

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Sixty-fourth Report — Overview of Petitions 1 January–30 June 2023 — Tabling

HON PETER FOSTER (Mining and Pastoral) [10.02 am]: I am directed to report the sixty-fourth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs titled *Overview of petitions 1 January–30 June 2023*.

[See paper [2504](#).]

Hon PETER FOSTER: The report that I have just tabled advises the house of the petitions that were finalised by the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs in the first half of 2023. During this period, the committee concluded its inquiries into 21 petitions. This is the fourth such report that I have had the pleasure of tabling in the house.

Part 1 of the report outlines the petitions process. Once tabled by a member, petitions are referred to the committee under standing orders. The committee will carry out inquiries, and then decide how to proceed. Often, the petition will be finalised at that stage, for one of a number of reasons set out in the report.

Sometimes, the inquiries will be extended through further correspondence with ministers or by the taking of oral evidence, following which a standalone report will be tabled in the house. That is what occurred in the case of petition 29, which led to the tabling of the sixty-second report, *Petition No. 029—Request for an independent review of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions prescribed burning practices*, on 22 June this year. On the tabling of that report, the petition was closed.

Occasionally, a petition will lead to the initiation of a full-scale own-motion inquiry under standing order 179. Petition 70 requested that the Legislative Council conduct a parliamentary inquiry to investigate the systematic and systemic removal of newborns from their mothers' care via past adoptive policies and practices. The committee resolved to carry out such an inquiry, and its terms of reference were provided to the house in its sixty-first report on 22 February 2023. That inquiry is ongoing, with over 140 submissions having been received to date. The petition was closed on 15 March 2023, as it had achieved its aim.

Other petitions finalised in the first half of the year covered a wide range of subject matters. Some issues had already been the subject of widespread consultation, and government decisions had already been made and put into effect that could not be influenced by the committee. Examples include a petition requesting a review of the proposed ban on west coast demersal fishing and another seeking a review of aspects of the government decision to close the sustainable native forest timber industry. Some of the issues raised were in the midst of government processes, and decisions were yet to be made. By way of example, a petition regarding abortion rights was tabled whilst the government was in the process of considering the results of a consultation process before finalising draft legislation. A petition regarding a planning application concerning Mt Claremont playing fields was received before the Minister for Planning had reached a final decision. Another petition raised aspects of the forthcoming draft bill resulting from the Law Reform Commission's Review of the Equal Opportunity Act 1984, which will in due course be debated by members of this house.

The committee was able to finalise a petition regarding the lack of sewerage affecting some 100 residents close to Kenwick train station when, following a good deal of correspondence with ministers, the Water Corporation and the City of Gosnells, the Minister for Water confirmed that the affected petitioners would be included in a \$55 million investment in wastewater infrastructure, announced in May 2023.

At the end of this reporting period, the committee was continuing its inquiries into 16 open petitions, which are listed in part 3 of the report.

The committee takes this opportunity again to thank all tabling members, and to encourage them to provide a written submission to the committee after a petition has been tabled.

The committee notes the ongoing trial of the e-petition system, which having been extended, now runs until 31 October 2024. The committee continues to regard this trial as a success so far. Fourteen of the 16 petitions under investigation at the end of the reporting period originated as e-petitions.

I commend the report to the house.