

PLAN FOR OUR PARKS

590. Mr M. HUGHES to the Minister for Environment:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's Plan for Our Parks initiative, which will create five million hectares of new national and marine parks in Western Australia.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house how this important initiative will create new tourism opportunities and provide enhanced biodiversity conservation across the state?
- (2) Can the minister update the house on the delivery to date of this significant increase to the state's conservation estate?

Mr R.R. WHITBY replied:

I thank the member for Kalamunda, a member who is passionate about the environment and the beautiful hills community that he represents. It is no wonder he asked this question today.

- (1)–(2) This is one of those issues, policies and commitments that our government is just getting on with. It will be one of those legacy issues that we will look back on and marvel at the achievement of this government in protecting the environment. I can tell members that we have made significant progress in our Plan for Our Parks.

I was recently in the Kimberley electorate to announce the creation of the new Bunuba National Park in the Fitzroy River area. It covers an area of more than 220 000 hectares of the stunning, amazing Kimberley landscape, including the beautiful Fitzroy River. An area larger than metropolitan London will be preserved and protected in perpetuity for all the community, including the traditional owners. The creation of this park marks the halfway milestone for Plan for Our Parks. Members might remember we committed to creating five million hectares of new national parks and reserves over five years. Bunuba gets us to 2.5 million hectares of land and sea now protected under this initiative. Members would be aware that the major legacy of this is that it increases the area covered by our parks and reserves across Western Australia by 20 per cent. This is a significant increase in what is protected across Western Australia. Over the last three months, we have also finalised additions to Kennedy Range National Park and Pimbee National Park, created the Lake Moore Nature Reserve as well as included 800 000 hectares of new conservation reserves at Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara, Lake Carnegie and Little Sandy Desert. That was no small feat as it is an area bigger than Bali. It comprises the largest area of exclusive possession land ever to be reserved as part of a conservation agreement in Western Australia.

This is important work that protects some of the state's most valuable natural assets, including wetlands, rangelands, forests, marine areas and scores of threatened flora and fauna. That has now been secured. But it is not just about conservation; this initiative also provides the basis for a new era in working with traditional owners. Plan for Our Parks provides transformative job opportunities, training and career development for many Aboriginal people in all areas of land management. There is also a considerable opportunity for the further development of nature-based and cultural tourism attractions and facilities, based on the remoteness, vast open spaces and spectacular scenery of where we are creating these parks. Therefore, the environment is protected, but there is also an economic story here for traditional owners to become proud of their country and proud to protect it. It will create business and entrepreneurial opportunities for traditional owners from remote communities.

A great deal of work is currently going on in negotiating Indigenous land use agreements with traditional owners, and I will have more to say on this later this year as we continue to open new parks to protect more of Western Australia's unique and very valuable natural landscape.