

ESPERANCE RAINWATER TANK TESTING

519. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

Can the minister advise the house of the results of the latest rainwater tank testing conducted by the Department of Health in Esperance?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question. We have just today received the results of the retesting of 12 rainwater tanks that had been professionally cleaned as part of the ongoing response to lead contamination. I regret to advise that four of those tanks returned levels that exceeded the Australian drinking water guidelines for lead. All of those tanks are in close proximity to the port facility.

Dr K.D. Hames interjected.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I do note that all tanks have shown a reduction in nickel levels so that they are now below the level recommended by the Australian drinking water guidelines, and all have shown reduced levels for lead. I must say that we find these results very anomalous.

Dr K.D. Hames: It is recontamination, is it not?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: We find these results anomalous, as all the results from retesting blood have shown significant decreases in blood lead levels over that same period. Another piece of information that this is not consistent with is the fact of the air-monitoring results. We introduced through the port authority new air monitoring systems in May of this year. The results from May, June and July, which are the most recent results that we have, have all shown absolutely no detectable levels of lead. Those monitoring systems are not only in the port; one is placed in the port and two are placed outside the port. We have these anomalous results, but we will launch an immediate investigation to identify the cause of these elevated levels in these four rainwater tanks.

Dr S.C. Thomas: Are they more than they were before?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: No, they are less than they were before. I ask members to accept that our government is taking this very seriously. We see it as anomalous to the other results that we have been achieving. We now need to go forward and have a complete and thorough investigation of this to determine how it got to be in this situation. We want to reiterate to the people of Esperance that we are absolutely dedicated to cleaning up all the lead pollution in the town. We will continue to do this. We will be putting out various warnings to the community from the Department of Health this afternoon.