

ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO

Statement

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [5.30 pm]: On Tuesday I came into this place and said that despite the fact that it is the third anniversary of the Barnett government coming to power, we have heard remarkably little talk from the government celebrating that fact. I dared to suggest that it was because the government was not in a position to talk about real achievements, at least in the portfolio of the environment. I did not think that what I said was particularly controversial, but I obviously excited a number of members opposite. I assume that the minister's office was asked to provide some sort of a list of "achievements" and that that was the list Hon Donna Faragher came into this place with last night and recited to us.

I want to go through a little bit of context for this debate. As I said on Tuesday, nothing I put on the record was, in my mind, particularly controversial. I believe the big issues in the environment portfolio have been quite well canvassed over the last few years. To recap for the benefit of honourable members who may have missed my speech, I suggested that the five obvious things that must be staring the Minister for Environment in the face every morning when he sits down at his desk headed "To do urgently" are: one, finalise the state waste strategy; two, finalise the state climate change plan; three, save the Swan River; four, create more marine parks; and, five, protect remaining urban bushland. I do not know whether my speech was ever drawn to the attention of the Minister for Environment.

Hon Donna Faragher: I don't think he spent a lot of time doing that!

Hon SALLY TALBOT: No. That is probably true. I absolutely accept that. It is perfectly clear that nobody in the government has any interest in promoting this debate in the community. I therefore imagine Hon Donna Faragher hoped it would sink without trace. What struck me last night about the contribution by way of response from Hon Donna Faragher was the nature of the things on the list that she brought into this place and recited to us.

Hon Donna Faragher: You didn't think any of them were good.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I am not having a go at any of those particular initiatives. Singly and collectively they are all worthwhile things to do. The point of my speech on Tuesday night was to point out that we have an absence of leadership in this state in the environment portfolio. Despite the fact that this week the Barnett government has been in power for three years, we are yet to see an environment minister who will stand up for environmental protection. The point I was making, therefore, was about this leadership failure.

I will quickly canvass some of the points Hon Donna Faragher recited to us last night. In relation to finalising the state waste strategy she said that the government had —

... provided a focus on combating e-waste and other recycling initiatives, ...

I am not quite sure whether that means providing a focus on combating e-waste and providing a focus on recycling initiatives, or if it means the government claims to have provided recycling initiatives. Either way, my point was about the state waste strategy itself. The former Minister for Environment held the environment portfolio for two years and so knows how absolutely central the waste strategy is to waste and recycling planning in this state. Without the waste strategy, the Waste Authority has no business plan. We have been told over and again that both are imminent for release and that if I would only be patient, we will see first one then the other. We had the curious moment when Hon Donna Faragher denied that there had been a delay in either, and said that before the waste strategy could be finalised we had to have a business plan. Then, the very next day—oh, what short memories we have about what we have said in this place—she said that it was vice versa; that the waste strategy had to come before the business plan, after she had informed the house the very opposite only the day before. For Hon Donna Faragher to come in here and say that the government has done something because it has provided a focus on something is simply not adequate.

The Minister for Environment has included on his list of achievements a couple of projects that were funded by low emission energy development money. That is fine; that is all good stuff. With regard to the Swan and Canning Rivers, we were informed that there was some action on fertiliser use. I think it is an absolute disgrace that this government is taking the public of Western Australia for fools. I remind the government that a mandatory scheme would, by the beginning of this year—nine months ago—have seen the compulsory phase-out of all water-soluble nutrients. It is disgraceful for the government to think that we are going to be diverted by some mealy mouthed statement about action on fertiliser use.

On the subject of marine parks, Hon Donna Faragher talked about Camden Sound. I have a perpetual beef about this; I will say it one more time, and maybe the government will hear me: when the government talks about marine planning, it has to talk about values. Hon Donna Faragher does not know what values we are trying to

protect at Camden Sound. One of the first questions Hon Bill Marmion was asked as Minister for Environment in the other place was: what values are you trying to protect in Camden Sound? He did not know. The other day when I asked Hon Norman Moore a question about sanctuary zones and no-take areas in the proposed Camden Sound marine park, he said that the values he was trying to protect in Camden Sound are whales! My friends, whales are not values. The government has to get its head around this. If government members want me to send them some material about what it means to decide what values are to be protected, I would be happy to do so. I ask government members to just Google “values” and “bioregional planning” and hundreds of entries will come up. I cannot believe that, after all this time, we still do not have an answer to that question. As for protecting urban bushland, I do not think there was any commentary about that from the minister’s office at all.

I was talking about leadership. Honourable members opposite who have a passing interest in this issue will have to go out to their constituents at some stage and talk about what they have and have not done for the environment. They will have to go out at some stage and talk about what they are trying to protect and how they are planning for environmental protection. I ask the government: what are the government’s first principles? What is it that the government actually wants to protect? Do not talk to me about woylies and threatened species rescue plans; they are all terrific. People from the department, from various sectors of the community and volunteers are doing absolutely fantastic work with threatened species and I absolutely acknowledge that, but members opposite should listen to what Tony Burke, the federal environment minister, said the other day in his National Press Club address. They should have a look at the points he is making about how to do environmental planning on the basis of first principles. I know that Hon Donna Faragher has not read that, because she could not have made the statement she made last night if she were familiar with what he said. He specifically dealt with the brand of environment planning whereby people just rush out there to protect threatened species. With this brand of planning, every time there is new development planning, people rush around looking for a rare frond or an orchid. The government pretends that that is the basis of its environmental plan.

Hon Donna Faragher interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It has never worked like that and it will never work like that in the future. As Tony Burke said, by the time we are dealing with endangered species, we are driving the ambulance to the bottom of the cliff. The government must take a step back and decide what it wants to protect. While I am on that subject, let me just refer once again to the speech by Hon Tony Burke, which I sincerely commend to members. He identified two basic principles. The first is that we take no backward steps. I ask: is that something that the government can put its hand on its heart and say that it has respected for the last three years? It simply is not true. The government has taken backwards steps. We have gone way backwards on all those key issues I identified. The second thing Tony Burke spoke about was stepping back and asking what we want to protect.