

ABORIGINAL RANGER PROGRAM

Statement by Minister for Environment

MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldivis — Minister for Environment) [12.11 pm]: Today I would like to update the house on the McGowan government's Aboriginal ranger program. The Aboriginal ranger program initiative is one of the cornerstones of this government's commitment to working with traditional owners.

The program was designed to create jobs and training and community development opportunities to empower Aboriginal people across Western Australia. The people funded through the program are building knowledge and skills in conservation and land management, Aboriginal site management and tourism on country. Since the McGowan government's initial commitment in 2017, the program has supported more than 800 employment opportunities across 32 projects in all regions of the state, with 650 ranger jobs on country, of which 95 per cent have gone to Aboriginal people, almost half of whom are women. The program is administered by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and is largely funded through royalties for regions. In 2021, the McGowan government acknowledged the importance and success of the program by investing another \$50 million. Later that year, it added another \$16.5 million, bringing the total phase 2 commitment to \$66.5 million over five years. A further annual allocation of \$16.5 million will begin after phase 2 is complete, bringing the current total allocated to the program up to \$83 million. This is exciting growth. It is a symbol of our state's ongoing commitment towards closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Feedback from our partners has told us that long-term funding certainty was important to keep ranger programs strong and sustainable. Therefore, in mid-2022, the state government allocated \$22.8 million to 14 established ranger programs under the Aboriginal ranger program's new expansion fund. This money will support 57 full-time equivalent positions for up to four years, meaning that organisations will be able to do more long-term planning and build stronger career pathways for rangers. In late 2022, we allocated another \$10 million to 17 ranger groups as part of the development fund. This investment will help Aboriginal organisations develop new ranger programs or build emerging ones. Last month, my colleague the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Hon Dr Tony Buti, MLA, joined me in inviting expressions of interest from eligible organisations for a new round of funding under the program. Up to \$11 million under the Aboriginal ranger program innovation fund is available for one-off innovative projects, and later in 2023 we will be making another \$13 million available through the development fund. I look forward to announcing the successful applicants of the \$11 million innovation fund and to sharing more of the benefits of the broader program.