

HERDSMAN LAKE WILDLIFE CENTRE — WA GOULD LEAGUE FUNDING CUT

Grievance

MR S.K. L'ESTRANGE (Churchlands) [9.14 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Education and Training, who is represented by the Minister for Tourism. My grievance to the Minister for Education and Training concerns the planned funding cut to the WA Gould League, which successfully manages Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre and its education programs. The government is scrapping the annual \$165 000 funding to the WA Gould League, thus preventing the delivery of essential and unique learning experiences provided to schoolchildren from kindergarten to year 12. The annual funding of \$165 000 provided by the Department of Education allows for a full-time education officer and an administration assistant at Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, thus providing schools with a unique wildlife excursion venue at which children can learn the value and wonders of nature whilst meeting many of the requirements of the Australian curriculum for the school foundation year through to year 9 for science, history and geography.

Premier Mark McGowan stated in December —

What we've done is look for savings measure — things at the edges that are nice to have, but not necessary to have," ...

More recently during a media release about boosting science in primary schools, the Premier stated —

We want to spark an interest in science in WA children from a young age, so they continue with that study in secondary school and are ready for the jobs of the future.

Science labs have their function, but nothing beats practical outdoor science education. Where can our children go within six kilometres of Perth city to discover a nature-rich environment and natural wetland ecosystem while expanding their education and experiencing nature? The answer is Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre. We all want children to continue to benefit from this learning establishment into the future. Not only is the funding cut jeopardising the future of Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, but it will also limit future generations from developing natural scientific skills whilst building an appreciation of the history and cultural significance of Herdsman Lake to the traditional custodians of the land, the Noongar people. Surely this is a worthwhile science learning experience broadening those experiences of a classroom and science laboratory. Each year approximately 6 500 students participate in the education programs at Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre with some 2 000 students taking part in the Indigenous education program, Ancient Science. This initiative teaches cultural history from local Aboriginal elders, which helps students break down cultural barriers and learn about the modern and ancient ecological footprint. Of significance, the Ancient Science initiative was a finalist in the Premier's Science Awards in 2013 for Science Engagement Initiative of the Year.

I must also bring to the minister's attention that the partnership between the Department of Education and the WA Gould League stems back almost 80 years to 1939. The Department of Education assisted in establishing the WA Gould League to facilitate the provision of environmental education experiences to schools with Charles Hadley, the then Director of Education, as its president. The Department of Education has given Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre a school code and it is considered a specialist school facility. It saddens the community that the McGowan Labor government is removing funding from this valuable establishment at a time when we should be encouraging our children and future generations to put down their phones, iPads and other electronic devices and explore and learn about the wonderful natural environment through Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre. We should in every way be encouraging and even expanding programs that will teach children an appreciation of our native flora and wildlife species that inhabit the natural wetland ecosystems at Herdsman Lake.

On behalf of schools, teachers, children and parents in metropolitan Perth, and along with the professional staff and many volunteers, we request that the Minister for Education and Training reverse this funding cut decision so that this esteemed education facility can continue to provide our children with an irreplaceable, practical science and wildlife learning experience.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism) [9.18 am]: I am representing the Minister for Education and Training from the other place. Therefore, I sought a response to the member's grievance from her office. I will deliver that response rather than go free range. The response is this: getting the state's finances back on track is a key priority for the McGowan Labor government. We are implementing responsible financial management and fair budget repair measures, with all parts of the community—government, business, industry, individuals and families—needing to contribute to this endeavour. This means that we have had to make tough decisions—tough decisions that the previous Liberal–National government was unable to make.

I note that the member for Churchlands was not in the position long, but he was the former Minister for Finance so he should be well aware of the state of the finances—or perhaps not, so it seems. We know the previous

government had \$137 million in education savings booked, but it did not dare tell anyone in this state how they would be achieved. As the Minister for Education and Training said in the other place, it seems this debate continues to be held in a vacuum and, I would say, in the absence of facts.

Some would describe this budget repair measure as penny-pinching because such a small amount of money will be saved. We have a responsibility to repair the budget and, although these decisions have not been easy, repairing the budget is a shared responsibility. Every small saving adds up and contributes towards budget repair, which will be a long-term, slow process over many years. Every line in the education budget was reviewed and continues to be reviewed.

We also face the unenviable task of having to do things differently from how they have been done in the past. I appreciate the members of the WA Gould League and their work. However, there are a number of opportunities to educate children about the natural environment, and schools right across the state make use of their surrounding natural environment to educate children. Not all of them can travel to Herdsman Lake, so they approach education on the natural environment, flora and fauna in other ways.

Although the programs for schools are well respected and in some ways unique, they need to be seen in proportion and in the context of other environmental education programs in public schools. The number of public school students participating in Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre school programs in 2017 represented approximately 0.6 per cent of all public school students. By way of comparison, more than 500 schools are participating in the Sustainable Schools WA initiative, with students engaged in practical, school-based activities such as energy conservation, waste management and biodiversity conservation.

Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre also provides community-based programs and services, but these are not part of the funding arrangement with the Department of Education. Examples include frog fests, involving a night walk and associated activities; tadpole exchange, via online booking and database; and an inquiry service, generally regarding sick and injured wildlife. The centre averages approximately five community visitors per day.

Getting students excited about science, technology, engineering and maths—STEM—is critical. As a government, we have delivered our commitment around science and technology education, with the first 100 primary schools getting science laboratories and equipment. This is a significant boost to students learning STEM and will better prepare students for secondary school. This government is continuing to modernise our schools, which will enable our students to take full advantage of the opportunities of the future and will see our state reach its full potential.

Although the service provided by the WA Gould League to government and non-government schools is valuable, the need to repair the state's finances after eight years of neglect is vital. It is correct that the Gould League manages Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre and receives \$165 000 annually from the Department of Education to fund a public service level 6 education officer—centre manager and a public service level 2 administrative officer. The funding contract was due to cease in December 2017; however, the government extended this for a year. The department is assisting the Gould League in finding an alternative source of sponsorship. The expected savings over the forward estimates are \$300 000.

The member for Churchlands has already raised in this place that the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre is a school with a school number. However, he is wrong in his conclusion that this identifying number makes the centre a school. A unique code number is assigned by the department to all schools in Western Australia and various other facilities at which where Department of Education personnel may be located. The person employed by the centre has historically been a Department of Education teacher on secondment, so they are paid by the Gould League, using its grant, but seconded so that their entitlements are maintained and their service record is not interrupted. However, that teacher's leave entitlements, superannuation and the like still have to be managed by the personnel section in the department, so for administrative purposes, the centre is given a code so it can appear on the teacher's record as the location of that teacher. The code does not bestow school status on that site; it is purely for HR administrative purposes. The code assigned to Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre is 5978. Facilities like Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre that do not enrol students are not considered to be schools under longstanding, nationally agreed reporting conventions.