N.W. Morton
Mr C.J. Barnett	Ms W.M. Duncan	Mr A.P. Jacob	Mr D.C. Nalder
Mr I.C. Blayney	Ms E. Evangel	Dr G.G. Jacobs	Mr J. Norberger
Mr I.M. Britza	Mr J.M. Francis	Mr S.K. L'Estrange	Mr A.J. Simpson
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Mr G.J. Godfrey	Mr R.S. Love	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr V.A. Catania	Mr B.J. Grylls	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr J.E. McGrath (<i>Teller</i>)

Noes (14)

Ms J. Farrer	Mr F.M. Logan	Ms R. Saffioti	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr P. Papalia	Mr C.J. Tallentire	Ms S.F. McGurk (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr W.J. Johnston	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr P.C. Tinley	
Mr D.J. Kelly	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr P.B. Watson	

Pairs

Mr R.F. Johnson	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr J.H.D. Day	Ms L.L. Baker
Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr J.R. Quigley

Question thus passed.

Bill read a second time.

House adjourned at 10.00 pm
