

BLACK COCKATOOS — PROTECTION

Statement

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [10.02 pm]: Tonight I want to congratulate the Black Cockatoo Coalition for its continued campaign to protect the black cockatoos' remaining habitat in the south west of our state. Of course, today is a particularly significant day on which to offer those congratulations because the Cockatoo Coalition gathered at lunchtime on the steps of Parliament House to show their strength and spread their message about how important this campaign is. I take my hat off to this group. They started a few months ago and have already launched a website. They have held a number of community events around Western Australia. They announced today that they have collected 4 315 signatures on their petition. As members of Parliament, we spend a lot of time collecting support for various campaigns. To get over 4 000 signatures on a petition is really a very fine achievement. It shows that the Cockatoo Coalition has really tapped into community concern about the protection of black cockatoos. A couple of species of black cockatoos, which are unique to Western Australia, have been on the endangered list for some time. Being on the endangered list means that unless we take some critical and prompt action to change what we are doing, the species will die out.

It looks as if we might be within sight of turning the corner, which is an enormous relief. A number of us went out to the rally at lunchtime. I heard a couple of stories about black cockatoos that woke people up this morning and black cockatoos that are destroying trees in backyards. But of course black cockatoos have an almost iconic status in the Western Australian imagination. The Cockatoo Coalition has a little story on its website that says —

Once upon a time, Black Cockatoos flew in vast flocks, bright tail feathers flashing, calling to each other as they gathered to feed and roost. Just 50 years ago, these unique birds were so plentiful their flocks would '**blacken the sky**'. But not anymore!

That is what motivates this campaign. That is why members of the WA Labor Party, including myself, are very proud to be associated with that campaign, to provide what support we can.

It is difficult to quantify exactly how many cockatoos remain. If members go to the fact sheet produced by the commonwealth government, there is a section on the fact sheet entitled "How many are there?" It is acknowledged on the fact sheet —

It is difficult to know how many Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos are left, but it is known that their populations have declined by over 50% in the past 45 years, and that they no longer breed in up to a third of their former breeding sites in the Wheatbelt.

They are gregarious birds and live in pairs or small flocks during the breeding season. After fledging, the young move with their parents from breeding areas to feeding areas where other family groups join the flock.

As many honourable members will know, the critical thing about the black cockatoo is the link between the breeding sites and the feeding sites. There are a number of very motivated, innovative conservationists and scientists in this state trying all sorts of different ways to help connect the breeding sites to the feeding sites. Having noted that it is difficult to estimate numbers—we heard a couple of wildly differing estimates at the rally today, which was interesting—the most optimistic was the Minister for Environment.

I want to mention the Great Cocky Count. The recovery project itself has been going for just on a decade. The annual Great Cocky Count has been held for several years. This year it was held on 7 April; about a week ago. The point of the Great Cocky Count is not just to count the birds—which, of course, is a bit of a moveable feast—it is to identify the number of known roost sites. What was achieved in 2010 was a pretty good outcome by anybody's standards because the volunteers who took part in the Great Cocky Count in 2010 nearly doubled the number of known roost sites from just 70 to 129, with a possible 222 roost sites actually surveyed. That is a pretty good outcome. Everybody who sat through the night counting the cockatoos deserves to have tribute paid to them.

Although it might be difficult to estimate the number of black cockatoos left and whether we have turned a significant corner towards protecting the species, it is not difficult to work out what is threatening the wellbeing of the black cockatoos. The chief contributory factor is loss of habitat. Nowhere I think is that more graphically exemplified than in an area like the Beeliar wetlands. The Minister for Environment took to the steps of Parliament House today and of course paid tribute to the people who were there and to the people who had taken part in the Great Cocky Count, but all through his speech he referred to the "problem" of the black cockatoos. I put it to honourable members that it is not so much that Mr Marmion has a problem with black cockatoos, I think the black cockatoos have a problem with him! He clearly has failed to grasp that he has it within his power to take away one of the greatest threats that exists for the black cockatoo today; that, of course, honourable

members will know, is the government's stubborn insistence to push ahead with its plan to build stage 8 of the Roe Highway extension through the Beeliar wetlands. Why the government is still insisting that this road to nowhere needs to be built, I do not know. But I do know that the government knows that the extension through the Beeliar wetlands will result in the destruction of a significant amount of the remaining habitat for black cockatoos in the metropolitan area. It is a totally reckless action. It will have a devastating knock-on effect. Frankly, it could push the cockatoo population in the metropolitan area to the brink of extinction. Having taken all these great steps to try to arrest the decline of the black cockatoo species, if we lose the Beeliar wetlands as a habitat, it will be absolutely devastating.

I call tonight on the Minister for Environment, Hon Bill Marmion, to take a strong stand to stop that highway from being built through the Beeliar wetlands. Ever since Hon Bill Marmion took office at the end of last year, I have wondered whether he understands the power that he has as a minister. The position of minister is a very powerful position. It is one of the most powerful positions that any individual can hold in this state. This is the reality. Mr Marmion could go to cabinet next Monday, and he could tell the Premier, and he could tell the Minister for Transport, Hon Troy Buswell, that building a highway through a Ramsar-listed wetland is simply not environmentally sustainable. If the minister thinks it is sustainable, I wish he would explain his reasons for holding that belief.

I assure honourable members, every person who came today to the steps of Parliament House to take part in the rally, and the 4 315 people who signed the cockatoo coalition petition, that Labor will continue to do whatever it takes to ensure that the Roe Highway extension is not built. We will continue to support campaigns like Cockatoo Coalition, the research that has been sponsored by the Conservation Council of Western Australia, and the work that has been done by all our bush care groups throughout this state, to rebuild our black cockatoo habitat and to protect existing habitats from further degradation and clearing, until the survival of the black cockatoo is guaranteed well into the future. We will not rest until that is done. I call on every member of the government to tell Mr Marmion what he needs to do and how he can walk into the cabinet room next Monday and say, "This cannot go ahead."