

BALGA SOCCER CLUB — JUNIOR FEE-FREE FOOTBALL PROGRAM

Statement by Minister for Sport and Recreation

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie-Preston — Minister for Sport and Recreation) [9.11 am]: On Monday night I had the opportunity to visit the Balga Soccer Club, an innovative and multicultural club doing excellent work developing accessible, grassroots sport for kids. The club is the first in Australia to introduce a junior fee-free football program to all Balga Soccer Club youth members. In a very multicultural area with a large new migrant population, the program successfully uses football as a vehicle for inclusion. The program provides both a fun way for families to spend time together and the opportunity for kids from a variety of backgrounds to further develop their sporting and life skills under a fully structured program.

To be eligible for the fee-free football program, families must get involved and participate in club activities. It was fantastic to meet some of the parents who had enrolled their kids in the program and started volunteering at the club, all of whom have enjoyed becoming a part of the football community. Funded through fundraising efforts, the fee-free football offers exceptional outcomes in getting families and kids who could not otherwise afford to play involved in their local community. The club itself also benefits, offering access to an optional advanced academy pathway for talented kids whose participation in sport may have otherwise been limited by their economic background. Balga SC now has 300 registered players and 17 teams. As the Minister for Sport and Recreation; Volunteering, I am delighted to see a program encouraging the participation of kids in sport and their parents in volunteering, and the incredible social, health and family outcomes of this fee-free initiative.

I thank Janine Freeman, MLA, for the invitation to come out and meet with the club, President Ken Shorto and the Balga SC executive for their exceptional leadership, the parents who have seized the opportunity to get themselves and their kids involved, and, of course, the City of Stirling and Football West for their support of the club.