

FLOODING — CARNARVON

Statement

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [6.33 pm]: I rise today to speak on behalf of a group of residents, growers and landowners in the Carnarvon region on the Gascoyne River flood plain about some of the concerns they have raised with me about the oncoming flood season. It is starting now, really, in terms of the potential for floods. These residents, business owners and growers are predominantly located east of Boundary Road. For those members who are familiar with Carnarvon, it is east of the main levee bank people go over when they enter the town, back towards the T-junction where the fuel station is on the corner as people come up on Great Northern Highway. It is in the suburb of Kingsford.

The Gascoyne River has a long history of floods. People on the floodplain, particularly growers, accept that flooding occurs and there has been a lot of mitigation works over the years, including major works funded by royalties for regions to divert major flooding to the east of the grower area. That work was undertaken by the former government and I think it might have been close to finished at the time of the change of government. It was around about that time. That was certainly significant insofar as it provided a buttress against major flooding but the concerns that have been raised with me relate to the Kingsford area. I have spoken to a number of landowners in that area and they have told me that, in the most recent flood in 2021, although the flood level was significantly lower than the major flooding that occurred some time ago, the effects were significantly worse than an equivalent flood would have likely had on properties close to Boundary Road. We are talking about properties along Robinson Road from the T-junction that leads towards the town of Carnarvon. The hypothesis that has been presented by the growers and landowners in the region is that the mitigation works, including some minor levee construction along South River Road, has concentrated the water in that region. That is a hypothesis presented by people who live in the region and have lived there for a long time. They obviously have a very deep interest in what is going on there and they are concerned about what will happen and how a flood that is similar to last year or even larger will impact them.

Members in this house will know that I have asked the now-retiring Minister for Regional Development about the work. A package of \$1.3 million of federal funding with an additional \$240 000 of state government funding was allocated to some work in flood preparedness on the Gascoyne floodplain. That was broken into six projects: town levies, Carnarvon Airport levee floodgates, geotechnical investigations, hydraulic modelling, a river care floodway natural infrastructure upgrade, and a project audit and acquittal costs. The amount that specifically relates to the hydraulic modelling is \$425 000. There is now \$425 000 in funding available for hydraulic modelling. I have spoken to many growers and landowners in the Kingsford area who are very concerned about the upcoming flood season. They would like to see that hydraulic modelling undertaken so that they can confirm or disprove their concerns about the impact of the potential concentration of water that will effectively result from the diversion of water during the various mitigation works that have occurred. That is the concern. It was very disappointing for those in that region who listened and watched the now-retiring Minister for Regional Development present her answer.

That hydraulic modelling will not be completed until the middle of 2024. That to me seems a very unreasonable time frame. I think it is incumbent on the Premier to consider this as he looks to identify the new Minister for Regional Development. I know there are members in this place who could be the new Minister for Regional Development—Hon Darren West, I am sure, or Hon Jackie Jarvis. Those aspiring ministers would take a very strong approach to getting this work done and identifying any short-term works that could occur to provide a sense of security for those growers. Certainly, they should get on the ground and talk to those growers and landowners so that they can allay their fears or provide the mitigations that are needed. I want to make that point as we go into the season of change. By the demeanour of Hon Darren West, I am not sure whether he has the job in the bag, but I am certainly hoping that we will have some action.

I was speaking to some of the growers today. They approached the Minister for Water—Minister Dave Kelly from the other place. They are concerned that they have not been able to get an audience with the minister. There has been some time taken on potentially getting an audience with the advisers. If there are any advisers from the office of the Minister for Water listening, please take note. These are genuine concerns. Put aside the politics. I am here doing my job as a member of the opposition, but put that aside, get on the ground and listen to the concerns being raised by the community. Use that available money now, get a contract out as soon as possible and deliver that hydraulic modelling, because we have the technology. We have the opportunity to assess these concerns and either provide comfort and assurance to those growers that their hypothesis is not correct or confirm their concerns and do something about it. This government has a track record lately of not getting on with the job. The government needs to get on with the job and bring that deadline forward, because 2024 is far too far out. It is unacceptable. The money is there. The government needs to do the work now and provide the reassurance or get in there and change the situation on the ground for those residents in the community of Kingsford and on the Gascoyne River.