

RETURN TO 1616 PROJECT — DIRK HARTOG ISLAND

Statement by Minister for Environment

MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldivis — Minister for Environment) [12.17 pm]: Today, I would like to update the house on the progress of the Dirk Hartog Island National Park Return to 1616 project. Over the weekend, I had the privilege of visiting to see dozens of dibblers released as part of an innovative project to reconstruct the island's fauna. I would like to acknowledge the Malgana people, who are the traditional owners of Wirruwana in Gutharraguda—Dirk Hartog Island in Shark Bay. Dirk Hartog is WA's largest island and an important part of the Shark Bay World Heritage Area.

The ambitious project aims to restore the island to what it was like in 1616 when Dutch sea captain Dirk Hartog was the first European to visit. The first stage is now complete, with feral cats, sheep and goats eradicated. This makes Dirk Hartog the largest island in the world to have achieved this remarkable feat—one we can be proud of. In the absence of sheep and goats and with targeted weed control, there has been significant improvement in vegetation. Six species of native mammals have been reintroduced, including 112 rufous hare-wallabies, 102 banded hare-wallabies, 99 Shark Bay bandicoots, 121 dibblers, 130 Shark Bay mice and 122 greater stick-nest rats. Early results show that they are all doing well on their new island home. I was thrilled to see the dibblers up close when they were released on the weekend. These animals were bred in captivity at Perth Zoo and will undergo a soft release into pens with support to assist them to adjust to their new home in the coastal heath of the island. Since 1997, Perth Zoo has bred 1 202 dibblers for release to the wild. As well as working with mammals, scientists are improving the conservation of birds with the recent release of 85 western grasswrens. This is a fantastic achievement.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, including our friends at Perth Zoo. Members who would like to find out more about Dirk Hartog Island and the Return to 1616 project can go online to the sharkbay.org website.