

WATERWAYS — ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Motion

Resumed from 25 February on the following motion moved by Hon Sally Talbot —

That this Council condemns the Barnett government for its failure to take effective action to protect Western Australia's rivers, estuaries and inlets from environmental degradation.

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [1.07 pm]: I am very pleased to have a chance in the next few minutes to wind up my comments before I hand over to other people on this side of the house who want to make a contribution to this debate. I look forward, as always, to perhaps having time at the end of the debate to speak, as the standing orders make provision for the mover to have a right of reply; however, I understand that a lot of people on this side of the house want to speak, so, if that is not possible, I hope that I have been able to make the point in my opening comments about the extent of the government's abject failure in this area.

When I commenced this debate a couple of weeks ago, I made the point that there were a couple of headings under which we could conduct this debate, or, if you like, there were subtitles we could give to this debate. The first one from the government's point of view was that ignorance is bliss. Since Labor lost office in 2008 we have had a number of years of neglect of our waterways statewide that is far from benign, on the basis that things have been clearly deteriorating, which has been borne out by warnings in the state of the environment report in 2007 and in the more recent Auditor General's report into the state of the Swan River, yet we have seen the government do nothing other than increase the regulatory burden that applies to all waterways—that is, not only oceans, but also rivers, estuaries and inlets statewide. It was on that point that I concluded my opening remarks a couple of weeks ago. I went through a staggeringly long list of agencies involved in the governance mechanisms for our waterways.

Most recently, our attention was drawn to that problem by the attempt made by a number of local government authorities to form an organisation that could have some serious governance responsibilities for the Swan River. It was called C21 for a very good reason because there were 21 local government authorities responsible for looking after the Swan Canning Riverpark. Of course, that all fell in a heap because although I know that at times there has been quite a close relationship between Liberal–National state governments and local government authorities, that has not been a relationship that the current government has been interested in fostering. It was just one of many examples in which that relationship broke down. All the hard work that the 21 LGAs did came to virtually nothing. The most recent example, of course, which has made the front page of the paper on many occasions, is the whole issue of local government reform. I think the government was clearly setting the tone of its relationship with LGAs by the way it treated that attempt to put a better governance system in place for the Swan Canning Riverpark.

The other subtitle that could be given to this debate, sadly I think, would be a story about lost opportunities. I think if I had been the incoming Minister for Environment in 2008 I would have found a lot on my desk to work with because in the years between 2001 and 2008, Labor had done a phenomenal amount of work, and tribute for that must be given to the environment ministers during that time, from Judy Edwards in 2001 through to David Templeman, who was the minister in 2008. I will go through a short list in the time that remains to me, and I hope I have more time later in the debate to take up some of these in more detail. The fertiliser action plan was ready to go, sitting on the minister's desk. All the negotiations had been done. It was not an easy job, but I am very proud to say that no Labor government minister has ever blinked in the face of the challenge that is presented by the task of trying to reduce the amount of fertilisers in our waterways. The fertiliser action plan was ready to go in 2008. We had done an enormous amount of work on it. At page 26 of the Auditor General's report to which I have just referred, on page 26 we find a heading about the fertiliser action plan. Of course, that plan was essentially demolished by the incoming Liberal–National government, and a scheme was put in place that contained absolutely no mandatory provisions whatsoever. The mandatory nature of that scheme was the very thing that was going to make it worse, and that is what the Liberal–National government removed. Sadly, on page 26, the Auditor General states —

Various steps have been taken to reduce the level of phosphorus leaching into the river system but so far these have had limited effect.

On page 27, he then states —

the Trust's Healthy Rivers Action Plan (2008–2013) sought to implement the Fertiliser Action Plan —

This was the new version of the FAP, which had no mandatory provisions —

by phasing out highly water-soluble phosphate fertilisers in sensitive catchments. This was not done.

What a shocking legacy to leave to the people of Western Australia who care so very much about their local waterways.

Another thing I will mention in this list of missed opportunities is why on earth the Liberal–National government has never found itself able to support legislation that would see a refundable deposit put on all containers. A container deposit scheme can be worked as narrowly or as broadly as the research indicates will be most effective. Yet, over the last few years, we have consistently seen conservative governments in this state run for cover every time somebody talks about container deposit legislation. We have seen it in the other place when members of the Liberal Party and members of the National Party stand up and speak against that legislation on the basis that we need a national approach, but under Premier Barnett’s leadership the state has shown itself to be entirely incapable of grappling with this issue. A container deposit scheme is perhaps not the silver bullet that is going to solve all the problems of the waterways, but, my goodness, it would go so far towards doing that. Members only have to take a passing interest in clean-up days in WA to see the number of containers that are polluting our waterways. To put in place a scheme like that would have massive community support. In the years that I was shadow Minister for Environment, the only people I spoke to statewide who were against a container deposit scheme were the beverage manufacturers, who had an interest in letting the current scheme go ahead. There would be massive community support for this scheme. It would remove so much of the litter from our waterways that we would see a difference within a matter of weeks. It would be the same with the fertiliser action plan—the timelines on seeing substantive change would be very short because of the significance of those measures. In the context of container deposits, I should also mention plastic bags—another major contaminant of our waterways statewide. There is perfectly simple legislation in place in other parts of the world that this government will not go anywhere near. It is often asked what Labor would do if we were in government. When we do come back to government, one of the things members can be sure of, because we have already given members the signs, is that we will act to improve governance mechanisms. Nowhere is that established more clearly than in the bill that is sitting on the table in the other place about the protection of the Peel–Harvey inlet.

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Agriculture and Food) [1.17 pm]: I rise to make a few comments about this motion. Firstly, much of our urban expanse, especially in the south west and in the southern parts of the state, occurs in and around the estuaries and the rivers that flow into them. I would like to start by mentioning the Peel–Harvey estuary. The government, in fulfilling its election commitment, has established the Peel–Harvey estuary management committee—better known under the acronym PHEMC—to provide a comprehensive whole-of-catchment focus to improve water quality in the Peel–Harvey estuary. That is chaired by the director general of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. PHEMC brings together directors general of all relevant agencies, as well as the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council and the Peel Development Commission. The government has provided additional support to the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council, with funding of \$400 000 over four years, for the appointment of a senior scientist for the Peel–Harvey area.

I understand Dr Ryan Hooper was appointed to this position earlier this month. The overall objective of the position is to facilitate and drive the integration of scientific evidence into catchment management strategies in the Peel–Harvey region. Initially the focus of the Peel–Harvey estuary management committee is to oversee the strategic assessment of the Perth–Peel region—better known by the acronym SAPPR—which is a negotiation with the commonwealth government over concurrent environmental approvals at state and commonwealth level with respect to new urban developments over the next 20 years. The committee overseeing the SAPPR process has endorsed a number of catchment and estuary actions and has recommended four priority actions to be implemented immediately. These four are: improved fertiliser management; drainage intervention works to improve water quality; removing barriers to the use of soil amendments; and development of the Peel regional park.

I now move to the Vasse–Wonnerup area. A major new initiative for Vasse–Wonnerup was launched by the Minister for Water, Hon Mia Davies, on 31 October 2014. The Revitalising Waterways of Geographe Bay initiative will improve how the Geographe catchment and its waterways are managed. In the first year, the initiative will be overseen by a task force of state agency, local government and community representatives chaired by the Minister for Water. The task force held its first meeting on 28 November 2014. The key actions are to review the drainage infrastructure to seek opportunities to reconnect rivers to improve water quality in the Vasse–Wonnerup area and Toby Inlet; implement new management approaches to reduce fish kills at the Vasse floodgates; develop clear management objectives for the key water assets and assigned local water asset managers; enhance water quality monitoring and reporting to the community; engage with industry, particularly the dairy industry, to implement best practice in effluent and fertiliser management; and implement priority actions of the water quality improvement plan.

Infill sewerage, funded by government and implemented by the Water Corporation, is reducing the flow of nutrients from the septic tanks that cause water quality problems. Recently completed infill sewerage in the suburbs of Abbey and Broadwater, at a cost of \$14.5 million, has already cut nutrient flow into the groundwater

by some 4.5 tonnes of nitrogen and one tonne of phosphorus a year. Further infill sewerage around Toby Inlet will improve water quality there. Some of these actions to improve water quality, such as riparian revegetation and fencing, were implemented by the local community. In support, the government has provided funding of \$200 000 to GeoCatch to undertake immediate actions in the catchment, including the important role of communications and community consultation.

In managing rivers and estuaries through a partnership approach, the government takes a whole-of-catchment approach to estuary management. One way of implementing this is through water quality improvement plans, which provide blueprints for action. A water quality improvement plan summarises the estuary and the river conditions, identifies the causes of water quality degradation and develops management intervention. All our estuaries with water quality problems are suffering because the waterways are receiving excess nutrients and organic matter from catchment areas. This is the primary cause of the problems that are experienced, and improving water quality requires that to be remediated. Each water quality improvement plan identifies nutrient sources by catchment and land use, providing water quality objectives to be met for a particular waterway. The plans have been produced following extensive consultation with the community, state agencies, research providers, landholders and local government. Water quality improvement plans have now been prepared for the Swan–Canning, Peel–Harvey, Vasse–Geographe and Leschenault estuaries, and the Hardy Inlet stage 1, which focuses on the Scott River catchment. We have also launched the Wilson Inlet management strategy, developed by the Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee. Stage 2 of the Hardy Inlet water quality improvement plan is currently being completed. It focuses on the lower Blackwood River and the town of Augusta.

A major study will soon be released on the identification of nutrient sources and management measures for the Avon River, especially as it affects the Swan–Canning catchment. The recommendations of this report will guide a new focus on water quality improvement in this catchment. In the new year, work will commence on updating the catchment modelling supporting the Peel–Harvey water quality improvement plan to reflect new urban development footprints, and update land uses and improvements in agricultural best-management practices. In fact, this type of modelling is currently being used to guide development planning in the Perth and Peel regions to avoid high-risk areas for nutrient leaching and to guide mitigation measures.

Funding for water quality improvement plan implementation comes from both state and commonwealth natural resource management programs. All water quality improvement plans and other nutrient reduction plans have the following actions: fertiliser management; riparian zone management—the area either side of streams or estuary foreshores; developing and implementing best practice in agriculture; managing both urban and rural point sources of nutrients; better urban water management; and monitoring, reporting and evaluation. These have shown some good results. Farm nutrient mapping has now commenced on over 200 farms across all targeted catchments, with the current round of state funding adding to the 286 farms already surveyed since 2009.

Riparian zone management includes revegetation of targeted areas; riparian zone restoration and weed control; fencing and stock management—providing stock crossings and alternative water sources; sediment removal; implementing fish passage through engineering design; and improving water quality and biodiversity values. The state government recognises the importance of river, estuary and water resources management and supports the science that informs it. Improving water quality in rivers and estuaries is a long-term undertaking requiring concerted action across government, businesses, catchment groups, landholders, the community and research providers. Much work is already being undertaken and important actions are underway. Maintaining and improving water quality is essential in supporting both existing and future developments in and around catchments, rivers and estuaries. The government has been active in supporting current successful approaches to waterways management and is developing new approaches to improving water quality in estuaries.

I will now move onto Ramsar wetlands. Four key estuarine and river systems in Western Australia have been nominated by the Western Australia government and listed under the Ramsar convention for wetlands of international significance. These are the Ord River floodplains, Lake Argyle and Kununurra Lake, the Peel–Yalgorup system and the Vasse–Wonnerup system. All the systems are iconic and have been chosen for listing due to the high number of waterbirds, including migratory shore bird species, that frequent these wetlands. The Department of Parks and Wildlife manages the Ord River floodplains Ramsar site as part of the Ord River and Parry Lagoon Nature Reserve, while the Peel–Yalgorup Ramsar site is managed collaboratively between the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, relevant agencies, local government and the Peel–Harvey Catchment Council. The other sites are managed between state government agencies and local governments.

The ecological character has been described, and management plans are in place for all these systems, with the exception of the Lake Argyle and Kununurra Lake system, which has a vegetation management plan and an Ord River management plan, done by the Department Water in 2006. Other sections of rivers, estuaries and floodplains are managed within the marine conservation reserve and terrestrial nature reserve systems by the

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Department of Parks and Wildlife, while the Department of Water manages water allocation and water quality improvement plans in many of these waterways.

The Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park was created on 8 May 2009 as a class A marine park. It covers an area of about 1 442 hectares. I think Hon Donna Faragher was the responsible minister at that time. The marine park encompasses a discrete estuarine system including the Walpole and Nornalup Inlets and the tidal reaches of the Frankland, Deep and Walpole Rivers. The management plan was gazetted on 10 June 2009. The plan details management regimes to ensure that the condition of these inlets and rivers is maintained or increased and the biodiversity of the marine park is monitored and protected. The Department of Water is introducing water allocation plans for catchments across Western Australia, which will insist on ensuring that water resources are protected and that environmental assets are allocated part of these water resources.

We hear a lot about the health of the Swan and Canning Rivers. I would like to update the house on how the Liberal–National government is improving the health of these rivers. In 2013, Murdoch University released a report on the fish communities in the estuaries, compiled by the Centre for Fish, Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems Research. The report shows the estuary to be in good to fair condition overall, based on the fish communities index, and suggests an overall improvement in estuarine conditions since the mid-2000s. The 2012 report presents similar findings. The improvement in fish communities since the mid-2000s is obviously good news. The Swan and Canning Rivers face the same stresses as other waterways around the world, but a lot is being done to improve the health of the system. The Swan River Trust is working with other government agencies, local government authorities, community groups and research institutions to improve water quality through the five-year, \$40 million, healthy rivers action plan. This plan is complemented by initiatives being implemented as part of the Swan–Canning Water Quality Improvement Plan, which was released by the Liberal–National government in 2009. Together these initiatives aim to prevent nutrients and organic matter entering the waterways through better land use planning; to reduce nutrient sources through the development and implementation of local water quality improvement plans in priority catchments; to reduce the conveyance and transmission of nutrients and other contaminants through better drainage management and intervention; and to address the effects of excess nutrients and organic matter through intervention approaches such as oxygenation and phoslock application—I guess prevention is better than cure.

Work on the two major nutrient-stripping wetlands at Ellen Brook and Bayswater Brook is well progressed. This government is committing \$3.2 million to allow the implementation of these important projects. The Ellen Brook and Bayswater wetland projects are expected to remove from the river system about 0.32 to 1.35 tonnes of nitrogen and 0.2 tonne of phosphorus respectively. These two areas combined currently account for 32.4 per cent of nitrogen and 41.1 per cent of phosphorus entering the Swan and Canning Rivers from the coastal catchment every year. The Liberal–National government introduced new fertiliser regulations to protect rivers. New limits on the amount of phosphorus contained in home garden fertilisers were introduced on 1 January 2011 that more than effectively halved the concentration of phosphorus in domestic-use fertilizers.

I will now touch on the shoreline of river walls. Investment in foreshore protection work is necessary to ensure that families and visitors can safely access our valuable area of public open space and facilities. The government works in partnership with local government to identify priority areas and implement works. The Liberal–National government is making a significant contribution to the protection and enhancement of the shoreline within the Swan and Canning River Park. Since coming into office in 2008, the Liberal–National government has invested over \$9.3 million in riverbank funding, distributing more than 100 projects, including \$2.1 million on replacement of several sections of the falling wall along Mounts Bay Road. The investment has been matched with a contribution from foreshore land managers resulting in a total investment of more than \$15 million. As part of the 2014–15 budget, we announced the provision of a further \$3 million over three years for riverbank funding in addition to the \$1 million a year that is available through the riverbank program in 2014–15. The Liberal–National government has committed \$2.4 million to substantially upgrade two existing oxygenation plants at Bacon Street and Camsell Way on the Canning River and to build a new plant at Nicholson Road Bridge, also on the Canning River. Two existing oxygenation plants also run on the Swan River at Guildford and Caversham.

It is quite obvious that a lot has been done in this area. Hon Sally Talbot made a comment with regard to the PumpHouse restaurant at Kununurra, and I agree it is also a very good venue, which took some 12 years to get through all the red tape. I sat on a Standing Committee on Public Administration that did a review into utilising waterways et cetera, and Kununurra was one that came up. If my memory serves me right, the recommendation that came out of that review was that local government be the lead agency with regard to all the different agencies involved. It is quite obvious from my comments that we will not support the motion, which I guess is no surprise to the opposition; however, an awful lot of work has been done in this area.

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HON AMBER-JADE SANDERSON (East Metropolitan) [1.34 pm]: I rise in support of the motion moved by Hon Sally Talbot —

That this Council condemns the Barnett Government for its failure to take effective action to protect Western Australia's rivers, estuaries and inlets from environmental degradation.

It is clear to see from the cacophony of reports and media articles about the state of the Swan and Canning Rivers in particular that there are existing problems. I will focus my remarks mostly on the Swan River, which is the biggest body of water in my electorate. Most Western Australians, particularly those who grew up around Perth, would identify very closely with the river and the lifestyle that we have, and how we want our children to enjoy the same lifestyle. My mum was a single mum for a period, so after I went to school in South Perth I used to go to OSCA, out of hours school care, which was run in the scouts hall on the foreshore. It was fantastic and the best way to spend every day after school. I would walk there from St Columba's Catholic Primary School and hang out at the river for a couple of hours every day, have jellyfish fights with my friends and enjoy the clean and beautiful environment—I felt very free. After the years of issues with the river and its pollution, I do not feel that my daughter can be as free to do those things in the river. We enjoy the river when we go down there, but there are issues and things that could have been done over the last seven to eight years that would have improved the systems even further.

The river is an important icon for people who live in Perth and it is important culturally for Noongar people as well and we have a responsibility to be the proper custodians of that river and to take care of it properly. A plethora of recent articles and reports say that there are major issues with the Swan River. Towards the end of last year, a very lengthy media article headed, "Experts say Perth's Swan River and its marine life are choking to death" stated —

TOXIC algal blooms have left the Swan River "dead" below two metres and pathogens harmful to humans are being recorded above the safe swimming limit ...

...

But Premier Colin Barnett insists the river is "stunning" ...

And he accuses anyone who says otherwise of —

"carrying on a bit too much" ...

One of the saddest things that the Barnett government did was to refuse to introduce the mandatory phasing out of soluble fertiliser, which Labor had committed to do. I will go into that later. University of Western Australia research found that for several months of the year oxygen levels in the river between Point Walter and Guildford are less than a quarter of the minimum required for fish, prawns and crabs to survive. Many birds have deserted the river, and health department data shows that bacteria and pathogens have forced the river to be closed to swimmers and anglers fairly regularly for periods of the year.

Another report from the Centre for Water Research at UWA—one has to say that these guys are pretty much experts—came out in August late last year. Professor Jorg Imberger, Director of the Centre for Water Research at UWA, states that the state government is ignoring the unhealthy status of the river. Some of the quotes from his interviews and reports are —

"We have asked them to come down for a seminar—we have asked them to come down for a briefing, but the Western Australian government doesn't seem to think it's necessary to get any information...

"The big problem is this inability to get over the fact you look across the river and it looks OK.

...

"Why don't we simply say this is an icon, let's find out from the specialist and make a rationale decision how much we are going to spend on it."

The environment minister's response was to say that this is a long-term view. In the short term, the river's health is on the mend, but we want to see a long-term plan for looking after the Swan River. The government implemented the oxygenation plants and a number of reports and experts claim that those oxygenation plants are simply not enough, are old technology and are not generally used in restoring river health. We look at the reports and the issues and we have to ask ourselves: what is the government doing? One of the major things it is doing is to remove the power from the Swan River Trust and roll it back into the major functions of the department. One of the main recommendations of a number of reports over the years has been that one body must have responsibility for the management of the river system. This move seems to fly in the face of that, and it has certainly come under sharp criticism from a number of groups. Many people donate their time and are committed to the health of the river but they are dismayed at the government's actions in terms of the Swan River Trust and

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the government's lack of action in terms of doing something for the river. The Director of the Conservation Council of Western Australia, Piers Verstegen, has accused the government of trying to make the problem go away because sometimes the Swan River Trust gives very inconvenient advice to the government, but that is the job of a body like the Swan River Trust.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order; one at a time, members.

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: The Conservation Council of Western Australia states —

“What the river needs is a strengthened regulator with the powers to tackle the pollution problems that are plaguing the system when governments lack the political will to take action.

“Instead we have a government that is weakening the regulatory role even further, in order to avoid scrutiny of its failing policies.

There is a significant problem with a lack of reporting, and that is highlighted in the Auditor General's report, which I will go into in a bit more detail.

Looking at the East Metropolitan Region specifically, the Murdoch University report on surveying fish communities referred to by the previous speaker is a mixed report. It is not all good news. That report states that the upper Swan and Canning estuaries are struggling from a lack of oxygen. The researchers examined more than 27 000 fish and 29 species at 48 near-shore and offshore locations, and the fish are struggling. According to the report, the near-shore waters of the upper Swan received a score of D, which means poor.

The author of the report, Dr Jacob John, is quoted as saying —

... studying fish communities is a good way to determine river health.

“It [this report] appears to be a mixed one, with some bad news and some good news ...

“By the time fish communities [which are the top of the chain] are in poor state, the rest of the biological communities will be sure to be worse.”

The government selects its good news out of reports when and where it can, and chooses to ignore the bad advice that it does not like. The government did not like the advice coming out of the Swan River Trust, so it decided to dissolve it and fold it into the department.

This week's microalgae report for the upper Swan, which is the part of the river that is in the worst condition, has algae spots at high and medium levels. It is bad this week, and it continues to be bad. In terms of data trends, one of the worst performing sections of the river at exceeding nutrient targets is Ellen Brook. In around 2007, Labor committed to the mandatory phasing out of phosphorous fertilisers for domestic and commercial use. This government walked away from that. Our soil is so sandy and porous that those sorts of fertilisers just drain right into the river system. There are alternatives, but people take the cheapest alternative. It is up to the government to work with industry—not use a stick—to help it phase out the use of those fertilisers to improve the health of our rivers.

The phasing out of phosphorous fertilisers came from the “State of the Environment Report 2007”, which recommended that the flow of phosphate and nitrogen-rich pollution from highly soluble sources needed to be stemmed, and that implementing the state environment policy must be to phase out these highly soluble fertilisers. That would make a significant difference, but the government walked away from it. The Minister for Environment, Albert Jacob, in his response to the report said —

Agriculture is far too important an industry for this state.

Agriculture is an incredibly important industry in this state. No-one would argue with that, but no-one is talking about closing down the agriculture industry. We need to work with industry to phase out the use of these fertilisers so that it is a more sustainable industry. If the use of these fertilisers is profitable on the one hand, but is costing the state on the other hand, there is a negative net result for the state.

The government does not like criticism of its policies, but it cannot argue with the Auditor General. The Auditor General recently released a report on the state of the river, titled “Our Heritage and Our Future: Health of the Swan Canning River System”. The report contains some very concerning findings and very concerning results. Overall, since 1995, river health has declined; salinity levels have increased in the Swan River estuary; water temperature has increased at a higher rate than sea surface temperature; oxygen levels are low in the Swan River; water turbidity, which is the cloudiness of the water, has increased; phytoplankton and chlorophyll levels are high, which is a sign of algae activity; nutrient levels are high, mostly from the use of domestic and commercial fertilisers; and fish deaths were recorded above the target of less than 10 000 deaths a year.

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The report has a number of findings and recommendations, all of which seem perfectly valid but deeply worrying. The findings in the Auditor General's report state that the responsibility for water quality and urban drains leading into the river is unclear, and no single agency has responsibility for ensuring the quality of water flowing into these drains and, therefore, into the river system—no-one is mandated to look after that. There has been little consistent action to address pollution entering urban drains. The fertiliser action plan has not been achieved, and the government has failed on the key goal to phase out highly soluble phosphorous fertilisers on the Swan coastal plain. The impact of urban development on the river system is increasing and requires additional effort to minimise the impact on water quality. We are seeing significant urban sprawl through the eastern suburbs and along the river, and that will put more strain on the river. There are significant gaps in reporting, planning and monitoring the health of the river. The declining health of the river system would be helped by a better high level of reporting. There is limited public reporting in an easily understandable format about the current health of the river system. In 2011, the Department of Water produced a report card with an estuary health score that gave a simple but comprehensive picture of the health of the Swan and Canning Rivers, but this report card was never released publicly.

A report on the health of the river system exists, but it has not been released. The production of the river protection strategy draft has been with the minister since 2012, but it has not been approved and released by the minister. The minister has had that draft since 2012, but it has still not been approved and released. The river health could be improved with collaboration and long-term commitment. We have to get the departments working together. Removing the single point of management is not a way to do that, because it creates further demarcation among the departments and allows them to operate more as silos. There are good examples of a collaborative approach across departments and community groups significantly improving the quality of river and water systems. Water quality in the River Thames in London, one of Europe's and the world's biggest cities, has been significantly improved by tightening regulations on polluting industries—something this government has failed to do—and major investment at sewage treatment works to stop point-source pollution. An issue with the Swan and Canning Rivers is that when the sewerage system overflows, the river is the backup. When there is a blockage or an issue with the sewerage system, the overflow goes into the river. There needs to be a better way to manage that, and there are ways that exist to work with the catchment farmers, businesses and water companies to reduce pollution, but the government is not doing that. There need to be firm plans for further improvements and engagement with community groups. Community groups are generally incredibly frustrated with the work the government has been doing. Community groups spend hours on weekends and holidays working on the river system and the foreshore, but are faced with a government that simply does not prioritise this important issue.

I conclude by saying that I support this motion. The government needs to have a firmer and clearer plan, and it needs to release the plan that exists. I call on the government to ban phosphorous fertilisers and work with community groups that are completely committed to improving the health and quality of the river, and to properly fund them to continue that work.

HON LYNN MacLAREN (South Metropolitan) [1.49 pm]: There is an appropriate opening to this issue on the Conservation Council of Western Australia website. I speak in support of the motion today. The Conservation Council of Western Australia website clearly states —

Generations of Western Australians have fond memories of swimming, crabbing, boating and generally enjoying the Swan River. Now, with the river in serious environmental decline, many of these activities risk being consigned to the history books.

The main cause of the river's chronic poor health can be traced to a cocktail of environmental pollutants entering the river system from a range of industrial, agricultural and urban sources. These pollutants' impact is exacerbated by climate change as we receive less rain in the catchments to flush the nutrients out to sea, and higher temperatures aid algal growth.

...

The main source of nutrient pollution entering the river is phosphorous and nitrogen-based fertiliser products used in farming and urban environments. When applied to the sandy soils of the Swan Coastal Plain, these nutrients dissolve readily and are transported through groundwater and surface flows into the river.

We have known about this for a long time. I was compelled to speak on this motion after hearing the long list of plans from the minister in the government's response to this motion. I am reminded of that famous saying that life is what happens when we are busy making plans, but in this case, perhaps the death of the river is what happens when we are busy making plans. What we need, minister, is comprehensive action, because the truth is that the rivers are suffering. Although it is important to list the few achievements we have made over time with

the Swan and Canning Rivers, we cannot afford to ignore the Auditor General's very comprehensive and damning report and also the evidence from the volunteers whom Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson talked about just before I stood up.

As I said, we have known about this for a long time. At the time of the record fish kill in 2003, the Swan River Trust explained —

What we see in the river is a base load of nutrients that is fairly high and when we get unusual weather conditions or patterns of unusual nutrient inflow, like we've seen with the recent rain followed by the highest temperature May on record, it tips the system over into this critical situation.

The Swan River trust also explained that the nutrients are —

... getting there from the 150 years of development that we've had around Perth, they're getting in through groundwater that's had nutrient levels in it increased as a result of historical urban and agricultural activities and also an overland flow from current applications of fertiliser and (indistinct) wastes in gardens and in agricultural activities.

My colleague Senator Rachel Siewert was the coordinator of the Conservation Council at that time in 2003 and her comments still resonate more than 10 years later —

We have a planning system in Perth that we don't think adequately deals with environmental issues such as this and we've allowed development to continue.

...

... there's a problem with some of the laws that we have in WA and the Trust has a very limited scope of responsibility around the river itself.

It is the responsibility of the whole of government and the failure of the whole of government over years to deal with this issue.

...

What we need to be doing is looking at a comprehensive approach to how we can do, for example, urban infill.

We need to look at the new concept of growth boundaries and set in place a growth boundary for Perth and start planning around that, rather than pretending that we can continue to expand Perth without any consequences because we can't.

Other members have quoted Jorg Imberger. When I consulted on the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Amendment Bill 2014, which we have passed in the last month, I sat down and talked with Jorg Imberger, who is the director of the Centre for Water Research at the University of Western Australia, and he was very clear in his concerns about the river. In fact, he spoke to the press at that time and said —

... oxygen levels are now below where life can exist for well over six months of the year. This has killed all the benthic life, the food for the higher life forms and even to a casual observer it is obvious that only a few birds remain.

The picture that Professor Imberger paints starts with the dredging of the harbour and goes through to the nutrient problem that escalated in the 1960s and 1970s, along with the clearing of native vegetation and decreased water flows. That is another matter that the Greens will continue to take the government to task on. The continued deforestation and the wilful disruption of our ecosystem simply have to stop. Professor Imberger is less hopeful of reducing nutrient input and is more hopeful of flushing the system clean every year. He says that increasing river flows in the winter is within our grasp and that we need to replant about 25 per cent of the coastal strip in strategic areas and, once this takes effect, the river flows can return to their pre-1970s levels and the hills reservoirs will be full once again.

I mentioned briefly in my contribution to the second reading debate on the Swan and Canning Rivers amendment bill that the Greens put out an initiative on the Swan River in the lead-up to the last election and I listed the points of the initiative. I do not want to repeat them now because they are on the *Hansard* record, but I want to almost conclude my comments by saying that the Swan and Canning Rivers are on life support. Additional oxygenation machines have been installed in the river's middle and upper reaches to try to breathe life back into the low-oxygen water resulting from too many nutrients. Although this has helped keep algal blooms at bay and fish alive, it has not fixed the underlying pollution problem. In 2009, an interagency report titled "Swan Canning Water Quality Improvement Plan" found that nearly double the sustainable levels of nitrogen and phosphorus were entering the system each year. The plan found that although the source of nutrients ranged from farmland run-off to excessive fertiliser use on urban parks and gardens, residential and recreational land was the biggest

source of nitrogen and the biggest source of phosphorus. Our urban drain system is the main conduit whereby this urban pollution enters the river.

Most recently, when we discussed the Swan and Canning Rivers amendment bill, I was contacted by constituents. As members know, I represent the South Metropolitan Region, much of which has a beautiful river scape and quite a lot of foreshore. The citizens who live along the Swan River are very appreciative of it and enjoy recreating on it, and they also enjoy the property value increase that is offered when they live next to the gorgeous river. However, as Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson said, a lot of the residents who spend their volunteer hours helping to clean up the river—in fact, most recently, we had a clean-up at the East Fremantle foreshore—are very concerned about the management of the river. I was contacted by one of these residents in South Perth who reminded me about the things that I want to bring to the minister's attention during this debate. There are mosquito-control measures. I attended one of the public forums in the South Perth region recently. Residents often cry out for help to control the mosquito problem, but the problem becomes worse when the only solution put forward is to spray more poisons onto the river, therefore causing more issues with the river health.

One of the other issues is the introduction of exotic species. The dominant fish species in the Canning River is the gambusia, also known as the mosquitofish. It is from the Gulf of Mexico, so it could be Mexican or it could be Texan. It is clearly a Spanish name. It was introduced to control mosquitoes in the 1930s. It eats fingerlings of native species, but it has very little effect on mozzies. The other introduced exotic species we struggle to control is carp, or goldfish, which are very common and often grow quite large. Further issues with the Swan and Canning Rivers involve toxic material in the river. Copper, mercury and pesticides are recorded at high levels. There is a reduced flow due to the Kent Street Weir and that means the river almost never flushes with fresh water and it is silting. Flow has been reduced by 98 per cent, so it is expected that the Canning River will be totally filled with silt by the middle of this century.

Finally, I refer to public open and free access to data about rivers. At present, via freedom of information, a person can request data from a particular place at a particular time only if they know it is available. We could benefit from open public access to the full-time series of all river data. Time series data is vital to research and to the development of management plans. That is just one of the issues raised by the Auditor General in his recommendations when he recently looked at the quality of the Swan River.

There is no doubt that a range of initiatives need to be urgently addressed by this government. The Swan and Canning Rivers are in trouble and that is why I stand today in support of this motion and urge the government not to fall back on the list of things it has done but to act to address the river quality issues. It is not fair enough to just give a report and say, "But I did this and I did that." The proof of the pudding is in the eating and the quality of the river has not improved to the extent that we feel the government is doing enough.

The forward estimates indicate that the amount of money invested in the Swan River will drop again next year. We need to see more deliberate and transparent action in the Swan River that is reported regularly to the public so that we who feel so attached to our river and enjoy it so much can see the progress being made. That is why I call upon the government to take heed of this motion and do something for the river now and not just move the deckchairs around as it has by merging the Swan River Trust with the Department of Parks and Wildlife but improve the quality of our very precious Swan and Canning Rivers.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson): Before we move on I want to welcome year 6 students from Subiaco Primary School. Welcome to Parliament. I attended Subiaco school for a very short time, so a special welcome to you all and enjoy your day.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral) [2.02 pm]: I too rise to add to the condemnation of the Barnett government for its failure to take effective action to protect Western Australia's rivers, estuaries and inlets from environmental degradation. I congratulate Hon Sally Talbot for bringing this motion to the house. It is a very important motion, and I hope members on the other side will also make a contribution to this debate.

The government went to the last election with a commitment to strengthen the management of Western Australia's environment and river parks; yet we have seen the opposite. I take members back to the "State of the Environment Report 2007", which was prepared by the Environmental Protection Authority. This is the third in a series of state of the environment reports; the first was published in 1993, just after the demise of the Lawrence government. The second was published in 1998 when Hon Cheryl Edwardes was the environment minister. The report I am talking about today is the third and last, and was published during the time of the Carpenter government. It is unfortunate that I say this is the last report because we have seen no movement from this government on the state of the environment reports. In fact, when such a report was published, the government of the day replied to the recommendations and the findings of the report. However, we have seen no response from this government to the 2007 document.

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We need only turn to page 77 of that report, to the section on inland waters, to find a good read. I recommend the report to members in this place; it outlines a range of concerns about the environment across a number of areas in the state. In the section on inland waters the key findings are that about 80 per cent of Western Australia's estuaries are in good condition and only about 30 per cent of the state's major rivers are in good condition. A further finding was that monitoring and managing of our inland waters is generally inadequate. Given that a report says that only 30 per cent of the state's major rivers are in good condition, I would have expected this government to go back to the drawing board, read what the problems are in this report and respond to them, yet we have not seen that in this case at all. Although this report was undertaken by the Environmental Protection Authority, we have not seen any movement from the Barnett government on its findings. As far as we know, the government has not even done any preparatory work on a new state of the environment report. That shows the government's attitude to the environment: ignorance is bliss, essentially.

The key findings in this report lay out what needs to be done to protect our environment in Western Australia yet we have seen no action from this government. As I said, the "State of the Environment Report 2007" indicates that only 30 per cent of the state's major rivers are in good condition. It also states that only 17 per cent of remaining wetlands on the Swan coastal plain have high conservation significance. It also refers to wetland vegetation on the Swan coastal plain being lost or degraded at the rate of about two football ovals a day. As I said, it also states that monitoring and management of inland water is generally inadequate.

I appreciate the Minister for Agriculture and Food commenting on this motion this afternoon. One of the things he highlighted in his contribution related to a media statement issued by the state government today, in fact. I wonder whether it is coincidental or the government noticed that Hon Sally Talbot's motion was on the notice paper and decided that today would be a good day to release the information. This media statement from Albert Jacob, the Minister for Environment, reads —

Fish results show rivers in good shape

- Fish communities have improved in Swan and Canning rivers
- New report debunks the myth that the rivers are dead

There is a fair bit of good news in this report. The minister goes on —

... the 2014 Fish Community Index showed that fish communities in the Swan and Canning rivers from Mosman Park and upstream to the Swan Valley and Kent Street Weir had improved since the mid-2000s.

Anyone who reads this report would think there was absolutely nothing wrong with our Swan and Canning river system. However, the minister very helpfully told us in his media statement that a report is available at the Swan River Trust website. I have had a quick look at the report, titled "Assessment of the condition of the Swan Canning Estuary in 2014, based on the Fish Community Indices of estuarine condition", prepared by some academics at the Centre for Fish and Fisheries Research at Murdoch University for, as the minister said, the Swan River Trust. If members read this report, they will find that things are happening in the Swan River. Bear in mind that this is only one of the areas of measurement of the health of the river. However, the report goes on to refer to finding species such as the Pearl cichlid in the Swan River. Referring to the upper Swan estuary, at page 3 the report states —

Notably, six individuals of the introduced Pearl cichlid ... were caught from nearshore waters of the USE zone in January 2014. This is the first time this species has been encountered ... and provides further evidence of its spread through the main body of the Swan River.

What is the cichlid? I go back to a media statement from the then Minister for Fisheries in 2009 titled "Feral fish pearl cichlids invades Swan River", which states —

A DESTRUCTIVE feral fish has been discovered in the Swan River, sparking a Department of Fisheries survey.

The Department of Fisheries has initiated surveys of the Swan River, near Eden Hill and Caversham, for feral pearl cichlids, after a member of the public found several of the unwanted species in the river last week.

It goes on —

"This common aquarium fish, which is a prolific breeder and can survive in saline waters, could impact on the local ecosystem, but the extent of its impact is unknown at this stage."

The statement goes on —

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“The Department of Fisheries has spent approximately \$300,000 over the last three years on the difficult and challenging control program ...

It goes on to say that unfortunately, it appears that this fish may not have been successfully contained in this instance.

The minister’s statement today referred to the river being in good shape but, as I said, there is not one mention of the fact that feral fish are being caught in the upper reaches of the Swan River. Why are we seeing such a thing? The report at page 6 goes on —

In response to increasing degradation of estuarine ecosystems, fish species with specific habitat, feeding or other environmental requirements will tend to become less abundant and diverse, whilst a few species with more general requirements become more abundant, ultimately leading to an overall reduction in the number and diversity of fish species.

It goes on —

So, in a degraded estuary with poor water, sediment and habitat quality, the abundance and diversity of specialist feeders ... will tend to decrease, as will the ... number and diversity of species. In contrast, generalist feeders —

That refers to blowfish or cichlids —

... which eat particles of decomposing organic material, will become more abundant and dominant ...

As I said, this report shows that these fish become more abundant because of poor water quality and are found in rivers that are unhealthy. Although I am certainly not suggesting today that the Swan and Canning Rivers are dead, I am suggesting that the report attached to this media statement actually points out some facts about a number of negative issues in relation to the Swan River.

After having been on the Swan River Trust website today, I then found a report on microalgae activity in the river. Again, we have seen over a number of years algal blooms becoming more of an issue in the Swan and Canning Rivers. The latest report I found on microalgae activity shows that high levels of algae were found at Midland and Beckenham, two very different parts of the river system and two different parts of the metropolitan area. Both Beckenham, through which the Canning River runs, and Midland, through which the upper reaches of the Swan River run, have high levels of algae. Again, at the same time as the minister is sending out a report saying that the river is in good shape, we see evidence from the Swan River Trust that in fact there are high levels of algae in the river and there is something wrong. Algae in the river is a telltale sign that all is not well.

I also note that this latest algae report is dated 2 March 2015. I understood that these reports were supposed to be weekly reports. I asked the staff in my office to check with the Swan River Trust and they were told yes, they are supposed to be updated weekly but the next update will not be until next week. That got me thinking that it could be that the latest report indicates that things might have got worse in the last week and they have not been reported. The other thing that crossed my mind was whether funding cuts implemented by this government mean that the Swan River Trust will not now be doing these weekly reports or might be doing them less frequently. Is there a conspiracy? Is the weekly report delayed? Is it being delayed on purpose? Perhaps not. Alternatively, is it happening simply because the resources are not there anymore to ensure that these reports are made public?

I might come back to the cichlids and to this report, but I do think that if members simply read the press statement from the minister today, they would think that all is well and there is absolutely no issue in the Swan River. Of course, if they look a little deeper and a little further, they will find that there are some issues, and I am pleased I was able to find those and bring them to the attention of the house this afternoon.

I want to talk about one of the things that we would do if we were in government now and we had been managing the river system throughout the state. We would have created catchment management authorities throughout the state. There is no doubt that wherever there is extensive human settlement and urbanisation, or human activity such as agriculture, forestry or mining, we should be developing catchment management plans and creating catchment management authorities. It is our view on this side of the house that catchment management authorities are certainly part of the answer to the recurring problem of bureaucratic conflicts and the failure to coordinate across government agencies. In fact, as one of my colleagues mentioned earlier, with the decline of the Swan River Trust and the fact that this government has taken powers away from the Swan River Trust, we may well see that failure to coordinate and the problem of bureaucratic conflicts actually increase. It is disappointing to note that Labor in 2006 strengthened the management of the Swan and Canning river system in this state. We introduced the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Bill to this place, and of course members would know that only last week this government took powers away from and essentially gutted the Swan River Trust in this state.

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I go back to catchment management authorities. We believe that a CMA could bring together all the various agencies responsible for the coordinated management of the catchment. I am not sure whether the Minister for Mental Health is trying to goad me. I hear her making statements under her breath, but I am not sure whether she is directing them to me.

Hon Helen Morton: I am interested to hear how many people on your side spoke on that bill.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I look forward to the minister's contribution this afternoon.

Hon Helen Morton interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson): Order! Hon Stephen Dawson has the call and will continue uninterrupted.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I will try to ensure that I direct my comments through you, Madam Acting President, and not to others in this place so that I do not get them into trouble, because I would not like to do that. However, I look forward to the minister making her contribution to the debate on the motion later this afternoon.

As I said, a catchment management authority could bring together all the various agencies responsible for the management of the catchment. It could be a one-stop shop. It could ensure that there are no bureaucratic conflicts, and that, in fact, the management of the catchment is most important and that the agencies roll with the punches and not get to push their own barrow at every opportunity.

A CMA could be tasked with setting environmental objectives for a catchment and could then be responsible for the implementation of strategies that will deliver those objectives. That is one thing that members on this side certainly believe would benefit the management of catchments.

In his comments in this debate, the Minister for Fisheries spoke about a few different estuaries and a few different issues, and I want to touch on some of those issues also. I note that the minister commented on the Vasse–Wonnerup estuary. He also told the house that the Minister for Water had begun to take action on this issue. I am pleased that she has, because it is my view that the Vasse–Wonnerup estuary is an example of what happens when there is no organised catchment management structure in place. I take members back to February 2014 when about 4 000 fish were found dead in the Vasse–Wonnerup estuary. In April the year before, some 10 000 fish were killed when nutrient levels caused dissolved oxygen levels to plummet in that estuary. Obviously, the Minister for Water in this case is concerned about the large number of fish that have been killed in the estuary and is starting to take notice—and I am pleased that she is. However, the management of the Vasse–Wonnerup estuary is undertaken by a range of agencies, including the Department of Water, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Parks and Wildlife—even the Water Corporation has an interest. Local government and local communities, too, have an interest in that estuary. At the time of those fish kills, no state government agency took on the responsibility of cleaning up the fish; it was left to the Shire of Busselton, and in that case the Shire of Busselton did a great job. However, I hope in future, under the minister's new plan for the Vasse–Wonnerup catchment, that state government agencies will play the role that they should be playing. Such fish kills should not be left to local government; they should be cleaned up by the state government, plainly and simply.

Members on this side, including you, Madam Acting President, have highlighted the fertiliser action plan that the last Labor government implemented before it left office. Under that plan, the use of highly water-soluble fertilisers was to be phased out by 2011. But, as members on this side of the house have asked: what happened in its place?

Hon Alanna Clohesy: Nothing.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Absolutely nothing—Hon Alanna Clohesy is correct. In fact, this current government scrapped the plan without proposing any viable alternative whatsoever. Again, if there were catchment management authorities in this state, they could implement such things as a fertiliser action plan and oversee agency and community implementation of clean-ups and management plans so that our rivers, particularly the Swan and Canning Rivers, could be well and truly cleaned up and given a clean bill of health.

The minister also mentioned the Peel–Harvey catchment. I think Hon Sally Talbot would have mentioned more about the Peel–Harvey catchment this afternoon if time had allowed it. In May 2014, Hon Mark McGowan, the Leader of the Opposition in the other place, launched WA Labor's Peel–Harvey Catchment Management Bill 2014, which was introduced into Parliament as a private member's bill. That bill sought to recognise not only the Peel's magnificent waterways, but also that those waterways are the lifeblood of the Peel region and that they underpin the overall health and wellbeing of the region, economically, socially and environmentally. That bill seeks to establish a new legal framework to regulate the environmental quality of the estuary and was heavily

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influenced by the success of the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Act 2006, on which I touched earlier and which this government has, of course, now weakened through the Swan and Canning Rivers Management Amendment Bill 2014.

In 2013, Murdoch University and the CSIRO reported on the Peel–Harvey estuary, and made the damning finding that the estuary was returning to a highly eutrophic state. Normally, I am not one to use the word “eutrophic” but Hon Mark Lewis, given his background and life before becoming a member of Parliament, would well know that eutrophic essentially means nutrient enrichment. That means we are getting too many nutrients in the river. That report made the damning finding that the estuary was returning to a highly eutrophic state and that the management structures were insufficient to halt that decline, let alone rehabilitate the system. The study highlighted that stakeholders and, in fact, the general public lack an effective means to rehabilitate and manage the system due to ineffective government structures or policies that have been only weakly implemented. In some cases there have been good policies, except that the agencies tasked to ensure those policies had been implemented have not done their job or have not put as much effort into ensuring that those policies are delivered as they should have been.

WA’s Labor’s draft bill seeks to provide solutions to the problems identified in that report. Under that bill, a statutory body called the Peel–Harvey catchment trust would be established and it would be provided with relevant powers and functions to oversee the management of the catchment area. The bill also provides for a new and integrated approvals process involving the relevant local governments and approval from the minister or the trust, and strict adherence to state planning policy 2.1. The Peel–Harvey Catchment Management Bill also provides for the trust to issue estuary protection notices within the catchment area. It also provides for the creation of a foundation to engage the public interest and raise money for the activities of the Peel–Harvey catchment trust. It would also set out the process for regulations to prescribe targets for the estuary and the catchment management area and provide for the creation of an estuary protection strategy involving all stakeholders and bodies.

Hon Sally Talbot and David Templeman, the member for Mandurah, have been key drivers in this plan. The Peel–Harvey catchment is on the doorstep of their electorates. They saw the need to ensure that the Peel–Harvey catchment is protected, but unfortunately that is not the case with this government. Yet again, we have seen little or no action on this issue. Again, from the “State of the Environment Report 2007”, we know that the salinisation of inland waterways is a major problem. Watercourses that begin in cleared areas, such as the Avon, Frankland, Blackwood, Kent and Murray Rivers, are severely salt affected in their upper reaches, and they remain brackish to saline as they approach the coast. We know from this report that excessive salinisation of waterways results in the catastrophic collapse of aquatic ecosystems.

I cannot highlight enough how good a document this “State of the Environment Report 2007” is, and I cannot express my disdain that this government has not tried to implement its findings, or has not told us publicly that it is implementing the findings of that report. I find it concerning that a report was issued in 1993, prepared under the Lawrence government but released afterwards. There was another report in 1998, commissioned at the time that Hon Cheryl Edwardes was the minister. A report was commissioned under the Lawrence government, and another under the Court government. The third report began during the time of the Gallop government and was completed under the Carpenter government. What have we had since then? Absolutely nothing—2007 was the last report, and in 2015 we have absolutely nothing. Bear in mind that the last report was a number of years in the making. Preparing such a report is a big task; a great amount of work went into it. Initially, a draft report was released to the public, and the Environmental Protection Agency and the then Department of Environment undertook community consultation. They went around the state and talked to environment groups, local governments and other government agencies seeking responses. This is not just the EPA saying that this is an issue and that these problems exist in this state. This is government agencies, non-government organisations and local governments all saying that these issues are important to the state and should be dealt with.

We are hearing very little from the Barnett government on the state of the environment, or indeed the environment in total. We have been told previously that we would see amendments to the Wildlife Conservation Act, or a new Wildlife Conservation Act, but we have seen nothing.

Hon Donna Faragher interjected.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Hon Donna Faragher can make a contribution when I am finished; there will be time left for her.

We are told also that amendments are on the way to the Environmental Protection Act, particularly in relation to environmentally sensitive areas, and yet we are seeing nothing in that space. We certainly see very little in the area of protecting all the state’s rivers, estuaries and inlets from environmental degradation. When we get contributions from the state government, like today’s contribution from the Minister for Agriculture and Food,

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we do not get the full story; we get half the picture. We are told that everything is fine and dandy, and there is no problem.

Hon Darren West: They're not interested in the environment.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: That is right, Hon Darren West; they do not have any interest in the environment, or they have very little interest in the environment. This is concerning, because I remind Hon Darren West that this government went to the last election saying that it has a commitment to strength in the management of Western Australia's environment and river parks, and what have we seen? Very little. The government has paid lip service to this area. There have been lots of promises but, like this government in a range of other areas, we have seen no action on them, and we see the promises broken.

A number of members also touched on the report of the Auditor General from August last year about our heritage and the future health of the Swan and Canning river system. The Auditor General is independent. Without fear or favour, he looks into issues that he thinks are important. He made some very valuable recommendations on the Swan River Trust, including that the Swan River Trust should regularly inform Parliament and the community about the overall health of the river using a comprehensive and easily understood report. There are a range of other recommendations on the Swan River Trust, but instead of acting on those recommendations and ensuring that they were implemented, what have we seen? We have seen the Swan River Trust gutted. We will see it essentially become a toothless tiger, because any power it had to ensure that the Swan and Canning Rivers were protected has been taken away. My fear is that under the Department of Environment and Conservation, which will now be responsible —

Hon Donna Faragher: It is now the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes—the Department of Parks and Wildlife; thank you, Hon Donna Faragher, I appreciate your well-considered contributions at various times.

My fear is that under the Department of Parks and Wildlife, or DPaW, we will not see the same level of protection for the Swan and Canning river system in this state as we have seen in the past. That is a concern, and I call on the state government to pull out the report of the Auditor General; take it off the shelf, blow away the dust and cobwebs, look at the recommendations and heed the advice that the Auditor General has given. There are recommendations for reviewing the fertiliser action plan and the fertiliser partnership; working with the Department of Planning to improve role clarity in the administration of planning controls outside development control areas; and continuing the high level of community involvement in protecting and enhancing the river system. But what are we seeing from the government? We are seeing very little, and in most cases we are seeing nothing at all, with the exception of the Vasse–Wonnerup system, on which I note the minister made some good comments this afternoon.

Again, I am happy to say that I support the motion of Hon Sally Talbot now before the house. This government should be condemned for the lack of action, and for its failure to take effective control of this state's rivers, estuaries and inlets to ensure that they are not environmentally degraded. When we see independent reports provided by agencies like the EPA and the Auditor General, we actually get the truth, and the truth must be hard to swallow for this mob. Plain and simply, the government is missing in action in this area, and should absolutely be condemned, because it needs to do more. With those comments, I conclude my remarks.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [2.39 pm]: There must be some sort of pro forma or template for these motions, maybe kept in the Clerk's office. They just get it down off the wall, and it is along the lines of "That this Council condemns the Barnett government for—insert pet hate here."

Several members interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Perhaps that will be "for its failure in respect of heritage matters". Maybe we will have a motion on that issue shortly—or have we already had one? This motion is about the environment.

Hon Sally Talbot: I can think of a good one!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: The member has not come up with a good one yet, because all these motions are exactly the same. I mentioned that in due course perhaps there will be a motion about heritage matters, because this one invites us to consider the question that we condemn the Barnett government for its failure to take effective action on certain matters. Notice of this motion was given by Hon Sally Talbot, a dear friend and colleague, back on 19 June 2013—five minutes after the state election!

Hon Stephen Dawson: And you have had two years to fix this issue and you have done nothing since.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: How crazy was it that Hon Sally Talbot managed to get this notice onto the notice paper barely five minutes after we returned to Parliament after the state election? What a crystal ball the member

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must have had. It is a pity members opposite could not have been that far-sighted when they were in government, even though some of the Labor government's environment ministers of the day were advised by some splendid people in a few cases. I remember Hon Judy Edwards had a particularly capable environment adviser. I do not know what happened to him; he probably came to no good in the end, I should think. We were able to match that. Hon Mark McGowan is another environment minister from the Labor days.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Another very good one!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Indeed, we have never seen anything like him! Members do not have to look too far to see the real leadership that was provided by this government. Members can say what they will about any government, although members opposite want to personalise the issue by calling it the Barnett government, but one of the things that Hon Colin Barnett has done is promote some quite outstanding members of Parliament, particularly in the environment portfolio. One of those members, of course, is sitting in this place—Hon Donna Faragher, who I think brought a great presence to the role. She can talk for herself about initiatives in a whole range of matters, including our rivers, estuaries and inlets, and I hope that when she does, the mover and some of her other cheer squad over there will take a bit of notice and reflect on what they know to be the case, which is this government's strong performance in the environment portfolio dating from late 2008. Members might remember that we had a very early election that year—I just thought I would mention that—and Hon Donna Faragher came into the portfolio. I think she performed with distinction. I remember that she was called on to make some difficult decisions right from the first week, one of which was my favourite. I will not remind the house of it on this particular occasion, but perhaps Hon Donna Faragher might like to do that. A number of initiatives were taken in the term of the first Barnett government, but members opposite want to talk about matters more recent.

When Hon Sally Talbot gave notice of this motion condemning the Barnett government of 2015, the example that was then in existence was the first Barnett government and its performance, which I think was particularly strong. The current government, which was formed shortly before the time this motion went on the notice paper, also saw the advent of another splendid, youthful but still experienced member of Parliament in Hon Albert Jacob. Members know that I tend to be quite frank in my assessment of how current affairs are going in Western Australia lately, which sometimes makes one or two of my colleagues nervous because they know I will not pull any punches about it, but I am very proud to be associated with the likes of Albert Jacob, because he is doing a great job and bringing a different type of personality to the extraordinarily difficult job of Minister for Environment.

I have had a bit to do with some of our rivers over the years. There has been a bit of a concentration in this debate about the river systems in and around the capital city, the metropolitan area and the populated immediate south of the Perth area. It is interesting to reflect on the health of those river systems and what has come to pass in recent years under successive governments, which in turn have all sought to promote the health of our river and estuary systems. Sometimes ideas have worked better than others, and sometimes proposals have generated controversy—canal developments, estuary cuts and a whole range of things that have impacted on our rivers, estuaries and inlets in the regions I am talking about. When I was a child, I would jump into the Swan River at various locations, but in retrospect I wonder why on earth I was doing that, knowing what I know now. That was at a time when our Swan River was lined with rubbish tips. For example, Burswood had the grand-daddy of all rubbish tips, strategically located not only at a major loop in the river that we now think of as the jewel in our crown, but also where it coincided with the main entry for people travelling down Great Eastern Highway into the city of Perth. That was not the only rubbish tip location. When I think of some of the locations of rubbish tips that we had at the time, I recall the one down the road from me at Lake Claremont. That was not on the river, but I can tell members that it is certainly in a wetland system that is associated with it through the watertable. Chidley Point, Mosman Park, is literally a stone's throw away from some of the priciest real estate to be found in Perth—up there in The Coombe and places like that; it was the site of a major rubbish tip in the 1960s.

I could go on because for a very long time other rubbish tips were for some reason located near the river. We have got away from that. We have seen an improvement in our river systems for decades now. It is something that has been continually developed and fine-tuned by successive governments, including this government. There is no way that members opposite can come into this place in any spirit other than with artifice or some sort of political motivation to suggest that the contrary is true, because any analysis will show that over the years there have been challenges to be met with our river, but governments of all persuasions have understood that the river system is constantly under threat, not from government actions, but from the growth of activity in and around our river systems that causes all sorts of pressure, whether it be risks from pollution or overuse for recreation, transport modes and all the rest of it.

Imagine if we still had rubbish tips on the Swan River—it is unthinkable now! There are other indicators that demonstrate the health of our rivers. From time to time we have read stories about the health of particular fauna

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in and around, for example, the Swan River. There was a time when readers of *The West Australian* got to know the names of the Swan River dolphins; there were not that many of them, and they were all named. The names escape me now, but some enthusiast around here could recite them quite easily. That shows the care being taken by everyone involved in the management of our river. I refer to members who drive up the Kwinana Freeway along the South Perth foreshore. I represent the area, and heaven knows that there are a hell of a lot of members who choose to live there. South Perth is a bit like the western suburbs. I do not live there, of course; I live in the City of Canning, which is continuing as a local government authority, I might add, but that is another story. Back to South Perth which, as I mentioned, is a bit like Fremantle and the western suburbs; it is absolutely infested with resident politicians of one type or another. There are plenty of Labor ones there too, I believe. It is a very popular place. Driving up and down the Como foreshore, the one thing that I have noticed in the time I have been a member in this place is a dramatic increase in the number of swans. Between 12 and 15 years ago, there were no swans, but now there are plenty of them. It is a well-established marine environment and sanctuary for not only swans, but also various types of birds and other fauna life. The presence of those animals and the fact that they are nesting, breeding, thriving and coming back tells us one thing: the health of the river is getting better, not worse. Despite what we do, nature is very resilient, but if an environment is contaminated and not favourable to swans and others, they will go elsewhere—and for many years, that is what they did. They are back now and they are thriving. That is not the sign of a degraded environment for which the responsible authority needs to be condemned.

I am interested, too, in the furore that is caused every now and then when there are changes in the organisational structure of who looks after places such as the Swan River, seeing that I am talking particularly about the Swan River. Just now there are all sorts of concerns about the future of the Swan River Trust. Would it be fair of me to say that it is the opposition's view—or expressed view, at least—that what this government is proposing to do will lead to the sky falling in, because of a reorganisation in the administrative arrangements of this part of the public sector? I do not know. The Department of Parks and Wildlife is already the main employer of the people who care for Western Australia's rivers, estuaries and so on, and that will continue to be the case. It seems to me that whenever there is concern and a political argument about who will manage this or that, whether it is our river systems, parks or hospitals, or just about anything else, it comes down to an ideological position based on whether it fits the desire of the centre-left or the centre-right to have the day-to-day management of such affairs. It has nothing to do with the quality of the service provided by the employees of the managing authority. Perhaps that is what this is all about. As with so many other motions on notice, this motion starts with the words "That this Council condemns the Barnett government for its failure to" and members opposite can insert whatever they are complaining about this week.

I urge members opposite to understand that the reason the current government was returned in 2013 was that the people collectively approved of its track record and appreciated the way it was going about business. That is why governments get into power and why they stay there. What members opposite perhaps need to understand—I refer to any members opposite at any time—is that our community is looking for something with a bit more imagination and inspiration than endless motions that are word-perfect because they are the same motion, but are quite meaningless in their content and in the way they are debated. The opposition should come up with some better ideas about what it could do rather than reproduce two-year-old motions that were written in the first half of 2013 and that it believes are somehow relevant today.

Hon Kate Doust: I should do a *Hansard* check of what you used to put forward when you were in opposition. I'm sure I could find a few under your name, Hon Simon O'Brien.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: From me? I was never negative!

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson): Order, members! Hon Simon O'Brien has the call.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: The fact is that our state at this time and in recent years has been under increasing pressure brought on by circumstances of rapid economic expansion, particularly but not only in the mining and service sector, which has led to an influx of population into the south west of our state, the Perth metropolitan area and the Peel region. That has put pressure on a number of institutions such as schools, which have to find room for extra students, and hospitals, which have to find room for extra patient loads and so on. It also causes other pressure on our environment, including when a relatively well-to-do community, with all its boating needs, produces stresses by way of its activities on and around the river. There are a whole range of pressures that may result in impacts on the river. It is not the government's fault that those pressures exist, but it is responsible for making sure that they are managed properly. The fact is that most of the expansion that occurs in urban areas occurs around the estuaries and rivers that flow into them. Why is that? It is because everyone cares about them; they want to live close to them and recreate nearby because it is pleasant to do so.

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I hope it is not a secret, but the key to making sure that we have healthy river systems, particularly in an urban environment, is not about having flagship organisations that fit the desired profile of the government of the day; it is about how our rivers are managed right across government. It is not a unidimensional system whereby the Swan River Trust can do it all. It does not work that way. I am looking at the Minister for Agriculture and Food because, as he well knows, even though agriculture is important to our economy and the people in Western Australia, agricultural activities and horticultural activities in particular in the metropolitan area do impact, or threaten to impact, on our system, so it is about our management of agriculture. We must also make sure that a government knows how to regulate the industrial activity that also takes place.

In my opening remarks, I reminded members about the rubbish tips that used to exist around the Swan River. We learnt that lesson long ago. However, the impacts of those rubbish tips on our waterways were not as serious in many cases as the threats from industry in the much more heavily populated area that are now confronting the river. Industrial waste that finds its way lawfully or, even worse, unlawfully into our water system has to be managed. Providing scientific knowledge about our aquatic and marine environment so that we can measure whether our rivers are healthy is another role that governments have to play. We must act in concert with local governments to make sure that, in our planning requirements, in the design of infill suburbs and so on—all of that is happening and is challenging us, even in the inner areas—we do not somehow place through our sewerage, stormwater drainage and so on the sorts of pressures on the river system which will damage it and from which it will find great difficulty recovering.

I have not heard a single thing said by anyone in support of this motion that wants to go to any of those places or that contemplates the very good work that the Barnett government has done through ministers such as Hon John Day in targeting our urban planning specifically to make sure that we have a healthier environment because we get our population patterns right and our future demographics set up or to make sure that our public health is guaranteed every time an engineer creates a blueprint. I think it clearly can be seen that there are some things that the Barnett government can be congratulated on. I know it is not very fashionable to do so lately.

Hon Kate Doust: Lots of promise; not much delivery.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I might put a motion on notice that the house congratulates the Barnett government.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members on both sides! Hon Simon O'Brien has the call.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Perhaps we could contemplate the things that successive governments have achieved. I remember a campaign in 2008; that was the year of the early election, in case I did not mention that earlier. Actually, the mover of the motion was the president of the ALP at that election.

Hon Samantha Rowe: Don't point.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Why not?

Hon Kate Doust: You'll upset Hon Liz Behjat; she doesn't like pointing.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: She will be all right; do not worry about it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson): Order, members! I remind Hon Simon O'Brien to direct his comments through the Chair and not address members directly.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I will indeed, Madam Acting President. That was an election when the community was asked to name three things that the Carpenter government had achieved.

Hon Kate Doust: We can name more than three things.

[The Deputy President took the chair.]

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Members could not at the time, so they have obviously had a few years to think about it. At the time, everyone said that the Mandurah rail line got opened, but no-one could rattle off three things.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Simon O'Brien has the call.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: If we run the same ruler over the first Barnett government or, indeed, the second Barnett government, we will find a track record that is truly admirable not only in infrastructure building and all the other good things that have been delivered —

Hon Kate Doust: What did you actually build in your first term? What did your government actually build of its own volition that wasn't finishing off stuff that we'd started?

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Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I could name a few in my own portfolios—Mandjoogoordap Drive, Daddow Road bridge, Lake Raeside bridge. The last time I was on my feet, I mentioned the good work that flowed on from our disability policy to deliver post-school options to all people with serious disability. Is there anything else I could go on.

Hon Kate Doust: It's a shame they got rid of you as a minister; you seem to be the only one capable of doing anything.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! I remind members that we are dealing with motions on notice and the waterways environmental degradation motion. I suggest that members stay on topic. I give the call to Hon Simon O'Brien.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I would like to thank members opposite for their assistance in helping to remind me of a few of the things that have gone on.

Hon Sally Talbot: Always happy to help.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Hon Sally Talbot is always happy to help, and that is good.

Any frank analysis of the record could, in fairness, perhaps say that we would like some slightly different things to be done with the management of our waterways.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to temporary orders.