

SWAN AND CANNING RIVERS, PROTECTION AND REHABILITATION

1955. Hon Jim Scott to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development representing the Minister for the Environment

In light of the report into the health of the Swan and Canning Rivers by Associate Professor Wong, Review of Best Management Practices for Improvement of Urban Water Quality on the Swan Coastal Plain, which warned that the rivers will be too poisonous for fish within 10 years -

- (1) What legislative measures is the Government planning to introduce to attempt to reverse this trend and when will they be introduced to Parliament?
- (2) What extra funding is the Government to allocate to schemes to attempt to reverse this trend and what are those schemes?
- (3) What extra staff is the Minister to allocate to Departments charged with protecting and rehabilitating the Swan and Canning Rivers and catchments?
- (4) If extra staff is to be allocated -
  - (a) to which Departments will they be allocated; and
  - (b) what job will each new staff carry out?
- (5) Is the Government planning additions to conservation areas to afford greater protection to the Swan and Canning River catchment?
- (6) If so what are these areas?
- (7) The report states on page 5 that, '...waters draining from the Mills Street Catchment also have elevated concentrations of heavy metals (Cu, Pb and Zn)...'. Has the DoE located the source of these contaminants?
- (8) If yes to (7), what action has the DoE taken to control the sources of these contaminants?
- (9) If no action has been taken, why not?
- (10) Page 60 of the report states that, 'Key experts and opinion leaders within the Water Corporation, Department of Environment and local consultancies currently do not share a consensus on the specific objectives for the management of water quality in urban areas.' How does the DoE approach to improving the management of water quality in urban areas differ to that of the Water Corporation and local consultancies?

Hon TOM STEPHENS replied:

The Minister for the Environment has provided the following response:

It should be noted that the report Review of Best Management Practices for Improvement of Urban Water Quality on the Swan Coastal Plain Note was not a report on the health of the Swan Canning Rivers nor did the report make any inferences about fish deaths. The report by Dr Tony Wong provided cost estimates to implement best management practices in the Mills St Catchment previously identified in the Drainage Improvement Framework for Mills St Main Drain Catchment.

- (1) In January 2004, the Government announced the preparation of new legislation which would give the Swan River Trust (SRT) a greater mandate to ensure the river system is managed in an integrated way.  
  
Consultation with key stakeholders on the content of the legislation commenced in February 2004 and I expect the Bill will be prepared in time for introduction to Parliament this year.
- (2) The key programs to receive increased funding under the new \$15 million package include:  
  
Riverbank foreshore protection and restoration: The Government has provided \$4 million - a boost of an extra \$3.5 million - over the next four years to the Riverbank program, whereby the SRT works with local government to restore river foreshore, beaches and wetland areas, including through the construction and maintenance of retaining walls.  
  
Drain rehabilitation and nutrient stripping works: The Government has provided an extra \$4 million over the next four years for nutrient-stripping works, including the re-engineering of drains to reduce nutrient discharges, the creation of nutrient stripping wetlands, the restoration of tributary vegetation and the use of phoslock and other materials which remove nutrients. This is on top of a one-off \$750,000 allocation made in 2003-04.

River, catchment and drain monitoring programs: Between 2005-06 and 2007-08, the Government will provide an extra \$1.35 million to extend programs which monitor nutrient, phytoplankton and non-nutrient contamination levels in waterways, catchment areas and drains.

Community-based nutrient reduction works and programs: The Government will provide an extra \$1.25 million over five years for catchment groups which implement nutrient reduction works aimed at improving water quality. Such works include the rehabilitation and revegetation of river foreshores, catchments, wetlands, drains and compensating basins. The extra funds will boost the SRT's contribution to the Swan Alcoa Landcare Program to \$350,000 a year, building on Alcoa funds of \$200,000 a year.

- (3)-(4) (a)-(b) The SRT is establishing several new positions to help implement the new initiatives. These are: Strategic Programs Manager, overseeing development of the new legislation and Riverplan initiatives; the Riverplan implementation team, including a program manager and two implementation officers; and a Drainage Intervention program manager, overseeing development of nutrient intervention actions focussed on drains.
- (5)-(6) The new legislation being developed through the SRT will not propose specific conservation areas. It will, however, provide the capacity for priority protection and remediation zones within the park boundary. The details of this are being developed through the SRT's consultation process and would be further refined as part of the Park Management Strategy, which would be developed with public consultation.
- (7) Waters from Mills Street drain were found to have concentrations of heavy metals in excess of the ANZECC trigger values for moderately disturbed freshwater streams but only two samples were above the recreational guidelines which are protective of human health. Metals are ubiquitous in urban drains passing through industrialised areas and derive from multiple sources. Follow-up studies have been conducted in the Mills Street drain which show no specific point source. Higher concentrations during rain runoff show that washdown of road surfaces, parking lots and road stands are the main sources.
- (8) The SRT, with the support of the Department of Environment (DoE), provides guidance and information on cleaner production and contaminant reduction through the Swan Canning Industry Working Group. Industries in the Mills St catchment have been targeted with this program and sampling is continuing in the catchment.
- (9) Not applicable
- (10) The SRT and the DoE have responsibilities to implement the State Water Quality Strategy in all waters, including urban drains. The SRT is further charged with the identification of Environmental Values and Environmental Quality Criteria under the Swan Canning EPP. The SRT has started a negotiation period to develop a consensus view on targets for Water Quality improvement. This negotiation will include the community through the Swan Regional Strategy of the Swan Catchment Council. The Water Corporation and local consultancies mentioned in the report are desirous of nutrient reduction targets to guide the development of best management practices in urban developments. Imposition of licence conditions on drainage operators raises the concern that they may be unreasonable while the operators have no controls over the source of stormwater. The structural arrangements for drainage management are being developed through a consultative process. In any event, the SRT and the DoE will be encouraging the Water Corporation to manage water quality in drains rather than impose such licence conditions. In reality, a range of targets and management objectives will be developed that meet needs of both the resource manager and the industry.