

CONSERVATION ESTATE — ABORIGINAL MANAGEMENT

Motion

HON ROSIE SAHANNA (Mining and Pastoral) [11.28 am] — without notice: I move —

That the Legislative Council —

- (a) acknowledges the importance of supporting Aboriginal peoples' commitment to the long-term management of Western Australia's national parks; and
- (b) notes the McGowan government's strong commitment to the Aboriginal ranger program and initiatives such as Plan for Our Parks to provide on-country employment opportunities and investment into the joint management of conservation reserves.

Hon ROSIE SAHANNA: Good morning, everyone. Today I am here to talk about the McGowan government's commitment to working with traditional owners through a range of initiatives that provide on-country employment opportunities and investments into the joint management of Western Australia's conservation estate. Traditional owners have been caring for country for thousands of years and have a special connection with their land. The connection that Aboriginal people feel with their country is tangible and offers a sense of belonging and identity. It refers to not only the land and sea, but also connections with plants and animals on a spiritual, cultural and emotional level. Living or working on-country is about caring for it and learning about how it works.

There are many social, health and wellbeing benefits for Aboriginal people who remain connected with their country. It is proven to have a positive effect on Aboriginal people in Western Australia's ranger program, with 70 per cent of projects reporting improvements in the overall health and wellbeing of rangers, including reduced heart and kidney disease, reduced alcohol and substance abuse, reduced mental health issues and better nutrition. The health and wellbeing outcomes delivered by the Aboriginal ranger program can be nothing short of life-changing, with an increase in employment opportunities, the preservation of important cultural values and reconnection to family, community, land, sea, culture and identity.

The connection with country has been threatened for many Aboriginal people by the impacts of colonisation and forced removal. Forced removal is something I am very much aware of because my dad and my grandmother were removed, so that is very close to home for me. The government's Aboriginal ranger program is committed to restoring Aboriginal people's connection with country and is focused on the environmental benefits that come from the successful ongoing joint management of country, including national parks, conservation areas and marine parks, thereby combining thousands of years of traditional knowledge with modern technologies and strategies.

Several of the ranger initiatives are administered by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, including the Aboriginal ranger program and Plan for Our Parks. DBCA has a long history of partnership with Aboriginal traditional owners and has in place many successful ongoing partnerships for joint management and accessing and caring for country with Aboriginal people. The program has created more than 800 employment opportunities across 35 projects since its inception in 2017. Of those, 650 are on-country ranger jobs, with 95 per cent of those jobs going to Aboriginal people, almost half of whom are women. The program focuses on empowering Aboriginal people and communities whilst engaging in collaborative approaches to undertaking conservation activities. It develops leadership prospects, employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal people. There are currently 16 formal joint management arrangements in place for 46 parks and reserves in Western Australia, totalling more than 2.5 million hectares of jointly managed conservation estate. The joint management strategy has longstanding benefits for all members of the community, including non-Aboriginal people, as it fosters a true appreciation of traditional knowledge and cultural understanding. These joint management agreements set out how traditional owners and DBCA come together to make decisions and recommendations on how an area is managed, including how to protect cultural heritage. It is a form of safeguarding culture and nature through meaningful work, delivering environmental results to benefit all Australians.

The ranger program was launched in 2017 with an initial \$20 million in funding allocated to 35 successful Aboriginal ranger projects managed by Aboriginal organisations across the state. A report evaluating the social outcomes of phase 1 of the program found it to be delivering meaningful employment and training on-country, resulting in an enhanced connection to country and culture. Acknowledging the importance and success of the Aboriginal ranger program, the McGowan government has committed an additional \$66.5 million over five years for phase 2 of the program, through to 2026. A further \$16.5 million commitment will commence after phase 2 is completed, bringing the total Aboriginal ranger program funding to \$83 million.

In 2022, phase 2 was co-designed with an Aboriginal reference group comprising 22 statewide representatives and DBCA. The co-design process led to the growth of the program under three key funding themes: development, expansion and innovation. In 2022, \$32.8 million was allocated from the department to development and expansion

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themes. Currently, \$11 million is available under the innovation fund for one-off projects that employ innovative ways to maximise outcomes and benefits to Aboriginal ranger programs throughout the state. Up to \$30 million will be available under the development fund, which will launch in late 2023.

Members may be aware of the McGowan government's Plan for Our Parks initiative, which was established in 2019 to create five million hectares of new national parks, marine parks and other conservation reserves by 2024. The initiative will create further on-country employment opportunities and enhance cultural tourism in our state. Plan for Our Parks will therefore provide more opportunities for traditional owners to jointly manage country. This is working towards protecting and restoring a strong connection, which is very important for Aboriginal people and traditional owners. There are currently 28 reserve proposals under Plan for Our Parks, and I am pleased to advise the house that considerable progress has been made since the initiative was announced, with 38 per cent of the five million-hectare target already reached.

Last year, as part of the McGowan government's commitment to Plan for Our Parks, three new parks in the Kimberley were announced: the Bardi Jawi Gaarra, Mayala and Maiyalam marine parks will cover more than 600 000 acres of the Buccaneer Archipelago and will be jointly managed by the traditional owners. The creation of these marine parks is an acknowledgement of traditional owners' connection with the sea and the coming of the Bardi Jawi Gaarra, Mayala and Dambeemangarddee traditional owners, our saltwater people and carers of the sea.

The Kimberley has produced many highly successful ranger programs over the past decade and the McGowan government's ongoing investment in Aboriginal ranger program is an acknowledgement of this. Our rangers up north do an exceptional job of caring for the country. The Kimberley rangers were even recognised overseas for their fire management skills, launching a groundbreaking project in Botswana in southern Africa to work with local landowners in practising successful savannah fire management. As an example of this incredible work the local rangers do on-country, the coordinator of the Nyaliga rangers on Wilinggin country on the Gibb River late last year found a female tourist who had been lost in the area for four days and was severely dehydrated. If the rangers had not been on-country, her chances of surviving the harsh conditions without food or water would have been very slim. It is a miracle that the ranger located her, and this highlights the importance of having local people employed as rangers in their areas. Without the program, the coordinator and the ranger would not have been there. Had it not been for them checking the area, the woman may not have been found until it was too late. Given another 24 hours, she may not have lived.

The Nyaliga ranger program commenced operation in 2020 after receiving funding from the McGowan government's Aboriginal ranger program. It provides training and employment for the local Nyaliga men and women to conduct meaningful work on their country through protecting native fauna and flora, managing fire and controlling weeds and feral animals, and supports the traditional owners to look after cultural sites and maintain traditional knowledge and practices. The Nyaliga ranger program is one of two Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation Aboriginal ranger groups. It is based in the north east of the Kimberley and the other ranger program is based in the centre. The Wunggurr rangers do fantastic work out there.

There are many examples of successful and empowering groups and programs being undertaken in the Kimberley because of allocated funding from the Aboriginal ranger program.

The Karajarri rangers based out of Bidyadanga community and the Ngurrara rangers based out in Fitzroy Crossing both received funding to undertake fire management, biodiversity surveys, habitat mapping and cultural site management as part of the Karajarri–Ngurrara desert fire and biodiversity project. The Kimberley Kija rangers and the Balangarra rangers, based in the East Kimberley, were also allocated funding to assist with expanding their programs and leadership opportunities, particularly for women.

A significant outcome of the Aboriginal ranger program is the opportunities the program provides for women rangers, with specific recruitment spaces becoming available for women to step up and take the lead in caring for country and culture. There is a record number of women rangers currently working in the Kimberley. The Bardi Jawi and the Nyul Nyul women rangers up in the Dampier Peninsula and the Kimberley received funding in 2020 from the programs to undertake land and sea management, including conservation and cultural and educational activities. The Kija women's program will be expanded because of a funding allocation last year. The Bunuba women rangers' program was established in 2018, following funding from the Aboriginal ranger program.

The McGowan government recognises the importance of supporting Aboriginal people's commitment to the long-term management of Western Australia's national parks. It recognises the profound knowledge of country that Aboriginal people hold. Programs and initiatives such as Plan for Our Parks support the creation of on-country jobs and training opportunities for Aboriginal people to connect with, and care for, their country. This empowers Aboriginal people to have a say in how their country is cared for, which creates benefits for their own wellbeing as well as being in the best interest of their traditional land and seas.

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The McGowan government's ongoing investment into the Aboriginal ranger program will work to inspire future generations to learn about country and how to protect it, which will in turn build sustainable economic development in the management of Western Australia's natural resources. I am proud to be part of a government that fully acknowledges the profound importance of this valuable, enriching program. Thank you.

HON SHELLEY PAYNE (Agricultural) [11.42 am]: It gives me great pleasure to talk on this motion today. Thank you, Hon Rosie Sahanna, for bringing this motion forward so we have an opportunity to talk about Aboriginal ranger programs and our great Plan for Our Parks.

When I first came to Esperance 22 years ago, the rhetoric around town was that Aboriginal people had never been there; they were somewhere else, but they were never in Esperance. It took me quite a few years to realise the truth about what I was listening to in the community. I came across a site on the National Heritage List in Cape Le Grand National Park. Use of Cheetup Rock Shelter by Aboriginal people dates back 13 500 years. At this site, a preserved, wrapped Aboriginal baby was found, as well as evidence of how Aboriginal people used to leach berries so they would not be poisonous anymore. The first sailors who arrived in Esperance used to get sick from eating the berries and learnt from the local Aboriginal people how to leach out the poison.

It took me a while to understand the real story. I met people like Doc Reynolds in Esperance, who has done a huge amount of work. Again, I had all this negative talk coming to me about Doc Reynolds and his family. At the same time, I was looking at the huge contribution Doc has made in standing up for his people. Last year, he got the Sir David Brand Medal for Tourism for his contribution to Aboriginal tourism; he is only the second Aboriginal person, I think in 50 years, to get the medal. His sister Gail Reynolds-Adamson has been the chair of Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation almost since its inception and she has done a lot of work as well.

I was on council in Esperance and it took me two years and three motions to get council to raise the Aboriginal flag. I commend the council and the changes within Esperance and the great job that the Esperance council is doing, but what I had to listen to behind closed doors, when I was first elected, was terrible. Shortly after I was elected, I went to a women's leadership event and Gail stood up. It was the first time, I think, she had had the courage to talk in the community, and she spoke about when she was growing up. She said she would go into the general store in Esperance and if there were white people in there, she and her mother would have to wait until they had been served and had left before she could come up and pay. It has been interesting to see the changes that have happened in Esperance over the last 20 years.

There is still a long way to go in regional areas. The vote on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice that is coming up is a great opportunity to engage our communities and do our bit. How the Esperance Tjaltjraak corporation runs its organisation is a fantastic example for the state, and I commend the elders' circle and the board and CEO Peter Bednall on all their great work. The group received its native title settlement in 2014 and, since then, has done a great job. It was one of the first groups funded through our Aboriginal ranger program and has been funded through the first four rounds. They are now working with the shire as well as the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. It is a great thing to see how the Parks and Wildlife Service in Esperance has changed to engage and work with Tjaltjraak, such as on the islands off Esperance where they introduced the Gilbert's potoroo and are monitoring on the islands, as well as some of the other projects, such as weed control and fauna management. The money that we have put into these Aboriginal programs has been fantastic and a real difference can be seen on the ground. I am really proud of Tjaltjraak and the example it is for the state.

The south coast marine park is under planning. We have had a lot of questions from the opposition. I want to commend the government on its Plan for Our Parks program and the proposed south coast marine park. It is not only consulting with commercial fishermen and the community, but also jointly planning the project with the traditional owners. It is not only Tjaltjraak that is involved, as the marine park will cover Bremer Bay all the way to the border. It will be really great. The park will be managed jointly with traditional owners. Working with four different owner groups is a big job for our government, and I commend it for the work it is doing.

Last weekend I had the privilege to go to a drone light show. Our government had committed \$168 000 to Fremantle Biennale to do a drone light show, and the group then went around the state working with different Aboriginal communities. It was great that the first drone show in Esperance was run through the native title organisation, and it was a show about their connections to sea country. There had been funding for six families to create animations from their family groups and the animations were premiered on the night. Members can go to the Parks Australia website and watch them there because the animations were federally funded. They tell stories about connection and how they used to fish. For example, they used to collect all the periwinkles and crabs and crush them and throw them over the rocks so that they could attract fish and then spear them. There were also other dreaming stories, which was great.

Doc Reynolds did a welcome to country on the night. I heard that another elder was supposed to be doing it, but Doc ended up doing it, which I think was great because of all his work in the community. It was a great welcome to country. It is the first time the community could be involved in the smoking ceremony and breathe in the smoke and

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get cleansed. Opportunities such as this really mean a lot to Aboriginal people; it was great to see the huge number of people from the community who came out to see the drone show and be part of the welcome to country ceremony.

I want to commend the local high school, Stars Foundation and Clontarf Academy for their great cultural dancing. This is something we can do more of to help bring cultural dancing back to our regions. Narrogin and Katanning have large Aboriginal populations. I think there is a lot more work that we can do in these areas to get Aboriginal people involved in parks and reserves management. This is something that I am really excited about. I know there are a few other people who want to speak so I will leave my comments there. Thank you.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Brian Walker): Honourable Samantha Carr.

HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural) [11.50 am]: Sandra.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Sandra Carr.

Hon SANDRA CARR: Thank you, Acting President. I can appreciate it; I have made the same error myself—not with my own name, but others!

I rise today in support of the motion moved by my good friend and colleague Hon Rosie Sahanna. I thank her for bringing this very important motion to everybody's attention. It is an important discussion, particularly in the state and federal context with the Voice to Parliament referendum coming up later in the year. That will be a great opportunity for us to acknowledge and unite as a country and incorporate an Aboriginal voice into our Constitution.

In February 2019, the McGowan government unveiled a conservation vision for our state. It is definitely a bold plan in that it endeavoured to create five million hectares of additional marine reserves and national parks. That indicates a 28 per cent increase in the reserve for the state, which is an important and significant increase. Importantly, it also creates Aboriginal jobs, biodiversity conservation and nature-based cultural tourism. There is a significant appetite for nature-based cultural tourism from outside the country to really experience the true history of our state and our nation. It is good to see our state providing opportunities to capitalise on that appetite and also to embrace that as part of the holistic story of our state.

I had the good fortune of attending the opening of the truth-telling ceremony exhibition in Toodyay as part of the Toodyay museum. That was a wonderful opportunity to see the history of our state being told with honesty and transparency. It is an opportunity for everyone to see the full picture of our history, not just the convenient truths that we usually like to acknowledge. The other great aspect of that was that it happened in a small regional town. It is fantastic to see our small regional towns embracing their traditional owners and their history, and allowing them to take ownership of the development of that story. I also had the opportunity to speak at that ceremony, which was a considerable honour. One of the observations I made when developing what I wanted to say at that ceremony was the realisation that our traditional owners named places and features by their geographical or environmental aspects, whereas Europeans or other settlers named them after people. The way we name things really struck me as a significant observation. It also reflects the value that we sometimes fail to place on land and the opportunities we have missed historically to embrace thousands of years of knowledge about country. It is particularly fantastic to see the delivery of the Aboriginal ranger program in our state and the work that it is doing.

I will talk about lots of investments, if I get time, but I would like to talk about the way the Aboriginal ranger program is manifesting in the region where I predominantly live and work, which is the midwest region. The Aboriginal ranger program in the midwest is predominantly delivered by the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council WA—the NACC natural resource management authority, as it is called. It does that in collaboration with partners. I love the word “collaboration”. It is really important. “Collaborating” is the catchword of our future. Collaboration is important because it embraces all the knowledge and experience and unifies it. That is what this program is doing. A whole heap of groups are involved in working with the Aboriginal ranger program along with the NACC NRM, including Western Mulga; the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions; and the Kwelena Mambakort Wedge Island Aboriginal Corporation. It also involves federal groups such as Bush Heritage Australia, Rangelands NRM, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, Ninghan IPA, Central Regional TAFE and some other local Indigenous organisations and communities. It is a big collaborative effort by those groups. It is dedicated to bringing together those traditional custodians and providing guidance and conservation and biodiversity preservation efforts right across the midwest region.

I would like to speak about some of the work the Aboriginal ranger program has done in some local schools because there are really lovely stories to tell about our young Aboriginal rangers going to schools and sharing their knowledge with the students. One of the programs the rangers delivered was speaking to the students at Holland Street School. For those people who are not from Geraldton, Holland Street School is a special needs school. It was really great to see that group also embracing the full range of diversity of students in our community. The rangers talked to the kids about things like middens, which they were fascinated by, and about rope history and the time line of Australia's and Western Australia's Indigenous history. They read the story book *The Lost Emu* and told stories in English

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and the Wiradjuri language. The students apparently really loved the Wiradjuri and Badimia dictionaries that are being produced in our region in the midwest to share the language. The high school kids and teachers in the schools I have taught at in the midwest drop in bits of Aboriginal language when they talk. I used to always wear Nike sneakers at one of the schools I taught at and the students always liked my jinabugas, which were my shoes. That language would pop up all the time when they talked. I really appreciated it because I would learn their language from them. That is a great way to share the knowledge. That is part of what the Aboriginal ranger program does as well.

The students also learnt that traditional fire burning is good for the country and the soil. Anyone who has had kids or interacted with kids knows that when they do something at the school that is outside the normal curriculum, like incursions or excursions, they are the things the kids remember. I am sure that if I look around the room, every single person who had the opportunity to attend school will remember the value they got out of a program they participated in that was outside the normal curriculum. For me, it was a Vietnamese teacher who taught us how to cook rice properly. I still remember that vividly because it was outside the range of my normal experience. I got home and taught my mum how to cook rice differently. Sometimes parents do not like it when they are told how to do things, especially when they are cooking you dinner! That knowledge sharing and the work the Aboriginal rangers are doing in the midwest region and across our state is an incredibly precious and important way to recognise the tens of thousands of years of history and knowledge that the Aboriginal community can provide us when we are willing to listen. It is great to see the McGowan government investing in developing and facilitating that knowledge and allowing the rangers to contribute.

I would like to add that the rangers also taught the students about how to find water out in the bush. They also shared a jigsaw puzzle they created that is made from the artwork of a Badimia Yamatji–Balladong Noongar woman, Acacia Collard. The image she created is about coming together, exchanging ideas and working together. That is a beautiful reflection of what the Aboriginal ranger program is delivering.

The rangers have also done programs by Chapman River with schools. Elders such as June Councillor met with some groups. Woodlupine and Bluff Point Primary Schools have participated. The students get a proper welcome to country. June Councillor is a Naaguja Yamatji woman. She welcomed the students to country, so the students were welcomed by the traditional owners. The students threw sand into the river, which is a longstanding tradition of First Nations people designed to show respect to the land and waters. It is critical that we teach our young people respect for our land and waters. After doing that, they looked around the river and saw the amount of rubbish that was thrown in there and compared that with the knowledge and experience that June Councillor had shared with them about how the Naaguja people lived and thrived around that river and the rich life that was in that river that they were able to survive on. The students were broken into groups and allowed to participate in some really sensory, hands-on experiences around the river. That taught them to appreciate the importance of land and country and how it sustains life. That connection and those opportunities that our Aboriginal rangers provide, along with all their conservation efforts and other work they do, is profoundly important. They are incredibly valuable educative lessons and they are also important for the young Aboriginal people. Aboriginal ranger Taj Mamid—apologies if I have mispronounced his surname—was very ably facilitated by Priscilla Papertalk, who works at NACC. She does a fantastic job. She recently spoke to groups at the Shore Leave Festival.

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.59 am]: It is an absolute pleasure to stand and talk on the motion moved by my mate Hon Rosie Sahanna. I would like to put on the record what an honour it is to serve in this Parliament with the first female Indigenous member in the upper house. What an achievement it is! It is no surprise which party achieved that. I also have to voice some disappointment because today's motion is relevant and very important for the other side to listen to. I am very proud of the reputation of the WA Labor Party. Not only do we have Hon Rosie Sahanna in the upper house, we also have the just as honourable Divina D'Anna, who represents the Kimberley electorate in the lower house. In the last election we also ran as the candidate for North West Central the absolutely honourable Cherie Sibosado. I will refer to the following state and federal Labor candidates as "honourable" because they are honourable people: Michelle Nelson in Central Wheatbelt; Jeremiah Riley in the federal electorate of Durack; and Shaneane Weldon in the federal electorate of O'Connor.

I am proud of WA Labor's record. It is no surprise that when we came to government in 2017, we came in with a program that has truly delivered for First Nations people in Western Australia. Hon Reece Whitby, the Minister for Environment, is doing a fantastic job, but I also want to pay homage to the member who was environment minister in 2017, Hon Stephen Dawson, and the work he and his staff did in getting the fantastic ranger program off the ground. Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson took over from Hon Stephen Dawson as environment minister and drove the Aboriginal ranger program even harder. Now, Hon Reece Whitby is absolutely smashing it; he is out there, on the ground, making sure that this program has legs. There will be an extra \$13 million up for grabs in this round of the ranger program.

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When I talk about the ranger program, I cannot help my passion for it seeping out, because I see it on the ground; I see what it does and what it achieves. Again, I thank Hon Rosie Sahanna because her words about how vital this program is on the ground for Aboriginal people were so true. It is a program that focuses on the transfer of more than 60 000 years of knowledge of this land to assist the government in looking after our biodiversity, our land, our sea and, most importantly, our cultural sites in this country. These are sites that have been around for thousands of years and hold such a special place in First Nations people's lives, culture and connection to the land.

There are many things I could talk about in respect of the ranger program, but I have only a short time and I know there are many speakers I will want to hear from. However, I will touch on Cardabia station, near Coral Bay. There is a lady there who is a fearless advocate for and leader of her community, Hazel Walgar. Hazel, I salute you for what you have achieved. When I first went to the Exmouth and Coral Bay regions in 2017 there was a noticeable lack of culture. Hazel has taken charge in that area with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions in Exmouth but also, more importantly, in her own space and country on Cardabia station. She is focusing on trying to connect First Nations people with tourism and the ranger program, through which they can look after their land.

I was sitting in the members' bar the other night, having a cup of coffee and trying to stay awake, and I heard Hazel's voice. I was a bit shocked and thought, "That's Hazel!" The ABC was on the TV; I hope members in this chamber have taken the opportunity to watch Tim Winton's *Ningaloo Nyinggulu* documentary, which is a three-part series. Hazel appeared in that series, and it was a really special moment that we just walked in on. She took Tim to a very sacred spot of great cultural significance and explained it to him. I will not give it away because I think members need to take the opportunity to watch this documentary. It will show the culture of the First Nations people in that area to the world.

I was also lucky enough to work with Hazel over the last six or seven years on multiple projects. She has young rangers up in Exmouth who are very excited to be learning from their elders; getting out onto country every day is their job, and they love it. Everywhere you go in that region, the schools et cetera, you see that First Nations kids see rangers as role models—people that they want to be when they grow up. They want to be rangers; they want to be able to have their culture crossing over with their job. That is really integral.

Hazel and her team, including Paul Baron and others, worked on the eclipse event up in Exmouth. I could talk all day about the space people who arrived there from all over the world and some of the interesting things that happened, but my favourite part of it was being invited by Hazel to the Jamba Nyinayi Festival the night before the solar eclipse. This was the first festival of its kind to be held in Exmouth and there was a lot of engagement with First Nations people in the area. We went out there and walked over to the cliffs, where one of the most stunning events I have ever seen was presented, the story of Jirndal sun and Wilarra moon coming together. It was performed through a drone show with Hazel narrating in language and then in English. It was spectacular; the people just felt it. It made the eclipse next day even more special. The story was performed again on Town Beach in Exmouth. Just hearing language being spoken across Exmouth Town Beach was really, really special.

I am a strong believer that we are entering into an opportunity to walk with First Nations people this year with the Voice to Parliament referendum. It is an absolute privilege for every Australian to be given the opportunity to hear Indigenous cultural stories and gain an understanding of what First Nations people can give us. That is knowledge that we cannot buy and cannot fake. There is truth, there is storytelling, and there is a way forward.

I will leave some time here, because I know that many members want to speak, but I cannot stress enough how much I love the ranger program; the WA Labor government is doing a fantastic job of delivering it. The Voice is also very important and I ask members to keep their eyes peeled and not be fooled by some of the rhetoric, because it is simple: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want us to walk with them, and we bloody well should.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [12.07 pm]: I, like other speakers before me, will not take my full allotment of time because I know there are many members who want to speak to this motion. I indicate that the opposition is happy to support the motion before the house today. It has been delivered in a not highly political way, and I think that is a good thing. We have had a small amount of politics; we are in the house, and it is very hard to avoid a bit of politics in the house, but it has not been extreme and I think that has been a productive way in which to hold this debate today. I am not necessarily opposed. I have been known to occasionally use a bit of politics myself, but I try to avoid it for the most part.

The motion is in two parts. It acknowledges the importance of supporting Aboriginal people's commitment to the long-term management of Western Australia's national parks, and it also notes the government's strong commitment to the Aboriginal ranger program. There were ranger programs, in a rather ad hoc way, prior to the 2017 election, but there has to be acknowledgement from the opposition that the current government has invested significantly in and promoted the ranger program. For those who were around at the time—not many members were—the former Minister for Environment, the current Minister for Emergency Services, and I have had a couple of debates on this

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topic over the last four or five years. We are all basically supporters of the Indigenous ranger program and the good work it does.

I think the initial program started from about a \$20 million budget in the government's first term, but it is now \$66 million. The opposition acknowledges that the government put additional investment in, but then increased it in its second term. I am happy to acknowledge that. There was previous activity, with joint management plans over certain parks and discussion around its expansion on some of the pastoral leases, in particular in the electorate of Hon Kyle McGinn and Hon Rosie Sahanna. That has seen some expansion. It is absolutely the case that some great positives come out of this program. The engagement of Aboriginal people in management gives an opportunity for the Aboriginal communities that are associated with those lands to take a positive and active interest in it. Everybody in the chamber would be supporting that and I suspect everybody in the public supports that as well. Hon Kyle McGinn made a very good point—I think others did as well, he was just the most recent—that the opportunity for employment as a part of the program is critically important. That is also something that the opposition supports.

One of the things that Hon Stephen Dawson and I debate at times is about the stepping stones to use education as a part of that process to move forward. The minister might respond and be able to update us, but there was a fair degree of interaction with the vocational education training sector and the ranger programs, and that has been a relatively good thing. I have been keen for many years to see that extended into tertiary education as well. I am not sure we have gone far down that particular path. It is probably not the easiest thing in the world, but I am keen to see a merging of Aboriginal knowledge with science. If I had a suggestion for the debate that I thought was missing so far, it is that merging of the science component that nobody has really talked about. I am very keen to see merging. There is an opportunity to take scientific knowledge and combine it, rather than keep it separate. It is important, when we can, to encourage people in that rangers group to step up into tertiary education to environmental degrees, agricultural degrees, and even good old-fashioned science degrees. I know the old fashion stuff is not so popular anymore—everybody wants to be a forensic scientist like it is on television—but a plain old-fashioned science degree based in botany, soil science and those sorts of things in combination is possibly one part of the process that we have not nailed as yet. I suspect it is a time frame issue. I accept the government's focus on getting people on the ground in the first instance. I understand that that is critically important.

I am happy to say that the government has invested well in the Indigenous ranger program to date. The opposite side of that is that this government and pretty much every previous government I can think of, has an issue in the delivery of biosecurity. In my view, nobody has done biosecurity well regarding invasive species that come in, effectively become endemic and change the nature of the region and the land et cetera. There is a massive opportunity to expand even beyond current planning into a major focus on biosecurity. That is the other half that needs to be a part of this debate. The first is the meeting point of science and Aboriginal culture in knowledge development and all those things. I think that is critically important, but the other is this massive focus on biosecurity. It would be ill-thought out of me to suggest that if we got this program in sooner, we might have stopped the spread of cane toads in the north west. The cane toad is a very difficult animal to get rid of; it is a tough one. Maybe that was long gone before anybody got anywhere near this discussion and 20 years ago was probably already too late, but there is an opportunity for the next invasive species, the next cane toad, the next thing that comes along to make a greater use of, and expansion of, the Indigenous ranger program. We used to have the wild dog debate and people wanted bounties on wild dogs, but as an employment opportunity, the possibilities for bounties on invasive species that do not have a direct economic reward for the private sector might be worth playing with in the fullness of time. It would not be a big or expensive one, but it might be worth looking at.

I know that other members want to speak. The opposition supports the motion. We acknowledge that the Labor government has invested significantly in this and expanded its investment. We will always claim that there were programs beforehand that existed and needed expansion. The government did that. Hopefully, we will continue the rest of this debate. Those are the issues we could pick up. The employment issue is critical, the science issue is very important and the biosecurity issue is possibly the most important one of the lot.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.15 pm]: It is with great pleasure that I give the government response to the wonderful motion put forward today by Hon Rosie Sahanna. I acknowledge, and Hon Kyle McGinn pointed out, how Hon Rosie Sahanna has created history by being the first First Nations woman elected to the Legislative Council. What a privilege it is to have Rosie here as a part of history with us. We have learned so much from her presence and her time here. We are wiser and better for the experience of having the opportunity to work with her. I took the opportunity to visit Hon Rosie Sahanna when I went to Broome last year. I was treated to a delicious lunch and then spent the afternoon driving around Broome, including a visit to Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation where I saw the great work being done there.

On this issue, this government obviously has a great story to tell. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his remarks and acknowledgement about how the McGowan government has worked extremely hard in this space. I also want

Hon Rosie Sahanna; Hon Shelley Payne; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon
Darren West; Hon Lorna Harper

to acknowledge all the traditional owners from right around the country, particularly in Western Australia. It is a great experience to work with First Nations people in their groups and walk lightly on country together, providing opportunities to care for country and connect and reconnect in many ways. It is just the right thing to do. It should be a key role of government. I hope going forward that programs such as the Aboriginal ranger program are never cut, never reduced and remain intact for years to come. The outcomes speak for themselves. The \$66 million investment is a major investment into this, but we know that the country will be cared for by people who actually care for the country through culture. We know that the skills that will be acquired will be transferrable into other professions, occupations and pursuits, and we also know how good it feels and how important it is for them when young people get out on country and make a contribution to their country.

Before I continue on, I will quote from something I was having a bit of a look through this morning that I found on the website of the Southern Aboriginal Corporation. This is probably the most important perspective on how this program works for Aboriginal people and their country. I found this webpage that I thought to share with members today. It starts with the word “moorditj”, which I think is the best word in the whole word. It states —

Moorditj Noongar & Yorgas—Albany Aboriginal rangers working on country

Moorditj Noongar & Yorgas—Albany Aboriginal Rangers will work with seven ... community partners, state and local government agencies to deliver environmental restoration, survey and monitoring of EPBC species populations, interpretation of local culturally significant sites, and trails design, construction and maintenance in the south coast region of WA.

Moorditj is the Noongar word for ‘solid’. The Southern Aboriginal Corporation ... is promoting this theme through its other outreach community programs including family violence prevention, improving employment opportunities, structured training and housing for Aboriginal people.

That is the perspective from the Southern Aboriginal Corporation and Aboriginal people. On that measure, this program is extremely worthwhile. I thank Hon Rosie Sahanna for bringing that perspective into the house today and of course we concur with its benefits.

I also want to acknowledge the government’s Plan for Our Parks initiative. This was first instigated under Minister Dawson, who has been followed by Minister Sanderson and now Minister Whitby. It is a great pleasure to serve as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Environment; Climate Action; Racing and Gaming. On the topic of environment, this is the greatest expansion to our conservation estate in history. It is a 20 per cent expansion, which is five million hectares. That is a big number and it is really hard to envisage, but I will make it easy for members to envisage what five million hectares looks like. It converts to 50 000 square kilometres. If a person left this place and walked to Manjimup, on to Ongerup in the great southern in the Shire of Gnowangerup—a wonderful place in the Agricultural Region—and then to Bruce Rock, home of the Bruce Rock Magpies, and back to Perth, they will have walked around five million hectares, which is the size of this increase of conservation estate in Western Australia. That is a pretty long walk. It is a large chunk of regional Western Australia and it encompasses some amazing national parks in this state. We have already done the Abrolhos, we are about to do the south coast, and we will be adding many others to that list as well. That is the scale of the legacy that the McGowan government will leave so that these areas of our state will be protected forever for future generations. We will also use the Aboriginal ranger program to care for that country and instil the skills required by people to walk softly on that country with First Nations people. That is the scale by which our government is increasing the estate and it highlights the priority that our government has given to this initiative.

As mentioned, \$66.5 million has been allocated to the Aboriginal ranger program from 2021 to 2026. The fifth round of recipients have just been announced and include some wonderful organisations such as Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, which has done some wonderful work while I have represented that area in the Parliament, and also Badgebup Aboriginal Corporation in Katanning, which has a wonderful tree planting program that helps young people develop the skills that they need to progress. Lots of good work is going on around the state. It is vital that we continue to preserve our natural environment. There is no planet B. We have to look after our planet. We have to take action on climate change and on carbon emissions. There is so much work for us to do. I went to a breakfast this morning with Hon Dr Jim Chalmers, federal Treasurer, and I am so heartened to have such a great working relationship with the federal government that will allow us to act even further in this environmental space.

In closing, the whole state benefits from this initiative, from working with Aboriginal people on-country and from the expansion to the estate. In the scheme of it all, the budget that we handed down last week is in the high \$30 billion or thereabouts, so \$66 million is an excellent investment. Not only does it provide a legacy for the future and the growth of skills, but also it is a wonderful investment, because when we invest in our people, our people will repay us many times over.

Hon Rosie Sahanna; Hon Shelley Payne; Hon Sandra Carr; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon
Darren West; Hon Lorna Harper

Again I thank Hon Rosie Sahanna for bringing this motion forward today. I encourage others to bring forward motions of an environmental nature because I will stand up here as often as you like to talk about the great work that we are doing in that space. When we can walk hand in hand with First Nations people, it makes it even more worthwhile. There are just a couple more things —

Hon Kyle McGinn: Hear, hear!

Hon DARREN WEST: I appreciate that, member. It is wonderful to get a “hear, hear” along the way. I want to add a couple more things this morning that I might direct people to. If members want to find out a bit more information about how this program works, the Parks and Wildlife Service, as part of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, has some excellent information on its website about how we are rolling out this program. Some of the information goes right back to the start of this program. It states —

The program helps Aboriginal organisations employ and train Aboriginal people as rangers, coordinators and other management and support staff to undertake land and sea management activities including:

- biodiversity monitoring and research
- traditional knowledge transfer —

How important is that! —

- fire management
- cultural site management
- feral animal and weed management
- cultural awareness for visitors
- guided welcome to country tours and/or talks for visitors

There is so much going on.

HON LORNA HARPER (East Metropolitan) [12.25 pm]: I have risen very quickly to thank my sister and honourable colleague Hon Rosie Sahanna for bringing forward this motion. I wish to leave a few minutes for her to have the last word. I do not have time to say what I wanted to say, but I want to let members know about my own little cultural connection while travelling with Rosie towards Perth. We were travelling along and Rosie told me that she wanted to see the Pinnacles at Nambung National Park near Cervantes. We got there quite late in the day and we started driving around the site. We were driving through the sand and had not even reached the part where we could see the Pinnacles and Rosie started to tense up in the car. She said she tensed up because she had the feeling she should not be there and that we should not get out of the car. It was astonishing to me that an Aboriginal woman from the north of Australia would have this feeling that she should not get out of the car. By the time we had driven around the Pinnacles, she had me jumping at shadows, to be quite honest. I know that she went away and researched it and the reason that we should not have been there was because we were women. For an Indigenous person from the north to have that intuition and connection to the land and to feel that is sensational. On that trip we overlooked Jurien Bay Marine Park. Rosie did not like the suggestion that we go up in a plane, jump out of it and have a better look at the marine park, but that is all I have time for. Thank you.

HON ROSIE SAHANNA (Mining and Pastoral) [12.27 pm] — in reply: First, I would like to thank my colleagues for their comments on my motion. As an Aboriginal person, I want to close off by saying something about the Aboriginal ranger program. I can only speak for the Kimberley program, because I am from the Kimberley, but it is one of the best programs ever. It provides employment and training and, like Hon Dr Steve Thomas mentioned, it provides education so that a lot of our people can learn about their own country. No-one knows the country like the traditional Aboriginal people who actually live there. I was not raised as a traditional person. My dad was taken away and it took me 10 years to get used to my mob, but, honestly, this program is a fantastic program and it has been invested in well. I would like to commend the McGowan government on supporting the Aboriginal ranger program. Thank you.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.