

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT - IRELAND, BELGIUM AND UNITED KINGDOM VISIT

Statement by Minister for the Environment

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah - Minister for the Environment) [9.08 am]: I report to the house on my trip to Ireland, Belgium and the United Kingdom between 27 September and 8 October 2007, on which I was accompanied by my chief of staff and the Director General of the Department of Environment and Conservation. A range of meetings and field visits were conducted, with an emphasis on climate change; waste management, including recycling and container deposit systems; sustainable cities; national park management; flora conservation; and waterways management. It was evident from my meetings with officials in each of the three countries that climate change is the priority environmental issue in Europe. There was a strong focus on the importance of next month's Bali conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in terms of setting future directions for action on climate change. It was also evident that there was dissatisfaction with the former Howard government's policy position on climate change. This view adds more significance to the fact that the Prime Minister-elect, Kevin Rudd, has designated the Bali conference as his first overseas assignment as Prime Minister.

In the United Kingdom, I discussed a range of issues with officials from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The British government is committed to introducing a climate change bill to create mandatory emissions reduction targets and to establish a legislative framework and mechanisms to achieve those targets. The British government is also setting up a committee on climate change as an independent statutory body to advise on the pathway to emissions reduction targets and other climate change issues, including international trading in carbon allowances.

While in the United Kingdom, I took the opportunity to visit the Millennium Seed Bank Project in West Sussex. The Millennium Seed Bank is a global seed conservation program that aims to collect and conserve 10 per cent of the world's seed-bearing plants - about 24 000 species. Western Australia's Department of Environment and Conservation and the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority are partners in this project.

I also had the opportunity in all three countries to look at several initiatives for reducing waste, including container deposit systems and voluntary recycling systems. The information gained will assist in implementing the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Bill when it is passed by Parliament.

I acknowledge the assistance I was afforded by the Australian Ambassador to Ireland, Ms Anne Plunkett; Ms Sally Janssen and other staff in the Western Australian government office in London; and Ms Jan Rayner from the Department of Environment and Conservation.

I table my report.

[See paper 3490.]