

NATIONAL WATER INITIATIVE — GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT

319. Hon HELEN BULLOCK to the minister representing the Minister for Water:

- (1) Is the state government still committed to the National Water Initiative signed by the Howard and Carpenter governments?
- (2) If yes to (1), when will the government establish irrigators' water entitlements as property rights and set up trading in those entitlements?
- (3) Why has the government arbitrarily reduced water entitlements for some Carnarvon growers while increasing allocations for others, rather than implement water trading?
- (4) Given that such decisions have substantial financial implications for affected growers, on what basis have these decisions been made?

Hon HELEN MORTON replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. The Minister for Water has provided me with the following advice —

- (1) Yes.
- (2) The government is considering proposed legislative changes required to create property rights and thus further facilitate trading. It is important to ensure the benefits to both the state and water users outweigh any accompanying regulatory and administrative costs.
- (3) The process to reduce water entitlements was an equitable and transparent one, as outlined in the 2004 lower Gascoyne groundwater management strategy. Total licensed entitlements were greater than the amount of fresh water that was able to be drawn safely without causing long-term salinity increases in the aquifer. Entitlements have been reduced but they are based on metering of actual water use and salinity information over the past seven years. Actual water use has not been reduced.
- (4) The new entitlements are higher than actual demonstrated water use. This has minimised any financial implications. The review of entitlements in 2010 was agreed with industry and the community in 2004, and set out in the 2004 lower Gascoyne groundwater management strategy. This time span allowed the collection of seven years of metered water use and salinity data to inform the process.