

COCKBURN SOUND ENVIRONMENT

Statement by Minister for the Environment

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah - Minister for the Environment) [9.06 am]: It is my pleasure to provide an example of how dedicated environmental protection has helped to reverse damage caused to Cockburn Sound in the 1970s by inappropriately managed industrial activities. The Cockburn Sound Management Council this week released its 2006-07 annual environmental report cards. This year the CSMC has used the highest number of monitoring programs since it began its reporting in 2001, and consequently is very confident of the results of the report cards.

This year's results are very positive; indeed, they are heartening because they show we are making significant headway in reversing the devastating damage caused to this waterway a number of decades ago. The results show that water quality is generally very good, especially considering past uses and current pressures. Water quality has markedly improved since the worst days of the 1970s, when massive seagrass deaths and nutrient enrichment threatened the collapse of Cockburn Sound. The sound was also badly affected by reduced flushing caused by the construction of the causeway to Garden Island in the 1970s. This year, dissolved oxygen, temperature, salinity and pH levels easily matched established environmental guidelines. This is a very good sign of a healthy ecosystem. Water clarity was also excellent this year and one of the best results since monitoring began in 1978. There have also been vast improvements in water quality at popular Rockingham beach swimming areas, and shellfish are abundant and safe to eat - an excellent indicator of environmental health. It is remarkable that the sound has such good water quality given its growing urban population, the increased industrial activity and the intense recreational pressure placed on this popular water body.

However, the report cards also point out issues at particular locations that require action and investigation. A key area for attention highlighted by the report cards was the waters of Jervoise Bay, where water and sediment quality were not up to standard. The CSMC has advised me that it has established a working group comprising key stakeholders to help solve these water quality problems as soon as possible. I have also asked the Department of Environment and Conservation to ensure that the licensed premises operating in the area are adhering to their strict conditions. The CSMC will also be discussing with the Fremantle Port Authority and the Department of Defence what can be done to improve tributyltin contamination in the sediments around their facilities, which, although serious, are not of serious environmental concern. The CSMC and other authorities are closely monitoring tributyltin levels, which are a historical legacy of the days this product was widely used in the shipping industry and boating community. It is pleasing to note that the use of tributyltin is being phased out internationally, and hopefully we will see a decline in its effects in future surveys.

Cockburn Sound is living proof that industry and the environment can co-exist. It is remarkable to think that the Kwinana industrial strip contributes \$15 billion to \$20 billion to the Australian economy each year, and yet is reducing its impact on the marine environment because of authorities like the Cockburn Sound Management Council and the Department of Environment and Conservation. I thank the Cockburn Sound Management Council for its comprehensive report and I look forward to more positive updates on the health of this important waterway in the future.