

ABORIGINAL RANGER PROGRAM

Statement by Minister for Environment

MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldivis — Minister for Environment) [1.13 pm]: I am pleased to inform the house that I recently announced the awarding of \$11 million to 12 successful applicants under round 6 of the Cook Labor Government's Aboriginal ranger program. The ARP is one of the cornerstones of the government's commitment to supporting Aboriginal-led projects to protect country. The program provides key deliverables towards our government's commitment to Closing the Gap. People funded through the program grow their knowledge and improve their skills in conservation and land management, site management and tourism opportunities. Since the government's initial commitment of \$20 million in 2017, the program has grown, with a further commitment of \$83 million. The program supports the development and expansion of ranger groups with innovative projects. The program spans the state and supports Aboriginal ranger groups in remote and regional locations.

The ARP has funded more than 800 employment opportunities across all regions of the state. Of these jobs, 95 per cent have gone to Aboriginal people, and almost half of them are women. A total of 650 jobs have been ranger jobs on country. Examples of projects from round 6 include developing programs, including a junior ranger program and a tourism capacity building program, in the Perth and Peel regions; establishing a facility for seed production to grow vulnerable and in-demand native seed stocks to meet the growing demand of the sector and reduce the reliance on unsustainable wild-harvest operations in the Pilbara; and expanding services from nursery operations to a ranger program that will target the carbon, restoration and bush food markets in the midwest and the wheatbelt.

The involvement of Aboriginal organisations and traditional owners in these endeavours ensures that the projects are grounded in local perspectives, needs and aspirations, leading to more holistic and impactful outcomes. I congratulate those Aboriginal organisations that were successful in round 6. I look forward to seeing what these innovative projects will discover and how this knowledge can be shared with all existing ranger teams.

I am also pleased to inform the house that on 11 August, Minister Buti joined me in opening the \$13 million development fund, which is round 7 of the program. This round is open for applications until 9 October 2023. I look forward to seeing which new and emerging Aboriginal ranger groups come forward to apply.