

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT — FUNDS

**693. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:**

The state government allocated \$30 million in this year's budget to the state natural resource management program, of which \$15 million was carried over from last year.

- (1) Why has the government not released the details it promised to release by June 2009 on the process for the allocation of natural resource management funds?
- (2) Why has no direction been given to regional natural resource management organisations on how this money is to be spent?
- (3) What is being done to give natural resource management community-led organisations a place at the negotiating table for these funds?
- (4) Is it true that most of these funds will be given to government agencies to fill holes in their budgets?

**Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:**

I thank the member for Collie-Preston for the question. It must be the second question he has asked me over the past eight months.

Several members interjected.

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** Not arrogant at all, member.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members, I want to hear the answer to the question asked by the member for Collie-Preston.

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

- (1)-(4) The member has raised an important point about the natural resource management policy in this state. Since we formed government last year, I have made a number of public statements. I supported the efforts of a range of regional groups and their contributions to NRM. However, there has been a fundamental shift from a bilateral arrangement between the state government and the federal government under the Natural Heritage Trust program phases 1, 2 and 3 and National Action Plan funding. Prior to the change of federal government, there was a shift from bilateral arrangements to the Caring for our Country program—which in code is really “Caring for the Eastern States”, because not a lot of resources have come from the federal government to the regional groups that have made a huge contribution. There may have been a push back recently, but there have been significant changes to the funding arrangements for regional groups that are feeling somewhat disaffected from the federal government; it sits on their plate. Now that the funding arrangements have changed, they are quite rightly looking to the state government for whatever support we can give. The government has laid out a policy for natural resource management; the policy has gone through cabinet and has been endorsed. The government has provided \$30 million in the budget—an extra \$4 million on top of the amount set out in forward estimates by the previous government—and has laid out a policy through which it is recognised that a range of groups can deliver natural resource management outcomes, not the least of which are community groups, and not only the six regional groups, but also the subgroups and the little land conservation district committees. It is fundamentally important to give the right people the funds to deliver the right outcomes on the ground.

My second point is that the government is laying out some priorities for natural resource management in the state; they have not yet been made public. During the term of the previous government there were no priorities or plans set out for natural resource management. That will happen under this government. We will be somewhat strategic about the way we spend \$30 million. There are substantial natural resource management issues in Western Australia. We could spend \$1 billion on salinity alone and be lucky to see some big shifts. It is a challenge to work out how we will spend \$30 million to deal with the range of NRM issues in Western Australia, including nutrient management on the coastal plain, salinity, biosecurity and biodiversity.

We need to be strategic about this and we are rolling out our plan. We have allocated base funds to the six NRM groups to assist with their administration. One of the pressures is the timing involved in getting funds on the ground. We have received submissions from agencies identifying projects on which we can deliver by getting funds on the ground. I have made it very clear that when the NRM ministerial council considers submissions, one of the criteria will be the need to ensure that regional delivery

components form part of any proposed projects. I am making sure that regional groups that have the capacity to best deliver natural resource management outcomes will have a place at the table.

I have met with the chairs of the regional NRM groups and they have raised a number of issues with me. There are certainly policy considerations that I will need to take on board as we move from this budget year into the next. I am keen to get money on the ground; that is my priority. I recognise that a significant proportion of the funds may go through agencies, but I have made it very clear that the agencies need to ensure that there are regional groups that can deliver outcomes and are part of the game. This is a priority for the government. We are putting a plan in place and delivering it. For the first time, regional groups will have an understanding of the priority this government places on natural resource management.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** You haven't said anything about what they've done!

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** I think there is a lack of understanding on the other side. I will leave it there.