

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT — COASTCARE GROUPS

1177. Hon COLIN TINCKNELL to the Minister for Regional Development:

The minister is on record as supporting WA regional natural resource management groups and those community groups involved in landcare, environment and agricultural landscape sustainability, yet, as the minister would be aware, all federal funding for Coastcare and Coastcare groups from across WA was stopped. These groups have since applied for state government funding and it appears to be unsuccessful.

- (1) Can the minister confirm whether the state government has funded them appropriately?
- (2) Furthermore, local grower and environmental groups such as the Fitzgerald Biosphere Group, which do fantastic work, do not receive any core funding for them to keep their doors open, despite requesting support from the minister. Why is the state government not supporting these groups?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:

- (1)–(2) I must say that I am quite puzzled by the member's question. Presumably the member was here when we actually had a debate on this recently. The member touches on the fact that he might understand that what has happened here has been a change in what the feds did. The feds have traditionally been the ones who have provided the core funding for natural resource management. That was its job. When it set it up subsequent to the Telstra sale, the federal job was to provide that core funding. It has been slowly reducing the overall amount of funding, and then also reducing the percentage of the money that is left that is spent on core funding. This is not just black and white. There is some critique of the smaller players in NRM that they are concerned that we have created some pretty large bureaucracies with these regional NRM groups, and much of the funds are going to sustaining bureaucracy rather than doing the grassroots work on the ground. Therefore, the issues here are not black and white. But, quite clearly, the federal government has cut the core funding, and cut that very significantly again in the last couple of years.

We made an election commitment for \$7.75 million a year for NRM over the life of our government, and we are delivering that. We are very conscious. We do know that groups obviously have been writing to us. I must say that I was very puzzled by the Fitzgerald Biosphere Group's letter—the group the member referred to—because it did not seem to be able to bring itself to mention that its problem was that it had this loss of federal government funding. We are going to have a look at the structure. But I would urge the member to do two things: I would urge the member to get onto people like Rick Wilson and start agitating to getting some of that federal funding back for that group.

In the next couple of months, Minister Dawson and I will be announcing the latest natural resource management grants, and we have committed to our election commitment. If we have an opportunity in the next couple of years to see whether we can increase that, we will, but this is no substitute for the federal government taking its share of responsibility for funding NRMs.