

CLIMATE CHANGE — IMPACT — PERTH AND PEEL REGION

Grievance

MR P. LILBURNE (Carine) [9.51 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Climate Action; Environment concerning the impacts of climate change right here in the Perth and Peel region, and I thank Minister Whitby for taking my grievance. Unfolding before our eyes in our beloved capital city are numerous matters. It is not just a matter of environmental concern; it is a matter of our future, our wellbeing and our responsibility to act. Our capital city of Perth is known for its natural beauty and unique biodiversity, but our precious environment is facing a crisis like never before and we cannot afford to turn a blind eye. The time for action is now. There is no doubt that rising temperatures have become an undeniable reality. We endure prolonged heatwaves that not only affect our daily lives, but also strain our energy resources as we desperately seek relief from the scorching sun. Our once-reliable water resources are dwindling. Prolonged droughts and diminishing rainfall mean less run off, and drinking water reservoirs are under pressure. The implications are here, and they are affecting our agriculture, drinking water supply and the sustainability of our region.

The threat of bushfires looms larger than ever. Higher temperatures and drier conditions have elevated the risk of catastrophic bushfires, threatening lives, homes and our natural environment. We have seen the devastation that bushfire can cause in Western Australia and even in my electorate of Carine—a thoroughly suburban electorate that has experienced bushfires such as the one that hit Star Swamp Bushland Reserve last year. I supported my fellow neighbours along Marmion Avenue in Marmion and North Beach on the day of the fire and can attest to the ferocity of the fire and the enormous effort needed by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services to contain the blaze. The resilience of the native flora species and the fauna that includes the endangered native quenda, and my neighbours' endurance, is amazing.

We must act to prevent future tragedies. As sea levels rise, our coastal areas bear the brunt. My electorate is lucky to include some magnificent stretches of coastline, including Sorrento, Marmion, Watermans Bay and North Beach. Erosion is causing damage to vital infrastructure. The threat to our coastal communities is all too real. In my electorate my constituents and I have witnessed significant sand erosion and movement at Sorrento Beach that has impacted on the local flora and the physical structure and stability of the primary dune systems. We cannot ignore these impending challenges. Perhaps most tragically, our unique ecosystems are under threat. Climate change disrupts our flora and fauna, endangering not only our environment but also the tourism industry that relies on the beauty of our natural landscapes. We cannot stand idly by while our city, our home, is threatened.

It is unfortunate, although not surprising, that the impacts of climate change have only been exacerbated by the complete inaction of the coalition at the federal level of government and the confusion it created when it last held office in WA. The former Barnett government even sent bulldozers to destroy the ancient and unique ecology and Aboriginal heritage of the Beeliar wetlands. There have been backflips on energy policy, which means the business sector has no confidence in how it should proceed. There has been significant opposition to net zero targets and continued dispute of the human cause of climate change. There has been much inaction and confusion and many missed opportunities, mistakes and misinformation. The incompetence of the previous government was astounding, leaving our government to play catch-up once again.

Thank goodness we now have a federal and a state Labor government that take climate change seriously. Climate change is a global issue; therefore, we must all do our part to be part of the solution. Thankfully, our state is one of the best equipped places in the world to lead the future green economy. It is a collaborative effort and our government continues to support amazing community-led initiatives and action on the ground. Perth is more than just a city; it is a community, a sanctuary of natural beauty and home to more than two million people. It is our duty to protect it for ourselves and for generations to come. I ask the minister to please explain what the impact of climate change is having in these regions and outline the steps the Cook government is taking to further climate action in Western Australia. I again thank the minister for taking my grievance.

MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldvis — Minister for Climate Action) [9.57 am]: I thank the member for Carine for his grievance and for realising, as many others do, that climate change, while a global challenge, has direct impacts on the communities in which we live at a very local level. As the member for Carine pointed out, climate change presents huge challenges for our community—from declining rainfall and drought, to longer and hotter summers, extended bushfire seasons, which we are about to enter, and increased coastal erosion, which is an issue for the member's electorate. The Perth and Peel region is famous for a Mediterranean climate, but the climate we love so much is at the forefront of climate change. The frequency of summer heatwaves and prolonged drought periods has increased in recent decades.

Perth has seen a doubling of days hotter than 40 degrees Celsius and a 1.5 times increase in heatwave events when comparing historical and current periods. Our region has experienced climate-induced drying at one of the fastest rates in the world and it is projected that it will continue to dry. Along with the reduction in rainfall, we are seeing

shifts in rainfall seasonality. Since 1970, our rainfall has declined 20 per cent. The wetlands in our region are particularly vulnerable to climate change through impacts on water depths and water quality, including acidification. Star Swamp Bushland Reserve, a class-A reserve in the Carine electorate, with which I am familiar—as a kid growing up in Warwick I used to go down to Star Swamp—features a semipermanent freshwater lake, paperbark trees, banksia, tuart, jarrah and marri woodlands. It is home to at least 209 native floras, a breeding site and sanctuary for over 65 species of birds, and is the vital habitat for numerous other species including the threatened quenda that the member for Carine mentioned.

Building the resilience of Australia’s biodiversity, including threatened species and ecological communities, is key to helping retain the capacity to adapt to a shifting climate and withstanding a range of current and emerging future threats. Western Australia’s well-managed and comprehensive conservation reserve system supports resilience and mitigates adverse impacts on biodiversity assets that may arise from climate change. The management of conservation reserves also supports climate change mitigation through carbon sequestration and emissions reduction. We know that climate change is also increasing the likelihood and consequences of extreme bushfire events such as the bushfire in Star Swamp Reserve in March. Eliminating the occurrence of bushfires is not possible, but adaption and mitigation efforts, including fuel management, are proven approaches to managing and reducing risk. Prescribed burning is the primary tool to reduce fuel loads and protect communities and biodiversity values from the devastating impacts of large, intense summer bushfires. I might add that it is our protection for saving lives and property as well. Current and future investment in fire management is critical to the mitigation of, and adaption to, climate risk.

Without a doubt, the member’s electorate of Carine is home to some of our most beautiful beaches, apart from maybe Rockingham and other parts! But these beaches, marine environments and fisheries are affected by rising average sea surface temperatures, which can be devastating, and coastal erosion. An assessment completed in 2019 by the Department of Transport and the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage identified 15 coastal erosion hotspots in the Perth metropolitan area, including the Marmion Angling and Aquatic Club seawall in Waterman’s Bay. The member is seeing the effects of coastal erosion at his front door. DPLH manages the hotspot coastal adaption protection grant scheme that is aimed to address coastal hazards, and there is \$33.5 million over the next five years for Coast WA programs to fight erosion, build local capacity in managing coastal hazards and protect Western Australia’s coastline.

The Cook Labor government is taking action on climate change and transitioning to a clean-energy economy. The Western Australian climate policy was released in November 2020, underscoring our commitment to work with all sectors of the economy to achieve net zero emissions in 2050. The climate policy includes action to transition public sector agencies to net zero emissions and prepare Western Australia’s electricity network, which is critical for the transition to net zero, and develop strategies to guide emissions reductions across other key sectors. In June last year, we announced a state target to reduce emissions from government operations by 80 per cent below the 2020 levels by 2030. We are ending coal power in WA through a \$3.8 billion investment in new green power infrastructure in the south west interconnected system, which will include wind generation and storage to replace fossil fuel energy sources. The member for Collie–Preston knows very well the great investment we have made in her community to assist with that transition. In July this year, the Cook government released Western Australia’s climate adaption strategy, prioritising 37 actions to ensure that our communities and the economy are resilient to the risks posed by climate change. Around \$40 million has been allocated in this year’s state budget to deliver this strategy, which will prepare our state for the climate of the future. Sectoral emissions reduction strategies are being developed in consultation with business, industry, research institutions and the community to identify robust and credible emissions reduction pathways to transition our economy to net zero emissions.

Our green energy approvals unit is up and running to help streamline renewable energy and decarbonisation projects across the state. More than \$60 million has been allocated to grant programs that are focused on reducing emissions and addressing climate change, including our Clean Energy Future Fund, the carbon innovation grants program, the Western Australian carbon farming and land restoration program, and the WA renewable hydrogen fund. The government is investing more than \$80 million in the state electric vehicle strategy to support the uptake of electric vehicles.

Addressing climate change for a cleaner, more sustainable environment continues to be a very high priority for the Cook government. I am proud of what we are doing, but I realise that we have important challenges ahead to deal with. I look forward to our team delivering more on our commitments as a government. I would like to finish by thanking the member for Carine for his commitment to his community and for his ongoing support and advocacy for climate action.