

ABORIGINAL RANGER PROGRAM

Statement by Minister for Environment

MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldvis — Minister for Environment) [9.13 am]: I would like to take the opportunity this morning to update the house on the \$50 million expansion of the Aboriginal ranger program. Since the McGowan government's initial \$20 million commitment to the Aboriginal ranger program, over 800 employment opportunities have been created across 28 Aboriginal communities in all regions of Western Australia. This program directly supports training opportunities to help Aboriginal rangers develop skills in conservation and land management, Aboriginal site management and tourism, which helps build community resilience and leadership. An evaluation of the program by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions has shown that the program is having positive social, cultural, economic and environmental outcomes and that Aboriginal ranger groups are helping to strengthen connection to country and culture and are contributing to greater community identity and pride.

Last year the McGowan government committed a further \$50 million to expand this important program, including extending the program into the Perth metropolitan region for the first time. An expert reference group, comprising 20 members statewide, was established to help shape the future of the program, together with DBCA. Members come from all corners of the state and have proved invaluable in co-designing the expansion of the program under three key funding themes: develop, expand and innovate. The reference group will continue to provide advice to DBCA to strengthen the program and guide the rollout of the new funding streams. As a result, \$22.8 million has already been allocated to 14 established ranger programs under the expansion fund, which will support 57 full-time equivalent positions for up to four years. More than half the roles to be funded will be for women. The funding certainty will help these Aboriginal organisations with long-term planning for their ranger programs and develop leadership and career pathways for rangers.

I and my colleague the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs recently announced that applications for round 5 of the program are open until 26 August. In this round, up to \$10 million is available as part of the new development fund to provide targeted support to new or emerging ranger programs for capacity building and to create new jobs. Other exciting opportunities under the innovation fund will be announced soon. I look forward to advising members of the progress of the program.