

ESPERANCE LEAD POLLUTION

**455. Dr S.C. THOMAS 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, in relation to the Department of Environment and Conservation, that -

... constant restructuring which, combined with insufficient resources, resulted in ongoing staffing changes and a loss of corporate knowledge.

- (1) Is it true that this situation directly resulted in substantially lower monitoring of the Esperance port, and if that had not occurred, it may have prevented this scandal?
- (2) Will the minister concede that he is unable to give an unconditional commitment to the people of Western Australia that such a scandal will not occur again, or even that a similar scandal is not occurring as we speak?

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

I thank the member for Capel for his question.

- (1)-(2) Clearly, 46 recommendations were released today as part of the report into the Esperance lead pollution issue. As the Premier has done, I congratulate the members of the committee. Clearly, a number of recommendations, including the recommendation that the member has highlighted, will need to be very carefully considered as part of the government's response. I can assure the member that every effort will be made and every possible initiative that will address a number of the concerns and, indeed, failings of the department that have been highlighted will be closely responded to. I assure the member and the people of Esperance that the government and I, as Minister for the Environment, with responsibility for the Department of Environment and Conservation, will take into account absolutely and consider carefully the recommendations and the 192 findings that have been presented today by the committee.

As the committee highlighted in a number of its findings and recommendations, a number of things need to be improved and, indeed, changed to ensure that this does not happen again. Therefore, I assure the member, the Parliament and the people of Esperance, in particular, that everything possible will be done to ensure that this sort of terrible experience is not repeated. If that means redirecting resources within the department, that is something that we will look at closely. If it means that more appropriate resources are needed, that will also be considered as part of the government's response.

However, I say to the member that as soon as this issue was raised, as the member for Roe knows, I, as minister, and this government acknowledged its seriousness for the people of Esperance. That is why we supported the inquiry, and that is why we ensured that the inquiry was given every opportunity and that every accountability element was available to it to deal with the issue. As the member for Roe knows, when he first raised the concerns with me within days of my becoming minister, he, as the local member of Parliament for the community of Esperance, was given every opportunity and every response that he requested from me, as minister, because I respect him. He knows that my office made available to him officers and policy people to ensure that the questions he asked and the concerns he raised right at the beginning were adhered to. As part of the government's response in regard to the department's responsibilities in this issue, I will make sure that we respond appropriately.