

BIODIVERSITY — THREATENED ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

Statement by Minister for Environment

MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldivis — Minister for Environment) [12.23 pm]: I would like to inform the house of the first listing of threatened ecological communities made under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, as recently published in the *Government Gazette*. This listing reaffirms that the protection of unique Western Australian biodiversity is a key priority of the Cook Labor government. The listing of these ecological communities under the act will enhance their protection through financial penalties for illegally causing modification to them. Prior to this listing, these ecological communities were not legislatively listed. Threatened ecological communities have previously been afforded some legislative protection as they have been on the environmentally sensitive areas list under section 51B of the Environmental Protection Act 1986 since 2005.

Furthermore, the new processes for listing ecological communities under the act elevate the standard of scientific rigour in assessing the eligibility of ecological communities for listing and include provisions for improving public consultation. I would like to thank and acknowledge here today the role of the Threatened Ecological Communities Scientific Committee of independent scientific experts for reviewing the conservation status of these ecological communities and providing me with expert scientific advice on their listing. This new list of threatened ecological communities under the act keeps our assessment up to date as threats change and our scientific understanding improves. The listing also allows for identification of research and management actions necessary to stop the decline of, and support the recovery of, these ecological communities. Responding to ongoing learning and improved knowledge means that the protection afforded to our threatened ecological communities can keep pace with our changing landscapes and seascapes.

In Western Australia, we can be proud of the many ways we are demonstrating leadership in safeguarding our unique biodiversity and natural assets for future generations. The first listing of ecological communities under the act is yet another example of the commitment of the Cook government to deliver conservation of the unique ecosystems we have in Western Australia. Finally, I thank the staff at the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions for their work on this listing process, as well as the Threatened Ecological Communities Scientific Committee for its advice to me on this very important matter.