

ESPERANCE LEAD POLLUTION - CONTINUING INVESTIGATIONS

129. Dr G.G. JACOBS to the Minister for the Environment:

I refer to the scandalous public health disaster that is developing in Esperance following the revelation of widespread lead pollution and ask -

- (1) Can the minister confirm that the lead exported through the port was the same lead that killed thousands of birds in the region?
- (2) Why did it take more than six months for the Department of Environment and Conservation to notice an adverse dust monitoring report from the Esperance Port Authority?
- (3) Why did it take more than 18 months for his department to recognise that the port was not complying with its licence by exporting lead powder rather than pelletised lead?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN replied:

- (1)-(3) I thank the member for Roe for his question, and acknowledge the deep concern expressed by the Premier in his statement to the house in only the past few minutes. The issues the member for Roe has just raised and in a matter of public interest two weeks ago have been debated. Of course, investigations by the Department of Environment and Conservation are continuing. However, the facts remain that the source of the lead that has caused the concerns which the member has raised and which are felt by the government have been confirmed. The information I received late this afternoon indicates that fingerprinting has confirmed the source. Obviously, the inquiry moved to be established by the member for Roe, which the government supports, will, of course, address a number of the concerns I have as minister.

Clearly some of the member's questions relate to events that occurred prior to my time as Minister for the Environment. However, that aside, I want to make sure that the department for which I am responsible ensures categorically that its responsibilities are carried out. I am absolutely committed to ensuring that if there have been errors, mistakes or oversights by the department, they will be uncovered and, indeed, the practices of the department will be modified to ensure that it does the job it set out to do. I assure the member for Roe, as I have done on a number of occasions in personal discussions with him, that the department is responsible for its role in monitoring and in ensuring we get to the bottom of this issue. I will be absolutely committed to that.