

ENVIRONMENT — SWAN COASTAL PLAIN

1081. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt to the minister representing the Minister for Environment:

I refer to the *State of the Environment Report* (SoE) for Western Australia, published by the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) in 2007, and I ask:

- (a) what percentage of the original wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain have been cleared, drained or filled since European settlement in 1829;
- (b) what percentage of the remaining wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain have high conservation value;
- (c) noting that the EPA estimated in SoE 2007, page 93, that wetlands loss on the Swan Coastal Plain was continuing at the rate of about 1500 hectares per year, how many more hectares of wetland have been lost since 2004;
- (d) what policies and plans has the Government in place or in mind to halt this ongoing wetland loss;
- (e) when does the Government intend to release its wetland buffer guidelines that have been in preparation since 1997; and
- (f) will the Minister take urgent action to gazette the Environmental Protection (Swan Coastal Plain Wetlands) Policy, which was prepared by the EPA following extensive public consultation in 2001–2005:
 - (i) if no to (f), why not?

Hon Stephen Dawson replied:

- (a) The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) maintains the ‘Geomorphic Wetlands, Swan Coastal Plain’ spatial dataset. This spatial dataset was originally digitised from wetland mapping published in 1995, and it is updated when site investigations are undertaken. In this dataset, 72 per cent of wetlands have been degraded (for example, cleared, drained or filled) to the extent that they are no longer priority for conservation. These wetlands are in the ‘Multiple Use’ management category. This dataset does not reflect the full extent of wetland loss.
- (b) In the ‘Geomorphic Wetlands Swan Coastal Plain’ dataset, 21 per cent of wetlands have a ‘Conservation’ management category.
- (c) Based on analysis of the ‘Geomorphic Wetlands Swan Coastal Plain’ spatial dataset from January 2005 to present, 564 hectares of wetland were re-evaluated to ‘Not Applicable’, that is, not a wetland; and 2497 hectares have been downgraded from ‘Conservation’ management category to ‘Multiple Use’ wetlands. This spatial dataset is not intended to reflect the loss of wetlands over time, because it is only updated when DBCA is requested to review wetland management categories.
- (d) *Draft State Planning Policy 2.9 Planning for Water* includes wetlands as an important theme. Public consultation was undertaken in late 2021. Submissions are now being assessed and the policy amended as necessary. A wetlands position statement and guidelines are being drafted to provide further guidance on wetlands, which will incorporate wetland buffers. A review of existing wetlands policies is being undertaken concurrently with the drafting of the position statement. The review will identify policies for consolidation, updating and, if appropriate, rescinding.
- (e) The draft position statement and guidelines are likely to be released for public consultation in the second half of 2023.
- (f) The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) Report, Revised Draft Environmental Protection (Swan Coastal Plain Wetlands) Policy and Regulations, dated 8 November 2004, was prepared following a statutory review of the *Environmental Protection (Swan Coastal Plains Lakes) Policy 1992* (Lakes EPP) in 1999. In 2015, the EPA provided a further report under s.33(2) of the *Environment Protection Act 1986* on the Lakes EPP, recommending that the Minister for Environment revoke the policy as there was adequate protection of lakes provided through other statutory, policy and planning mechanisms. The EPA undertakes an annual review of policy priorities and has not identified further review of the draft Environmental Protection (Swan Coastal Plain Wetlands) Policy as a current priority.
 - (i) Not applicable.