

PILBARA STRATEGIC CONSERVATION FUND

980. Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE to the Minister for Environment:

I refer to the minister's continued lack of action in establishing the Pilbara strategic conservation fund, even though companies including Fortescue Metals Group, Hamersley Iron and Iron Ore Holdings agreed to pay funds over two years ago. Considering the rising unemployment rate in the Pilbara, why has the minister still not established this long-promised fund that could be increasing employment right now?

Mr A.P. JACOB replied:

The fund that the member refers to has been a condition in a range of ministerial statements given through environmental approvals in the Pilbara and it requires as part of an offset for an aggregate range of projects throughout the Pilbara a contribution into an amalgamated fund, with a view to funding environmental outcomes in that region. In much the same vein, the good work we are doing on Dirk Hartog Island at the moment, for example, is funded through offsets from the Gorgon project on Barrow Island. As I have said, member for Gosnells, when asked previously, the commitment to those conditions stands and those companies are well aware of the requirement that they will have to pay into that fund. However, we have seen over the last decade a once-in-a-generation—perhaps once in several generations—upswing in mining activity in that region, and the offset fund that comes with it equally presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity for some large-scale environmental outcomes across the region, funded by tens of millions of dollars in offset funds. It is not something I am going to rush into in terms of the set-up or the framework. The governance for this program needs to be right. I have had a committee working with a range of stakeholders including the Chamber of Minerals and Energy and the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies and some of the larger company contributors, and also the Department of Environment Regulation, the Environmental Protection Authority and others. We are working through the framework —

Mr M. McGowan interjected.

Mr A.P. JACOB: We will take the time to make sure that we get it right. There are tens of millions of dollars involved, and it does not need to be rushed out the door, because mistakes can be made and these things take time to make sure we get them right. We are doing that work and that committee is very close to reporting its recommendations to me.