

HAMELIN POOL STROMATOLITES

591. Ms M. BEARD to the Minister for Environment:

I refer to the ongoing closure of the world-famous Hamelin Pool stromatolites and the associated impact on tourism.

- (1) When will the communities of the Gascoyne and visitors be provided with a definitive time line of when this site will be reopened?
- (2) Why has the minister not taken action in two and half years?
- (3) What advice has the minister received about the ongoing impact of the closure on the site's UNESCO World Heritage status?

Mr R.R. WHITBY replied:

I thank the member for the question.

- (1)–(3) I will begin by making the comment that the Labor Party understands the natural value of this area. The Hawke Labor government, in partnership with the Lawrence Labor government, in 1991 successfully inscribed Shark Bay on the World Heritage List, so I will just start with that fact.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr R.R. WHITBY: We recognise, and have been instrumental in protecting, the value of the stromatolites at Hamelin Pool. It is true that a cyclone hit the area in April 2021 and, as a result of that cyclone, significant damage was done to the boardwalk. We responded appropriately and had engineers investigate to look at what work needed to be done. We were not going to rush it; we were going to take our time and do it properly. The investigation found that, given the whole structure was approaching end of life in the next 10-or-so years, it made absolute sense to look at a total replacement rather than a piecemeal approach of fixing the damaged section and then coming back in a few years' time to start planning for a replacement. The repair approach would have led to more disruption at the site, longer closures and more threats to the stromatolites because of the increased activity of building twice rather than once. We are now conducting a thorough investigation into the entire rebuild, and we will continue to protect those natural assets in their environment. I make the point that our government is very keen to protect this part of the world and very keen to make very large investments in the natural environment in the member's electorate. We have spent more than \$12 million to protect the region's natural environment through the WA Recovery Plan, Plan for Our Parks and national heritage grant initiatives. We have projects and upgrades for Monkey Mia; walk trails; interpretive landscaping; park infrastructure; and Kennedy Range National Park and Pimbee National Park, which I have just mentioned. Of course, in 2020, the McGowan government delivered the \$24 million Kalbarri Skywalk, in the heart of the member's electorate, which was a major project. Seriously, what more can we do? This is one of the major attractions of any national park, and we have invested heavily and delivered that project in the member's electorate.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please, members!

Mr R.R. WHITBY: We will continue to work and deliver for the environment in the member's electorate, and we will continue to protect the stromatolites.