

ESPERANCE LEAD POLLUTION

**462. Mr G. SNOOK to the Minister for the Environment:**

I refer the minister to finding 151 of the inquiry into the cause and extent of lead pollution in the Esperance area, which states that the major impediment to effective industry regulation by the Department of Environment and Conservation was constant restructuring.

- (1) Can the minister list all the restructures that have occurred to the agencies within his department under the Gallop-Carpenter government; and, if not, why not?
- (2) Does the minister concede that these unnecessary restructures directly contributed to the poisoning of Western Australians?
- (3) Does the minister concede that his department has failed its most basic and most important functions to protect the people and the environment of Western Australia?
- (4) Will the minister apologise to the people of WA for these failures?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN replied:**

I thank the member for Moore for his question.

- (1)-(3) The member for Moore would be aware that the Department of Environment and Conservation changed to its current status in July last year. I am keen to investigate what elements of any change to the department's focus may have affected its capacity to carry out its statutory role and, indeed, the various roles it has. As members are aware, the department has a range of responsibilities. Again, I will be looking very closely at those recommendations and the findings of the committee in reference to any impact the changes have made. I remind the member that the department has excellent staff. One of the important points that was made by the chairman of the committee this morning was that there was no person that they were seeking to make culpable for some of the agency's failings. I have already said in answer to a question in this place that there have been failings by the agency as a result of the investigation and the inquiry. I have never said that that is not the case. My role is to ensure that those sorts of things do not happen again. If this agency needs to refocus or resources need to be redirected, that will be considered.
- (4) In terms of an apology, in his opening answer to the first question, the Premier has already said that we are sorry that this incident in Esperance occurred and we will do everything we possibly can to ensure that such an event does not occur in any other community in Western Australia. We recognise that the people of Esperance deserve that. The community of Esperance is a magnificent part of our state. It is a fantastic town. It is an important part of our state and we owe that to the people. I can assure the member for Moore that we as a government and I as the Minister for the Environment will do everything we possibly can to ensure that we have an agency that is functioning appropriately as per its statutory responsibilities to ensure the protection of the environment into the future.