

**PERTH ZOO — ABORIGINAL JOB-READY PROGRAM**

*Statement by Minister for Environment*

**MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldivis — Minister for Environment)** [9.08 am]: I today inform the house of a new Aboriginal job-ready program being conducted at Perth Zoo. Perth Zoo has formed a partnership with Clontarf Aboriginal College and the Shoreline Foundation Ltd to provide several students with the opportunity to attain a certificate II qualification in conservation and ecosystems management. Over the past year, these teenagers have had the unique opportunity to work alongside Perth Zoo animal carers, education officers, maintenance staff and horticulturists. To support their learning journey, each student was assigned a “zoo coach” who provided guidance and mentoring throughout the educational experience. In its inaugural year, the program has already yielded impressive results. Two of the students have graduated; the remaining five will continue their work placement at Perth Zoo in 2024, graduating at the end of that year; and one student has been employed in a casual capacity within the Zoo’s education team, helping to inspire and engage students and Zoo visitors.

The primary goal of this program is to empower Aboriginal youth by enhancing their future employment prospects. It is not just a one-way learning experience. Both the students and staff at Perth Zoo benefit by fostering a deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture and connection to country.

I recently attended the graduation ceremony at Perth Zoo, which proudly sits on Whadjuk Noongar land. It is a remarkable program which is quite literally changing lives. It also showcases the breadth of work and impact our Zoo has on the community and the Zoo’s commitment to genuinely supporting the employment of Aboriginal people. To see the pride of the students and the expertise of our Zoo staff being utilised to set the students up for future success is inspiring. It provides students with the knowledge and skills to consider professional and further education pathways previously unknown to them. Apart from the curriculum learnings, for some, the social interaction and interpersonal skills gained have been just as important to enable those students to thrive beyond school and in a professional workplace. One student said that before he started, he could not speak in public. As a result of this program, he is very confident speaking in public and to everyone he encounters.

The career options are numerous. These students could be employed within the resources sector, sustainability, environmental education, horticulture or rangers on country caring for our protected areas. It is my hope that this program continues to grow to be a sustainable long-term opportunity for Perth Zoo and young Aboriginal people.