

BEELIAR REGIONAL PARK — ROE HIGHWAY RESERVATION

Grievance

MR A.D. McRAE (Riverton) [9.30 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for the Environment. One week ago the whole world celebrated World Environment Day. It is important to have these international events to remind us that we are globally connected by the wellbeing of the environment in which we live and that the degradation of one part of the world affects people all around the world.

I commence my grievance to the minister on the retention and protection of the Swan coastal plain wetlands by acknowledging that at a local level we are part of this great, interconnected network across the globe and that our responsibility is to deal with those things, regionally and locally, for which we have responsibility. We must understand that if everybody took that attitude, we would have a greater degree of global protection and preservation of environmental values, ecosystems and biodiversity. It is very much a philosophy driven by the old adage, “Think global, act local”. In other words, scientific and international perspectives are brought down to a local level, where people have direct responsibility.

Last week the minister, along with the Premier, was part of the opening of the Canning River Eco Education Centre, a \$2.5 million facility that was built by the state. The trusteeship for and management of that facility has been handed to the City of Canning. That centre is scheduled to provide education facilities and access to the Canning River Regional Park for up to 10 000 students a year. That kind of practical investment at a local level is extraordinary, and it very much balances some of the investment that the state has made previously in places such as the eco centres at Herdsman Lake and Bold Park, at which research is undertaken into those ecosystems.

The Canning River Eco Education Centre is important because it sits adjacent to the Kent Street Weir on the Canning River. The weir marks the separation of the salt water downstream, going from the Canning River into the Swan River and out to sea, and the fresh water upstream. There are two distinct terrestrial-marine environments. That in itself is important and fascinating for the area. The part of my electorate around the Canning River really is part of the Swan coastal plain network, or region. We know at a scientific level that the Swan coastal plain is characterised by dune systems. Somewhere between 12 000 and 17 000 years ago, that area comprised the shallow waters of the sea because the coastline was then further to the east along the escarpment. The whole of the Swan coastal plain represents the immediate submerged lands of offshore waters. Its makeup is very much characterised by that and a product of that, because throughout the Swan coastal plain, which comprises my electorate, the minister’s electorate and, Madam Deputy Speaker, your electorate, there is a chain of interconnected wetlands and dune systems that create distinct and unique ecosystems with their own profiles of flora and fauna.

I am coming now to the very point of my grievance to the minister. One of the areas of concern in my broader district, but outside my electorate and certainly across the south metropolitan region, is the protection and enhancement of Beeliar Regional Park and the wetlands that connect to it. If members have not been there, I invite them to go to Bibra Lake. It is an extraordinary environment and is one of those places that, through a quirk of planning and development across the region, has remained largely intact. One of the reasons that it has remained intact is that the Stephenson plan of the 1950s and 1960s included Mr Stephenson’s drawings of the freeways that he thought would modernise Perth. The irony of this is that those freeways were to connect through the wetlands that then existed on the Swan coastal plain. Wetlands, which were then regarded as dirty, smelly swamps, were part of the physical characteristic of the Swan coastal plain that drew a planner to identify lines on a map where he could easily, and without too much encroachment on agricultural, economic and residential interests, create major thoroughfares. The problem is that in 2008 we clearly understand that the Beeliar Regional Park and all the other regional parks are absolutely vital. It is of concern to me, and I have heard that this may be under review, that the Roe Highway stage 8 reserve still goes through Beeliar Regional Park. In 2008 it must be time for us to review that situation. As I mentioned, I have heard that research into this is taking place.

My real concern is that we have to focus on sustainable, long-term freight solutions for the south metropolitan region, and in my view—it has always been my view—going through Beeliar Regional Park is not the solution. That is an old plan that needs to be rethought and redesigned. We have made an investment of hundreds of millions of dollars in more effective freight movement across the region, but destroying Bibra Lake and the Beeliar Regional Park is not the way to progress in the future.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for the Environment) [9.38 am]: I thank the member for Riverton for his very important grievance. I am glad that he raised the issue of the importance of, from a global perspective to a local perspective, protecting the Perth metropolitan wetlands systems. The scientific information which is now available and which shows the importance of our wetlands system is more greatly understood. The importance of providing ongoing water quality and preserving the ecology and the sustainability of fauna and

flora species is greater now than it has ever been. The member is right in his assessment of what we knew in the 1950s and earlier and what we now know. That is important to how we plan for the future.

I congratulate the member again on his leadership of the Canning River Eco Education Centre. It was a pleasure to be there with him and the Premier last Saturday. That facility has a great opportunity to be an ongoing educational resource for not only children, but also the community in and around the Canning River system. Certainly, it is important for government to support investments of that nature if we are to have a genuine impact on education within our community about the importance of not only our river system, but also the catchment that feeds the river system and other important developments that impact on the health and wellbeing of our natural environment. Of course, as Perth's population continues to grow, the pressure on our wetlands and our natural environmental areas is greater. Therefore, government must be very, very conscious of its planning. The government needs to plan for residential areas, industrial estates and effective and efficient road networks but it must also ensure that it does not allow that development to be detrimental to important ecosystems.

Beeliar Regional Park, which the member for Riverton highlighted, is a jewel in the crown of the metropolitan area—absolutely no doubt about that. The member and I have been to Beeliar Regional Park, and I agree with the member that we should encourage other members to visit our regional and metropolitan regional parks. These parks are now very important arks for our native fauna and flora that once existed in greater abundance throughout the metropolitan area. Beeliar Regional Park is probably one of the most important wetlands remaining within the Perth metropolitan system. It has high nature conservation values because of its rich diversity and the complexity of its ecosystems. Beeliar Regional Park is managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation, the City of Melville, the City of Cockburn and the Town of Kwinana under the Beeliar Regional Park management plan. However, it is also supported—I know the member is aware of this—by very strong volunteer groups who understand the effective management of that system. Three key bird species have been reported in the park; namely, the Australasian bittern, Carnaby's cockatoo and the peregrine falcon, all of which are listed under the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950. Therefore, Beeliar Regional Park is a haven for three very important bird species alone.

Mr A.D. McRae: Minister, if I can interrupt: one of those volunteer groups you talked about conducts bird surveys on an annual basis and it has identified the three species that you just mentioned, which I think are on a preservation list or an endangered list or at risk —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes; that is right.

Mr A.D. McRae: That group has identified a total of 70 bird species in the park.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: That is right, and I think there are even some key migratory birds that visit Beeliar Regional Park on an annual basis as part of their migration.

The important thing, of course, is that we recognise that it is important to keep these systems intact. The point the member for Riverton made towards the end of this grievance, which really focused on the issue of the Roe Highway expansion proposal, is critical to this. The member is right: there have been and still are proposals on the planning statutes to take that highway expansion through Beeliar. From my perspective, and I understand it is also the member's perspective, that would cause great concern for the integrity of Beeliar Regional Park.

Mr A.D. McRae: "Integrity" is a good way of describing it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We need to ensure that we maintain the integrity of that park.

Having met a number of local people who have raised this ongoing concern with me, I can assure the member for Riverton that I have sought advice from the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure because, as the member is probably aware, the majority of land comprising North Lake is owned by the Western Australian Planning Commission and managed by the Department of Environment and Conservation under the Conservation and Land Management Act. The member said that he had heard about some ongoing reviewing and research. My colleague the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure has, in fact, confirmed that, consistent with the state government's policy, she requested only six months ago—late last year—that the Western Australian Planning Commission review the Roe Highway reservation within the metropolitan scheme, the area west of Kwinana Freeway, with a view to deleting that reservation. Of course, this would include the proposed section through the Beeliar wetlands area that the member highlighted.

I thank the member for Riverton for bringing this grievance to me. I can assure the member that I will continue to liaise with the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure on this important issue as that review process takes place. We need to maintain the integrity of that very important ecosystem, and the member has my commitment that I will continue to support him in his views on this matter.

Mr A.D. McRae: Thank you, minister.