

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES — WATER SERVICES

709. Ms D.G. D'ANNA to the Minister for Water:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to delivering safe and reliable water services to remote Aboriginal communities.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how this government's \$350 million remote communities program will deliver significant improvements across Western Australia?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house what other programs are being delivered by this government to improve essential services in remote WA?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

- (1)–(2) I am very proud to talk about this important project. For many of us, turning on the tap to access safe, reliable drinking water or having a flushing toilet and knowing that the wastewater will be dealt with safely and to Australian standards is something that we take for granted, but the reality for many people in Aboriginal communities across the state is that that is not the case. As of July this year the Water Corporation has taken over responsibility from the Department of Communities for water services for 141 Aboriginal communities, so these will now be dealt with under the Aboriginal community water services program.

Raising the standard of water services in Aboriginal communities is a priority for the Cook government, so we are getting on to do this work. You could say that we are flushed with enthusiasm! Working in partnership with local communities, which is an important element of this work, the Water Corporation will deliver a new 10-year program to manage and progressively upgrade water and wastewater infrastructure in Aboriginal communities across the state. The program will ensure that residents have access to reliable drinking water that meets Australian drinking water guidelines and wastewater services that meet or exceed relevant standards. This is something the government is committed to doing, and it is an important measure under Closing the Gap.

We know we get better results when we work in partnership with Aboriginal people, so this approach is crucial to the work that the Water Corporation is doing to deliver the infrastructure upgrades that Aboriginal communities need. As I said, the upgrades will take place over 10 years, and they are being prioritised in regard to water reliability and water safety, and on the basis of risk. There are 141 communities spread across the Kimberley. The member for Kimberley's electorate has 101 communities affected; the Pilbara and the midwest have 26 communities affected; and the goldfields and central wheatbelt have 14 communities that will be included in this program.

Just recently, on 28 September, I visited Mowanjum, just outside of Derby, as many members would know, where the Water Corporation has just completed its works to upgrade the community's wastewater treatment plant. This is the first major upgrade to be completed since the Water Corporation took over the management of water services. It is an \$8.3 million investment, and an important milestone for this overall program. As a result of this work this treatment plant will become WA's first licensed wastewater treatment plant in an Aboriginal community. The project was delivered by an Aboriginal-owned contractor, Kimberley Civil and Drainage, and involved the construction of two new wastewater treatment ponds and re-lining the existing treatment ponds. Works also included putting up a solid fence around the treatment plant. This was an important upgrade because, as many members of the community told us, dogs would often go into the ponds to cool off during hot weather, and members can imagine that the results were as unpleasant as they were unsanitary. In partnership with the community, the Water Corporation is also set to complete further works, with another \$2 million being invested into a new wastewater pump station, pipe renewals and, importantly, greening an area in the centre of town for the community to enjoy.

Through the Aboriginal community water services program we are working to ensure that by 2033, 12 000 people living in these communities will have water services that meet or exceed relevant standards. I will leave the last word to Clive Aiken from Kimberley Civil and Drainage who, as I mentioned, did the work. He told me on the day that he was very proud of the works completed. He said, "It is a proud moment for us as well as the community." I look forward to more of these projects flowing through to more Aboriginal communities.

The SPEAKER: The member for Landsdale would have been proud of you! The member for Roe with the last question.