

**BUDGET ESTIMATES 2009-2010 – QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
**Questions relating to the portfolio of Climate Change and the Environment**  
**17 September 2009**

**Questions from Ms Robertson**

**1 NSW Environmental Trust**

- a. What is the Government doing to support the many community organisations, local councils and businesses around NSW to address environmental degradation and sustainability in the state?

**Answer**

The NSW Government has been a long term partner and supporter of individuals, households, organisations, businesses and communities who are committed to tackling environmental challenges across this state.

The NSW Environmental Trust is an independent statutory body, established by the NSW Government to support exceptional environmental projects.

It is now celebrating its 11<sup>th</sup> year and is now a core part of the Government's efforts to sustain strong community action on the environment.

The Trust gives grants to community groups, non government organisations, Aboriginal organisations, local councils, the business community and state agencies under a range of programs, all of which are regularly and independently reviewed to ensure that they are addressing the State's most pressing environmental issues.

The Trust is unique in Australia in its longevity, the breadth of issues that can be addressed through its programs and the overall size of funding available. It has become a highly trusted and credible way for the NSW Government to partner with communities, business and academia in working towards environmental sustainability.

At any one time, the Trust may be supporting up to 600 projects across the State under its programs. These projects address priority environmental issues such as climate change, river and ecosystem health, community involvement and local environmental sustainability priorities.

The Trust provides an important impetus for jobs and environment protection in NSW, particularly in regional and local urban areas.

Building on achievements of past rounds of Trust programs, an update on the 2009 round of contestable grants through the Environmental Trust can be given.

Through the current round, 659 applications were received from community organisations, local councils, schools, universities, regional and state agencies.

The independent technical assessment is being completed on all applications and recommendations will be provided to the Trust for approval over the next few months.

Around \$6.5 million worth of funding under 10 programs will be allocated to successful applicants to maintain the momentum of environmental action around the state. Funding is available under the following programs:

- *The Restoration and Rehabilitation Program*  
Grants up to \$100,000 are available for projects that address environmental degradation. \$3 million in total will be given to community organisations, local councils and agencies.
- *The Protecting Our Places Program*  
This showcase program is providing individual grants up to \$35,000 for Aboriginal organisations from a total allocation of \$500,000. These projects are to address environmental issues like illegal dumping, water pollution or degradation in areas of significance to Aboriginal people.
- *The Lead Environmental Community Groups Program*  
This helps fund non government environmental organisations meet basic administration costs. Individual grants of up to \$80,000 per annum are available. The government has doubled the amount available under this program to \$600,000 annually. These funds are provided so that community based organisations can continue to undertake their important work of raising community awareness of environmental issues and solutions.
- *The Environmental Education Program*  
Grants up to \$100,000 are available with a total allocation of \$1 million. Projects will be delivered through community organisations, local councils and agencies.
- *The Eco School Grants Program*  
60 grants of \$2,500 are made available for schools each year (total of \$150,000). These aim to ensure that the next generation of Australians gain direct exposure to our environment and begin to understand their responsibilities for its protection.
- *The Environmental Research Grants Program*  
Grants up to \$200,000 are available to research organisations (total allocation of \$1 million) for projects that address our most pressing environmental issues.
- *The Urban Sustainability Seed Funding Program*  
The Urban Sustainability Program is currently investing almost \$80 million to local government in NSW to undertake ground breaking sustainability projects. This stream of the program assists councils and alliances of councils to undertake sustainability planning

Some examples of innovative projects currently funded by the Trust include:

1. Clarence Valley Council's *Lake Wooloweyah (Wool-lo-way-ah)- Water Quality and Aquatic Habitat Improvement* project which has been granted \$79,883

2. The Burra Creek Landcare Group's *Riparian Revegetation Burra Creek to Create Major Biolink* which has been granted \$61,600
3. The Sydney Institute of Marine Science's *Climate Change Effects* project which has been funded \$95,066
4. The Murray and Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations' *Murray Country - Sharing Indigenous Environmental Values* project which has been granted \$35,000
5. The Evans River K-12 School's \$2500 for its *Whole School Waste Reduction and Recycling Project*

These are the sort of proven projects that can be replicated by communities, local councils, business associations, NGOs and agencies across NSW.

While the 2009 round of applications is now complete, the 2010 round of Environmental Trust contestable grants will be opening in early 2010. Guides for Applicants are available from the Department of Environment and Climate Change and Water website.

## **2 Catchment Management Authorities**

- a. Can the Minister advise on NSW Catchment Management Authorities' achievements in protecting and enhancing the State's natural resources?

### **Answer**

Since 2004, at least five million hectares of land, which is equivalent to six per cent of the area of NSW, has been protected, repaired, treated and/or rehabilitated with direct support from our 13 Catchment Management Authorities known as CMAs.

To date, CMAs have invested nearly \$667 million of NSW and Commonwealth funds in on-ground natural resource management.

Each CMA works closely with its local community and landholders to deliver real natural resource management outcomes across four broad themes of biodiversity, water, land and community.

For biodiversity, some of these achievements include over 2.5 million hectares of native vegetation that has been enhanced or rehabilitated or protected – which is equivalent to over a third of the landmass of Tasmania.

Within this, over 300,000 hectares of land have been isolated by exclusion fencing to protect significant species and ecological communities.

In addition, CMAs have helped landowners put in place measures to control invasive weeds across NSW covering an area almost five times the size of the Australian Capital Territory.

CMAAs have improved water quality by enhancing, rehabilitating and protecting 135,960 hectares of riparian native vegetation, 87,786 hectares of wetland native vegetation and 9,451 hectares of coastal native vegetation.

In terms of land management, CMAAs have helped improve the soil condition of almost 2.2 million hectares of land through activities like increasing organic matter, soil acidity treatments or conservation farming practices – this is equivalent to an area the size of over 3 million football fields.

In addition to this, almost 70 thousand hectares of land have been protected from soil erosion by engineering works.

In establishing these Authorities, the NSW Government will ensure that regional communities have a significant say in how natural resources are managed in their catchments.

The independent Boards have successfully engaged with their communities through a range of activities such as holding 8,715 events organised to increase community capacity in natural resource management – with over 141,000 people attending these events.

CMAAs have also negotiated over 13,200 voluntary conservation agreements, and 1064 conservation covenants have been placed on land titles. This equates to 10 agreements being signed every working day over the last five years.

The NSW Government is committed to ensuring that Catchment Management Authorities continue this on-ground natural resource management investment into the future.

In 2009/10 the NSW Government financial commitment to Catchment Management Authorities has increased, and together they will spend over \$124 million to help protect and enhance our valuable natural resources across NSW.

### **3 Contaminated Land Management**

- a. How effective has the NSW Government's framework for the management of contaminated lands been in clearing up these sites and what is the NSW Government doing to prevent land contamination?

#### **Answer**

Historical industrial and waste disposal practices have left numerous legacies of contaminated land that can present an ongoing hazard to both the community and the environment. Because of this contamination, there are limits on how this land can be put to more valuable uses in the community.

NSW has a formidable track record in passing strong legislation and taking clean up action over the last decade to deal with these legacy issues which had remained in the "too hard basket".

This started with legislation being passed in 1997 to control the clean up of significant sites and capitalised on opportunities such as the Olympics to galvanise action.

The progressive remediation and redevelopment of sites such as the Rhodes Peninsula, the Homebush Olympics site and Breakfast Point has been facilitated by the comprehensive NSW legislative framework and implementation program.

The value of development of these sites, many of which were alongside our rivers and harbours, exceeds an estimated \$10 billion.

This injection into the NSW economy has transformed derelict and polluted industrial sites, and has significant implications for sustained employment and residential growth in NSW.

The clean up of contaminated sites is technically complex and very time consuming. The NSW Government is committed to providing the necessary legislative framework to clean up the community's legacy of past industrial practices.

The *Contaminated Lands Management Act*, which was most recently updated in July this year, provides a framework for effective and timely remediation operations. For the most significant sites, it requires those responsible for pollution to clean it up under close regulation and monitoring by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water.

When those who are responsible for the pollution of the land are unable or unwilling to address their responsibilities, the costs of cleanup could fall on the broader community.

While the Department is generally able to negotiate to achieve the voluntary participation of responsible landowners and polluters, sometimes it is necessary to order recalcitrant parties to shoulder their responsibilities.

Operational experience since the introduction of the *Contaminated Land Management Act* in 1997 has identified improvements to streamline the operation of the Act, which started on 1 July 2009.

These changes reduce the regulatory steps to get a site cleaned up and make it clear that multiple polluters can be responsible for the clean up of a site.

These latest improvements to the Government's system for managing contaminated sites will further help to ensure the community and the environment are protected.

#### **4 Carbon Neutrality and Government Sustainability (incl DECCW)**

- a. How will the NSW Government deliver on its commitments to improve sustainability and become carbon neutral by 2020?

**Answer**

The NSW Government Sustainability Policy outlines how the government will lead by example in sustainable water use, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, waste and fleet management and sustainable purchasing.

It will do this through a number of measures, including the provision of support by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water to other government agencies.

The Department is the lead agency for policy development and review, reporting on the NSW Government's performance, and for delivering the Waste Reduction and Purchasing Policy, or WRAPP.

NSW has reported on waste and recycling performance for over 10 years.

I am advised that the NSW Government has been the only government in Australia to do so.

The Department is also leading annual water and energy reporting for whole-of-government. It also provides support to agencies in the form of guidance, capacity building, technical assistance, benchmarks and facilitating access to up-front finance.

The NSW Government has set a number of new targets under this policy for agencies to deliver to improve sustainability.

This includes reducing greenhouse emissions from building energy use to 2000 levels by 2020 and a 15 per cent reduction in water consumption across all budget dependant agencies.

In addition, the policy requires all government owned or tenanted buildings to achieve four and a half star environmental performance rating for energy and water efficiency by July 2011. It also requires the purchase of products and appliances with a minimum four star water and energy rating.

The Policy requires 85 per cent of all copy paper purchased by the NSW Government to contain recycled content by 2014, an increase from the current rate that is around 50 per cent.

This is in addition to a continuing commitment for all budget dependant agencies to purchase six per cent Green Power.

The carbon neutral policy committed NSW Cabinet to be carbon neutral by mid-2009, which we have done, and for all government agencies to be carbon neutral by 2020.

Becoming carbon neutral involves three important steps:

- First, measuring an organisation's footprint by taking an inventory of the greenhouse gas emissions generated within a defined boundary of their operation.
- Secondly, develop and implement targeted goals and strategies for reducing those emissions, using cost effective measures.
- Finally, offsetting the remaining emissions generated.

Carbon neutrality for Cabinet has already been achieved with its emissions inventory quantified at 3,180 tonnes per year and verified by a third party (Price Waterhouse Coopers). Offsets have been purchased through a third party broker, focused on accredited renewable energy projects located in NSW.

While the NSW Cabinet's activities result in only relatively small emissions, the NSW public sector is a large set of organisations and achieving neutrality is not a simple exercise.

To achieve this by 2020, NSW will focus on improving energy efficiency and reducing emissions first. Offsetting will also be considered in 2014, and will commence from 2020 if it is recommended.

Further to this, the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water has already taken steps to improve its sustainability and has a strong plan in place to continually improve its environmental performance.

It has become a member of *Sustainability Advantage* to mirror the approach that has been rolled out to more than 250 medium and large sized enterprises across NSW.

As part of this approach, the Department was one of the first state agencies to commence work on its carbon footprint by conducting a Greenhouse Gas Inventory. They have established a baseline on greenhouse gases from which future progress can be measured.

In relation to its buildings, the Department has undertaken National Australian Built Environment Rating System (NABERS) ratings on all office space over 1,000 square metres and is now awaiting the results from the assessors. These will update previous Australian Building Greenhouse Ratings.

The Department intends to develop sustainability checklists for offices smaller than 1,000 square metres and, for buildings over that size, develop plans for achieving energy, water, waste and indoor environment targets.

As part of the Sustainability Advantage program the Department has identified its top water and electricity consuming sites and this year will be preparing and implementing resource efficiency action plans for these sites.

### Water

The Royal Botanic Gardens has halved its water consumption since it began implementing its water savings action plan in 2006.

The Royal National Park is participating in Sydney Water's BizFix program to review visitor amenities to reduce water consumption.

The Department has achieved other significant reductions in its water use including:

- 1.9 kilolitres reduction per day in the Blue Mountains National Park
- 4.5 kilolitres reduction per day in the Royal National Park
- 7.7 kilolitres reduction per day in the Sydney Harbour National Park

### DECCW fleet

The Department has an admirable record on its vehicle fleet's environmental performance and is working hard to continually improve.

At 30 June 2009, the Department had a vehicle fleet of 968 vehicles (for a staff of over 3500) and over half of those are vehicles used in firefighting and difficult terrain for management of our national parks.

Of its passenger vehicles, the Department has 38 hybrids which have an environmental rating of 16+ out of 20, and almost 10 per cent have a rating of 14+, which significantly exceeds the benchmark rating figure of 13.5.

The Department is also trialing a prototype hybrid electric vehicle, the first car of its kind in Australia that can also return power to the grid.

The Department is also increasing its use of ethanol. Over the last year, 21 per cent of petrol purchased was E10 fuel.

### Waste, recycling and purchasing

The Department has reviewed its Procurement Policy to include Government Sustainability Policy requirements, and promoting the use of recycled content copy, printing paper and recycled publication paper.

The Department has updated its Waste Reduction and Purchasing Policy Plan and will set specific improvement targets.

In the 12 months to July 2009, the Department recycled:

- 97 per cent of its waste paper and 95 per cent of its cardboard;
- 100 per cent of its toner cartridges;
- 100 per cent of obsolete computers;
- 76 per cent of vegetation;
- 78 per cent of waste steel; and
- 94 per cent of glass.



The Goulburn St Head Office has upgraded its waste system to maximise recovery opportunities.

98 per cent of copy paper purchased by the Department contained recycled content and 89 per cent of the printing and publications paper used also contained recycled content.

## **5 Improvements in National Parks**

- a. What improvements have been made to National Parks products and destinations to increase visitation and enhance the visitor experience?

### **Answer**

We know that NSW parks are visited by locals, domestic tourists and international visitors, amounting to well over 38 million visits each year.

The majority of visits are made by locals, reinforcing the importance of parks to communities as a place for social interaction, recreation and for providing opportunities for Aboriginal communities to connect with Country.

The pre-eminent roles of national parks and other reserves established under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* are the ongoing conservation and enhancement of natural and cultural values, and the public enjoyment of those values.

It is with this imperative in mind that the NSW Government seeks to encourage visitors to our national parks and promote a greater understanding and awareness of conservation and the importance of our parks.

Sustainable visitation is focussed on developing a wider range of visitor experiences and refreshing our existing offerings to make sure they remain attractive to a changing community. These are nature-based and often small scale, which would be appropriate for a national park.

We are also committed to building awareness of our park system through the promotion of visitor experiences and through strengthening existing and building new partnerships with business, government and the community.

In a recent state-wide telephone survey of park visitors conducted during 2008 by Roy Morgan Research, 91% of visitors said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their national parks experience.

The NSW Government has invested in a range of significant capital projects to maintain or improve visitor infrastructure and visitor experiences.

Overall, the NSW Government invests around \$70 million annually on visitor services and infrastructure.

The four-year *Revitalising Sydney's National Parks Program* program, which concluded in 2008/09, invested \$38 million to upgrade and improve visitor facilities and access in key Sydney visitor destinations in the Blue Mountains, Sydney Harbour, Botany Bay, Ku-ring-gai Chase, Royal, and the Lane Cove and Georges River national parks.

State heritage-listed National Pass Walking Track in Wentworth Falls, was completed last financial year. After many decades this very popular and impressive walk required revitalisation to maintain its important heritage values and ensure a much safer walking track for all visitors.

Another project, the upgrade to the Wentworth Falls Lookout and visitor day-use area, was recently completed in November last year. The Government invested \$1.3 million in this major redevelopment, including new access to the lookouts for disabled visitors, new walkways, signage and picnic grounds, revitalising the highly visited site and making it a truly world class visitor experience.

The *Towards Centenary Project*, resourced through the IPART infrastructure levy, aims to enhance tourism and recreation opportunities in Kosciuszko National Park. It includes funding for visitor infrastructure and facilities, such as new camping areas, lookouts and walking tracks, cross country skiing and horse riding facilities and improved visitor information and education.

Other visitor infrastructure expenditure has included sensitively managed visitor accommodation at the historic Sugarloaf Point Lighthouse Cottages in Myall Lakes National Park, refurbishment of the Lighthouse Keepers' and other beach-side cottages at Cape Byron State Conservation Area and new campgrounds at the recently opened Yanga National Park on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River.

Our national park projects, products and destinations are regularly recognised with tourism awards and acknowledgments.

Montague (Mon-ta-gew) Island Tours won the prestigious national award for ecotourism for the second year running at the 2009 Australian Tourism Awards. It is a unique ecotourism experience that combines an island tour and lighthouse cottage accommodation with conservation education and activities. It is a successful partnership between the Department of Environment and Climate Change, Conservation Volunteers Australia and Charles Sturt University.

Closer to Sydney, the Lane Cove River Tourist Park has won multiple awards for its environmental initiatives, providing visitors with a unique and low-cost ecotourism experience. The Park has Advanced Eco Certification as well as the international Green Globe certification.

Initiatives at the Park include a water management program, habitat projects and a carbon reduction program. Guests can elect to participate in an offset package, with funds reinvested in the site's solar energy and tree planting programs.

In August this year, the Tourist Park's solar generation system, incorporating 60 individually ground-mounted panels covering 400 square metres, was connected to the electricity grid. This new system will reduce the Tourist Park's carbon footprint and provide financial benefits by offsetting some of their operating costs and complimenting the existing mains power supply.

The Government has also received praise for some of the commercial partnerships developed through the national parks extensive leasing portfolio, which includes more than 192 leases, from the award-winning Dorrigo Rainforest Café through to small niche lighthouse accommodation such as Smoky Cape Lighthouse.

These successes are great news for sustainable tourism in NSW. And they're helping us to strengthen and further develop our sustainable tourism offering across the State.

## **6      Solaria Regulation**

- a.      What is the Government doing to protect the community from the harmful effects of artificial sun-tanning machines?

### **Answer**

Most Australians are well aware that sun tanning and exposure to artificial ultraviolet light can increase a person's risk of developing skin cancer.

Yet despite this awareness, we have seen a significant increase in the size of the solarium industry in recent years.

Sun-tanning machines – or solaria – emit the same harmful ultraviolet radiation as the sun, which we are regularly advised to protect ourselves against. They can also cause irreversible damage to our skin.

In fact, the light emitted from solaria can be up to five times stronger than the sun.

With the growth in the solarium industry has come increasing public concern about the unregulated use of sun-tanning machines, particularly by young people.

This issue was brought to the fore by a young Victorian woman, Clare Oliver, who was diagnosed with melanoma which she attributed to her use of solaria.

Prior to her death in September 2007, Clare courageously campaigned to raise awareness of the dangers of solarium use.

Studies have found that individuals who have used solaria have a 22 per cent increased risk of developing melanoma compared to people who have never used them.

If first use occurs under the age of 35, there is a 75 per cent increase in the risk of melanoma.

In the past commercial solarium operators were guided by the Australian Standard for Solarium and voluntary industry guidelines.

However, in two surveys of the industry in 2003 and 2006, NSW Health and the Centre for Health Research and Psycho-oncology found that voluntary compliance was low.

Self regulation clearly was not working.

The NSW Government has been participating in a national process to develop regulatory standards for solarium regulation, and I am pleased to advise that NSW has moved ahead to implement these measures.

Following a period of consultation between December 2008 and February 2009, the Radiation Control Amendment (Tanning Units) Regulation 2009 took effect from 29 May 2009.

Under the regulation, solarium businesses have to comply with a number of safety requirements to ensure that tanning units are being used and promoted in a responsible way.

Key amongst these is that solarium clients must be over 18 years of age and must not have fair skin – fair skin being skin that burns and never tans.

Usage is further limited to those who understand the risks ultraviolet radiation and sign a consent form.

The Regulation requires that appropriate warning notices are displayed, that protective eyewear is worn and that people do not receive any more than the amount of UV radiation specified in the Regulation.

The frequency of exposure is also limited to one session within a 48 hour period. All solarium sessions must be supervised by a trained operator.

The Regulation creates training obligations for operators in conducting skin type assessments, operating tanning machines and implementing other safety provisions.

The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency – or ARPANSA – will provide web-based training to enable operators to demonstrate competency against the regulatory requirements.

There must be no representations or claims about so-called health benefits from using tanning units.

Solarium business operators must notify the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water about the details of their business.

Letters have been sent to solarium businesses outlining requirements under the Regulation and advertisements have been placed in industry publications.

The Department is undertaking a compliance campaign across Metropolitan Sydney in late September and early October 2009 targeting commercial tanning businesses.

There will be further compliance work in other parts of the State during the first 12 months of the operation of the Regulation to ensure operators are adopting compliant practices.

The effectiveness of the Regulation will be reviewed after three years to ensure public health and safety objectives are being met.

## **7 Additions to the Reserve System**

- a. What additions have been made to build a diverse and resilient system of parks and reserves under the National Parks & Wildlife Act?

### **Answer**

The establishment and management of formal public reserves by the NSW Government is one of a number of strategies recognised as necessary to limit the decline of biodiversity and help manage the effects of climate change.

Currently the protected area 'reserve' system protects almost 6.7 million hectares of the State's 80 million hectares of land. The terrestrial reserve system has grown from 4 million hectares in March 1995.

Building the reserve system involves land acquisitions which are sourced in a range of ways: from public lands and by purchasing private lands – that is, private lands purchased by the Department from willing vendors.

Lands are also acquired through transfers and donations, which are titled lands transferred by other state agencies or councils and lands donated by private individuals or organisations.

The NSW National Parks Establishment Plan, which was released by Government in 2008, sets out the strategic directions to be taken for the ongoing building of the park and reserve system established under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*.

The Plan sets out our direction over the long term - for the next 50 years - using a wide range of opportunities including Environmental Trust funding, offsets, donations and bequests.

The NPWS Establishment Plan stands NSW in good stead for receiving funding from the Commonwealth under the National Reserve System or other sources to add more land to the national parks system.

The Rudd Government recently made the on-going development of the National Reserve System its highest priority in natural resource management under its Caring for our Country program.

The Commonwealth Government has confirmed that national parks are the most cost effective way to get on-going natural resource outcomes and committed \$180 million over the next 5 years to grow the reserve system across Australia, particularly in bioregions that do not have many reserves.

The National Parks Establishment Plan is a simple and smart way to help guide where resources are directed — it translates technical and scientific information to a simple list of what needs to be protected in each bioregion in NSW.

Because national parks have a wider set of values than just conserving our natural and cultural heritage, implementation of the Plan will also contribute to other State Plan priorities, including:

- Priority R4 - participation and integration in community activities;
- Priority F1 - health and education for Aboriginal people;
- Priority P6 - business investment in rural and regional NSW;
- Priority E3 - cleaner air and greenhouse gas reductions; and
- Priority E8 - more people using parks, sporting and recreational facilities.

The three major recent additions of Toorale, Booligal and Cranebrook will increase the reserve system by 97,500 hectares and enhance the representation of poorly reserved NSW ecosystems in western NSW and on the Cumberland Plain in line with the priorities in National Parks Establishment Plan.

The recent purchase of the 91,383 hectare property 'Toorale', situated on the junction of the Warrego and Darling Rivers, south west of Bourke, was achieved through a State and Commonwealth Government joint funding agreement.

Toorale provides a unique opportunity for the NSW and Commonwealth Governments to meet multiple priorities including the potential to return about 20,000 megalitres of water to the environment, and the opportunity to reserve a very large, high conservation value property adjacent to an existing national park.

The purchase of Booligal Station, on the Lachlan River just north of Hay, in April of this year has added an additional 5,936 hectares to the reserve system of which 2,500 hectares is Booligal Wetland.

This wetland is of high conservation value and is listed on the Register of the National Estate and the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia.

The purchase will help protect this important wetland system into the future. I am advised that the 24,275 megalitres of water entitlements acquired in the Lachlan from the RiverBank Program will be used to ensure continued support for these wetlands.

The purchase of Cranebrook, 181 hectares, is one of only few sizeable remnants of native vegetation and wildlife habitat on the Cumberland Plain of western Sydney.

It is a fantastic addition to our Sydney National Parks, and forms an important link in a conservation corridor for native animals in an urban environment, and provides a natural setting for the people of western Sydney.

## **8 Environmental Water Recovery and Management**

- a. How is NSW progressing with the recovery of water for the environment and how will this benefit important wetlands?

### **Answer**

Water management within NSW has fundamentally changed over the last decade as national and state reforms have progressed.

Of course, in these desperate times of drought, farmers, rural towns and the environment are all suffering because of the lack of rainfall. However, the NSW Government is carefully progressing reforms which will help farming communities and the environment in the long run.

A key aspect of these reforms was led by NSW in 2000 with the enactment of the *Water Management Act 2000*.

The Act recognises that the environment must receive its share of the water resource, and it sets out a means of recovering water for the environment, particularly in over-allocated regulated river systems.

In addition to the legislative reforms to address the critical shortage of water for the environment in our stressed inland river systems, the NSW Government recognised that more needed to be done.

This is why pursuing both infrastructure improvements to make water delivery more efficient and the purchase of water for the environment are important. These programs work in tandem to benefit our rural communities.

In 2006, the NSW Government established NSW RiverBank, which is administered by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, to buy water licences from willing sellers.

The purpose of RiverBank is to help build on the volume of water available through NSW water sharing plans and actively managed for environmental purposes.

RiverBank has led the way nationally in using markets to recover water for the environment. It has done so without adverse impact on these markets, purchasing at prices consistent with other market transactions.

RiverBank was allocated \$105 million across the five years to June 2012 through the NSW Environmental Trust. It has a business plan and is overseen by a

subcommittee of the Trust which includes members from a wide background including scientists, economists and irrigators.

To August 2009, three years into the RiverBank program, more than 93,500 megalitres of water entitlement had been purchased for the environment within the Gwydir, Macquarie, Lachlan and Murrumbidgee valleys.

This water can then be delivered to iconic wetlands such as the Macquarie Marshes so that it can sustain international migratory and local birds, fish, frogs, aquatic reed beds and magnificent red gum woodlands, and benefit local communities and visitors.

This will provide real and enduring benefit to wetlands within these valleys into the future.

In 2007, NSW received a further \$71.77 million from the Commonwealth Government to support water purchase and improved environmental water planning and management under the Rivers Environmental Restoration Program, using the RiverBank business model.

In fact, the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water works very closely with its Commonwealth counterparts in both purchasing water for the environment and delivering water efficiencies.

For example, joint NSW and Commonwealth Government funding, through RiverBank, has purchased water worth \$12 million under the three year \$26 million Wetlands Recovery Program.

The Riverbank team has also been responsible for acquiring water entitlements worth \$200 million for the Living Murray First Step Initiative which is jointly funded by the Murray-Darling Basin partners.

Through the Commonwealth Living Murray Program, RiverBank has delivered a further 208, 000 megalitres of water to NSW's ecosystems. This was achieved through additional water purchases and efficiency savings.

This Living Murray water will be managed by the Murray Darling Basin Authority for use at Living Murray Icon Sites, including important River Red Gum forests along the Murray River.

Each time an allocation is made to all water licence holders within these valleys, the environment will now get a share as a licence holder.

The Committee will be aware that the past year has seen an escalation of purchase effort by the Commonwealth Government in its own water buyback program. The oversight of NSW interactions with the Commonwealth is the responsibility of the NSW Minister for Water, the Hon Phillip Costa MP.



I understand that Minister Costa is working with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that NSW is not disadvantaged by the Commonwealth's investment effort over the Murray Darling member states.

#### Environmental Water Deliveries

The famed Macquarie Marshes are one of our most well known, large and diverse wetland systems in north western NSW. The Marshes have supported some of the largest water bird breeding events in Australia and are an important refuge for wildlife during dry times as we are experiencing now.

Its catchment also supports some of the more agriculturally diverse landscapes of central NSW. We know that the resilience of the Macquarie Marshes is declining and this presents both ecological and social challenges.

So, the first release of water purchased by RiverBank (known as adaptive environmental water) was made to the north Macquarie Marshes in April 2008.

Nearly 700 megalitres was released to support the breeding of a colony of white egrets (E-GRETS) that had commenced nesting following summer rainfall on the Marshes and inflows from the Macquarie River.

This water was released in conjunction with a release of more than 20,000 megalitres of planned environmental water allocated under the Macquarie and Cudgegong Water Sharing Plan.

The release was made with the support of the Macquarie and Cudgegong Environmental Water Advisory Group established under the Plan.

This year, further environmental water is also being delivered to the southern Macquarie Marshes. Approximately 19,000 megalitres is available, and the release from Burrendong Dam began recently, on 15 August 2009.

Riverbank has been active in other inland areas. There have been a number of important planned environmental and adaptive water deliveries over the past two years.

More than 12,000 megalitres was delivered to the Lower Murrumbidgee (Lowbidgee) and Yanga National Park from late 2007 to early 2008 to recover threatened populations of the endangered Southern Bell Frog. Further environmental flows have been made in May-June 2009 to support stressed wetland environmental of the Lowbidgee floodplain.

Stressed wetlands have now been watered within Yanga National Park as well as on private properties including Nap Nap, Wynburn and Narwhie (*NAR-WEE*), helping to improve the condition of River Red Gums, Black Box and Lignum (*LIG-NUM*);

12,000 megalitres has been delivered to the lower Gwydir and Gingham wetlands in November-December 2007 to maintain wetland vegetation and habitat.

90 megalitres was delivered to Whittaker's Lagoon in the Gwydir Valley from RiverBank licences in late November 2008 to support local birdlife and cultural values, and 6,500 megalitres of planned environmental water was then also delivered to the Gwydir Wetlands in February 2009. This delivery benefited native wetland vegetation and assisted in suppressing the noxious weed *Lippia*;

In turn, the improved vegetation condition has provided critical habitat and protection for wildlife including a variety of waterbirds such as Black-winged stilts, swans and egrets. By maintaining the vegetation within known rookery areas, these waterbirds will be able to use them in wetter years.

## **9 Native Vegetation Reforms**

- a. Have the native vegetation reforms been successful at curbing broad scale land-clearing in NSW?

### **Answer**

The clearing of native vegetation has been identified as the single greatest threat to biodiversity and native plants and animals in NSW.

To address this challenge, the NSW Government made a commitment in 2003 to end broadscale land clearing in NSW, except in cases where it improves or maintains environmental outcomes. This was a historic, and challenging, commitment.

In order to help achieve this goal, the Government introduced new legislation, the *Native Vegetation Act*, to protect the health of our land, rivers and wildlife.

The keystones of these reforms include:

- a simplified property vegetation planning system, including integrated threatened species approvals;
- greater autonomy for farmers through a range of clearing exemptions for routine activities;
- over \$120 million over four years, direct to farmers and other local groups, to protect and conserve native vegetation; and
- a streamlined system for the management of invasive native scrub in Central and Western NSW.

These reforms have delivered positive results since the implementation of the *Native Vegetation Act* in 2005.

- Clearing approvals have decreased from more than 12,000 hectares in 2005/2006 to less than 5450 hectares between 2006 and 2009;
- More than 1.1 million hectares of land, mainly in the western parts of NSW, have been approved for the treatment of Invasive Native Scrub. These are native plant species that, due to their density, can cause environmental

and production problems, including habitat loss, soil erosion, pasture loss, and feral animal habitat;

- To date, more than 1,500 farmers have entered into voluntary Property Vegetation Plans known as PVPs;
- 1100 of these PVPs involve incentive payments to farmers to protect or conserve almost 250,000 hectares of native vegetation.

Following a detailed process of negotiation between the farmers and the Namoi Catchment Management Authority, five PVPs have now been approved to deal with vegetation management at a landscape scale. This had been an integrated and innovative approach.

By working together, these farmers have improved both their collective economic opportunities and conservation outcomes across a very large area of country. This is the first time that such a large area, covering multiple landowners and providing broadscale landscapes benefits, has been brought into the Native Vegetation Act framework.

This takes the achievements of the NSW Government's native vegetation reforms to a new level.

The five Property Vegetation Ps provide the farmers with approval to:

- thin to benchmark 663 hectares of dense vegetation and better manage 75 hectares of invasive native scrub. This will improve the biodiversity values of this vegetation in addition to facilitating greater production and easier management;
- clear scattered trees across 1,700 hectares of existing cropping land. This will facilitate the implementation of more efficient and more environmentally sensitive farming methods such as conservation farming and control track farming. As an offset for removing these scattered trees around 2,750 hectares of vegetation will be enhanced and conserved in-perpetuity;
- clear 941 hectares of degraded native vegetation. As an offset 4,469 hectares of better condition vegetation will be improved and conserved in-perpetuity; and
- in addition to the offsets listed above there will be about 4,000 hectares of additional management area to increase threatened species habitat and reduce the impact of fox and feral cat predation.

The NSW Government has also secured approximately 18,800 hectares of native vegetation for improvement and conservation in perpetuity and has kept its commitment to review this regulatory framework as issues arise. For example:

- a streamlined system for the management of invasive native scrub in central and western NSW was introduced in 2006;
- changes to give local councils more flexibility when constructing infrastructure were added in 2008;

- provision has been made for landscape scale rather than single property assessments in some cases, especially where farmers can work together as a group; and
- sections of the Environmental Outcomes Assessment Methodology relating to biodiversity and threatened species are currently being reviewed to better reflect current knowledge of environmental assessment.

The *Native Vegetation Act* has made a real difference but we're always ready to make improvements. The first five-yearly review of the Act has begun.

The NSW Government has called for public submissions, closing on 23 September 2009, and a discussion paper is available on the website of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water.

All public submissions will be carefully considered as part of the review and a report will be tabled in Parliament once completed.

The Native Vegetation reforms are now well accepted by conservation and farming interests alike. This general support is a testament to the Government's ability to get the balance right when dealing with major environmental issues.

The NSW Government has also made significant achievements in terms of native vegetation compliance.

The Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water uses a range of tools such as education, warnings, penalty notices and prosecutions to ensure that people do the right thing.

The Department commenced ten native vegetation prosecutions during 2008. As of August 2009, the Department has secured convictions for seven of those prosecutions and the remaining three are still in the court process. The Department also issued two stop work orders and four remedial directions in relation to 490 hectares of cleared land; and issued a range of warning and advisory correspondence.

The NSW Government remains committed to supporting farmers and rural communities in managing native vegetation.

The vast majority of farmers do the right thing, manage their properties well, and take great pride in looking after their farms with an eye to the next generation.

The NSW Government remains committed to supporting these farmers and rural communities and has invested \$120 million in Catchment Management Authorities over 4 years to give real local decision making and support funds to help farmers restore the health of the landscape.

It is worth commending all farmers who have made use of the *Native Vegetation Act* to improve the health of farming. The NSW Government will continue to work closely

with landholders, Catchment Management Authorities and other agencies to improve the overall management of the state's native vegetation.

## **10 Captive Breeding Program-Zoo**

- a. Can the Minister please provide the latest information on the Taronga and Taronga Western Plains Zoos' captive breeding programs?

### **Answer**

The Taronga Conservation Society Australia is a major contributor to NSW in the fields of conservation, research, environmental education and tourism.

The Zoos contribute funding and support to over 25 in-situ conservation programs, including the Asian Elephant and Sumatran Tiger, and 11 recovery programs, including the Corroboree Frog and Tasmanian Devil.

Approximately 20% of the Zoos collection of animals participate in regional or global conservation programs, including the Booroolong Frog, Fijian Crested Iguana, Bilby, Snow Leopard and Regent Honey-eater.

The Society is actively involved in 54 Conservation Breeding Programs, including Silvery Gibbon, Greater Bilby and three species of Rhino.

The Society is currently experiencing success with reference to its breeding programs.

In an Australasian first the Society is celebrating three confirmed Asian Elephant pregnancies – a result of the importation from Thailand in 2006.

The first of these calves was born at Taronga Zoo on 4 July – the first in Australia's history. The second is due early next year and the third in late 2010.

In 2008/09, a breed-for-release program for the critically endangered Booroolong Frog was carried out. Booroolong Frogs are found along the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range with recent surveys indicating that it may have disappeared entirely from 80% of its former range.

Taronga Zoo, in conjunction with National Parks and Wildlife, have bred 600 frogs and 13,000 eggs which were released into wild habitat in 2008. Research into their survival rates is currently being assessed.

In 2008/09 the Zoos played a lead role in a national recovery program for the endangered Tasmanian Devil. The Tasmanian Devil populations have declined by more than 50% in the past 13 years as a result of Facial Tumour Disease. This disease is one of only two contagious cancers known to science.

This recovery program is working towards establishing a captive population in the mainland states. Descendants will be re-introduced to wild habitats in Tasmania when, and if, areas are declared free of disease.

The Society has invested approximately \$2.5 million in facilities, research and the funding of a national coordination program.

Breeding and holding facilities at Taronga and Taronga Western Plains Zoos have been built to hold 30 disease-free breeding animals from Tasmania.

Thirteen pouch young were successfully reared in the program's first breeding year of 2008/09.

Taronga Zoo continues its lead role in the conservation program for one of Australia's most critically endangered species – the Corroboree Frog from Kosciusko. Taronga Zoo continues to hatch and raise the Frogs for release in its former habitat. As few as 200 individuals remain in the wild.

In addition:

- Thirteen (13) Regent Honey Eaters were bred in 2008/09 as part of a regional conservation breeding programme for this endangered species. They will be released into the ironbark forests of the Great Dividing Range in the future;
- A pygmy hippopotamus was born in November 2008;
- Taronga Zoo also celebrated the arrival of Binturong (Bin-too-rong), Meerkat and Red Panda during 2008/09;
- Taronga Zoo is a world leader in Red Panda breeding, having welcomed 44 cubs since 1977;
- An endangered Australian Sea Lion was born at Taronga Zoo in January 2009;
- An endangered Francois Langur (Langer) was born at Taronga Zoo in March 2009;
- Taronga Western Plains Zoo welcomed two cheetah cubs in August 2008, a bison in October, a bongo calf in September and a Przewalski's ('Pres-wall-skis') Horse in May 2009. Przewalski's Horse are extinct in the wild and rely on global captive breeding programs for their survival.

The Taronga and Taronga Western Plains Zoos attract more than 1.5 million visitors annually and contribute \$248M to the NSW Economy annually.

The success of these captive breeding programs ensures that locals and visitors to NSW will continue to gain an increased awareness of the plight of threatened and endangered species from around the world.

## Question from Ms Cusack

### 11 National Parks

- a. Please provide details of the regional allocations for National Parks over the past 5 financial years, and the budgeted expenditure for 2009-10?
- b. Please list revenues by National Park for the past three financial years, together with budgeted revenues for 2009-10 (Please break down the information by individual Park).

### Answer

The Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water allocates income received (revenue) and expenditure by the Parks and Wildlife Group on a regional basis rather than by individual parks, except in the case of Kosciuszko National Park. The table shows the four regionally based National Park field branches' actual revenue and direct expenditure between 2004-05 and 2008-09 and the budgeted figures for 2009-10.

#### **PWG Direct Recurrent Expenditure and Income**

##### **2009-10 Budget**

	<b>Central</b>	<b>Northern</b>	<b>Southern</b>	<b>Western</b>
Expenses	62,100,858	65,131,583	65,805,477	35,565,191
Revenue	20,376,010	11,085,883	35,842,885	4,949,203

##### **2008-09 Actuals**

	<b>Central</b>	<b>Northern</b>	<b>Southern</b>	<b>Western</b>
Expenses	64,770,489	63,507,368	63,162,972	33,540,679
Revenue	24,443,149	11,825,555	35,460,534	3,490,666

##### **2007-08 Actuals**

	<b>Central</b>	<b>Northern</b>	<b>Southern</b>	<b>Western</b>
Expenses	61,491,666	61,521,032	54,757,999	29,596,955
Revenue	23,475,837	12,760,977	28,923,975	4,095,453

##### **2006-07 Actuals**

	<b>Central</b>	<b>Northern</b>	<b>Southern</b>	<b>Western</b>
Expenses	66,522,359	54,357,060	60,686,488	32,249,264
Revenue	28,243,521	10,667,349	37,046,967	6,970,578

##### **2005-06 Actuals**

	<b>Central</b>	<b>Northern</b>	<b>Southern</b>	<b>Western</b>
Expenses	55,136,262	53,092,148	51,775,185	25,690,017
Revenue	21,648,591	9,600,638	29,058,178	2,608,403

##### **2004-05 Actuals**

	<b>Central</b>	<b>Northern</b>	<b>Southern</b>	<b>Western</b>
Expenses	44,944,983	45,670,609	46,153,419	18,558,477
Revenue	17,439,884	7,014,953	28,431,716	1,799,642

## 12 Blue Mountains

- a. What is the cost of maintaining a Park Office at Govetts Leap Rd in the Blue Mountains?
- b. What statistics do you have on visitor usage to the Office and how does this compare with visitor usage of the Blue Mountains Council information Centre at Echo Point?
- c. How many tourists are estimated to visit Echo Point each year?
- d. While I appreciate the precinct is owned and managed by Blue Mountains Council, does DECCW have any role in managing the area that is possibly the most popular National Park lookout in Australia?
- e. For example, is it appropriate for pedestrians egress to double as a bus turning circle? (When I visited the lookout on 12 April 2009 - Easter Sunday - I found hundreds of pedestrians, dozens of parked cars and three busses attempting to turn, all sharing the same conflicted space. When buses were wedged between illegally parked vehicles and pedestrians the solution seems to be to sound the horn unremittingly - thus the noise and sense of chaos was incredible. Certainly there were adverse impacts on visitor enjoyment of the lookout. Presumably local residents and businesses could benefit from better management. I am interested to know if DECCW has any issues with this management of the site, particularly arrangements for visitor safety, and any ideas or plans to improve the situation.)
- f. Are there any plans to upgrade DECCW's manual visitor bookings system and the 'honesty box' system for payment of visitor and camping fees in National Parks? What costing if any have been done to establish more modern means of processing payments?

### Answer

- a. The centre is co-located with the NPWS Blackheath Area Office; building costs are not assigned to the cost of operating the centre. Information staff at the centre are funded from retail sales. The Manager's salary and a proportion of running costs are funded from the Blue Mountains Region's recurrent budget in recognition of the importance of the centre's operational role, particularly as the key contact for field and ranger staff rostered on weekends and a point of contact for public enquiry. Expenses for 2008/09 were \$289,000 and Revenue was \$182,000.
- b. The Blackheath Heritage Centre at Govetts Leap in Blue Mountains National Park received 64,000 visitors in 2008/09. The centre has 14 years of data including visitor use and statistics on telephone and internet enquiries. It is now a key centre for the distribution of Personal Locator Beacons as part of the joint Police/NPWS *Think Before You Trek* program.
- c. Echo Point's visitation exceeds 2 million per annum.
- d. DECCW has no direct involvement in the management of Echo Point.



- e. See above.
- f. DECCW is currently undertaking major investigations to develop and implement an online booking system for many of its visitor services throughout the parks system, including hard-roof accommodation, camping, *Discovery Walks, Talks and Tours* and its Annual Pass program.

The application of a modern online booking system to replace current manual booking arrangements will directly benefit visitors to the parks and staff of DECCW by improving customer service and providing a more efficient payment processing system.

The project will be the subject of competitive tender processes and costing information will be available when the preferred tenderers have been selected.

### **13 Grey-Headed Flying Foxes**

- a. The new 'Standard Operating Procedure' which DECCW has mandated in its system of permits to shoot threatened Grey Headed Flying Foxes requires the shooter to travel to the original flying fox camp to identify orphaned young, and to kill them as well. Please explain:
  - i. How do shooters correctly identify which camp the deceased Grey Headed Flying Fox came from?
  - ii. Once they have worked out which camp to attend, for example the Royal Botanic Gardens or Gordon Bat Colony; do you envisage these visits to kill orphaned young will occur that same night while the adult bats are away, or during the day when all the bats are present? If during the night, what arrangements have you made to facilitate access for shooters to the Royal Botanic Gardens for the purposes of killing young endangered Grey Headed Flying Foxes? Will these shooters be expected or otherwise permitted to take their firearms into the Botanic Gardens?
  - iii. What method do you suggest shooters use to correctly identify young orphaned flying foxes? Can you give examples as to where this method has been trialed and used successfully?
  - iv. In the case of an authorized shooter required by the SOP to attend the Royal Botanic Gardens in the middle of the night, for the purposes of identifying and killing orphaned young, can you explain the means by which they will capture orphaned young that are hanging upside down from branches 10-20 meters from the ground? Has the method you recommend been assessed in terms of occupational health and safety?
  - v. Will the Royal Botanic Gardens exempt shooters from their rules prohibiting the climbing of trees? Who will be liable for meeting expenses under this policy associated with damage to trees or park property and/ or accidental injury to shooters required by the Government to correctly identify and retrieve orphaned flying foxes? Will taxpayers be liable for accidental injury caused to staff at the Botanic Gardens or members of the public, such as visitors to the Royal Botanic Gardens (i.e. in the event you require orphaned young in the

- park to be killed during the day) or conservationists studying the Gordon Bat colony during the night?
- vi. Once the orphaned flying fox has been located, identified and captured, what specific means do you envisage will be used to kill them? Which of the following methods are legal or illegal under the SOP?
    - 1. shooting
    - 2. strangulation
    - 3. clubbing
    - 4. drowning
    - 5. other (please specify)
  - vii. How does the SOP for killing Grey Headed Flying Foxes comply with the recovery plan for saving the species from extinction?
  - viii. What funding will be provided to support volunteers seeking to rescue and rehabilitate flying foxes inadvertently injured by shooters who fail in the difficult task of making a clean headshot on an in-flight flying fox at night? Will additional resources be available for counselling services for distressed volunteers?
  - ix. What compliance activity will be undertaken to ensure the requirements of the SOP such as killing orphaned young are fulfilled? What is the penalty for failing to kill orphaned young? Is there a penalty for killing young flying foxes who are not orphaned? How will the compliance officers verify whether the shooter has correctly identified that baby flying foxes he is required to kill are in fact orphans?
  - x. What is the timeframe for relocating the flying fox camp at the Royal Botanic Gardens? What has been expended on the project to 30 June 2009 and what additional funds are budgeted to be spent post 30 June 2009? Where will the flying foxes be moved?

## **Answer**

i – ix

The Standard Operating Procedures (SoP) for shooting of flying foxes are being developed by the Department of Industry and Investment (DII) and these questions should be answered by the Minister for Primary Industries. DII is currently reviewing the draft following stakeholder input, and the practicalities of the orphan young provisions will be considered through this process. Once the draft is finalised, DECCW will require that licensed shooters adhere to the SoP.

- x. The relocation program for the flying fox camp at the Royal Botanic Gardens (RBG) is scheduled for between May – July 2010, subject to approval from the Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

Expenditure to 30 June 2009 is \$194,500. Fifty percent of this was funded by the Friends of the Gardens group, which continues to fundraise for the program. The RBG expects to expend \$150,000 on a research program that includes analysis of diet and tracking movement, mortality and changes in reproductive rates as a result of the camp dispersal; \$150,000 on planning and operational plan costs; and up to

\$50,000 in in-kind and cash support for assistance to Grey headed flying fox camp managers and animal welfare organisations. There may be other costs associated with the ongoing maintenance program but this is not yet known. Given the heritage values of the trees and their setting within the RBG, these costs are considered reasonable.

Six potential dispersal sites for the flying foxes have been nominated, five of which are within the Sydney National Parks network. They are: sections of Garigal National Park; Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park; Botany Bay National Park – Kurnell; Lane Cove National Park; and Royal National Park. The sixth site is the Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve in Gordon. Should the flying-foxes settle in a location other than one of these nominated sites, DECCW will assess the potential impacts on any adjacent urban areas, and/or the ecological values of the site, to determine whether the flying-foxes need to be further relocated.

Staff will monitor the camp for orphaned flying-foxes on a daily basis during and after the relocation. Grey headed flying-fox pups are dependant on their mothers between birth in early October and 'independence' in late February, and monitoring would occur during this period.

## **14 Wilderness**

- a. Given the resilience of wilderness land to withstand the ecological impacts caused by human accelerated climate change, has the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water's elevated the priority of wilderness acquisition in the agencies' land acquisition strategy?
- b. Can the Government ensure that wilderness lands acquired by the agency, and particularly by donations and gifts, will be declared as wilderness under the Wilderness Act, 1987 as soon as possible, including those acquired at Green Gully in 2003 and those acquired through the White Wilderness Legacy in 2007?
- c. Can the Minister advise on the level of agency funds and resources allocated to undertake wilderness assessment processes?
- d. Can the Minister outline the amount of funding and the extent of wilderness assessment program?
- e. Does the Government have funding arrangements in place for the wilderness assessments regarding the environment groups' 2005 Southern wilderness nominations, the Sandon and Woolli wilderness nominations in the Yuraygir National Park, the Murruin wilderness nomination in the Blue Mountains National Park, and the Moors wilderness nomination in the Myall Lakes National Park, noting that all these nominations are overdue in relation to the designated two year time period for wilderness assessments in the Wilderness Act, 1987?

- f. As two million hectares of the national parks estate are also declared as wilderness, has the Government considered the establishment of a Wilderness Branch within the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water to elevate the priority of wilderness protection and ensure sympathetic and consistent wilderness management across the agency?
- g. Has the Government considered amending the Forestry and National Parks Estate Act to permit the more operation of Wilderness Act processes and wilderness management for those wilderness areas considered not to contain commercial timber value?

### **Answer**

- a. This Government recognises the importance of large and relatively unmodified reserves for maintaining biodiversity in the face of climate change. This is reflected in the strategies of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water for building the reserve system and for responding to climate change. These strategies specifically target large and relatively unmodified areas, including lands with wilderness values, for acquisition and reservation.
- b. Lands which are identified as wilderness under the *Wilderness Act 1987* and which are purchased by the Department are declared as wilderness as soon as practicable following their reservation under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. There is a detailed process for identifying, assessing and declaring wilderness areas, which includes a number of administrative and legal steps that must be completed before an acquired land can be reserved and declared as wilderness. These are undertaken as soon as possible after purchase.

In the case of Green Gully and those lands purchased under the White Wilderness Legacy, all necessary administrative and legal tasks have been completed. These areas have been now been reserved and I am advised by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water that they will be gazetted as wilderness shortly.

- c. Wilderness assessments are a statutory responsibility of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water. Considerable resources have been, and continue to be, allocated to these responsibilities. Wilderness assessments are undertaken using recurrent funding. As staff involved in wilderness assessments are also engaged in a variety of other conservation and natural resource assessment work, it is not possible to separate out the recurrent funds that go to wilderness assessments from those allocated to these other important assessments functions.
- d. The answer to this part of the question insofar as it deals with funding for wilderness assessments is as per the response given to part (c). Regarding the extent of the wilderness assessment program, the former Minister for Climate Change the Environment, the Hon Carmel Tebbutt MP recently endorsed an 18 month forward plan for wilderness assessments, a plan this Government

continues to endorse. This plan includes the progression of the Curracabundi, Pilliga and Kaputar wilderness assessments and the majority of the area covered by the Southern nomination and renomination. Assessment of the remaining wilderness nominations; Murruin, which is part of the Southern renomination, and Sandon and Wooli areas in Yuraygir will be considered for further attention once the current work program has been concluded.

- e. The answer to this part of the question is provided in the answer to part (d).
- f. There are no plans to establish a separate wilderness branch. The tasks required to assess and protect wilderness are varied, and are allocated to different parts of the agency. These arrangements have been in place since 2000 and have not impacted on the achievements made in wilderness protection. Since 2000, over 455,000 hectares of wilderness have been declared, an increase of around 28%. Approximately 2 million hectares - 2.5% of NSW - is declared wilderness. This represents around 30% of the total park system.
- g. The Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, with the cooperation of the Department of Industry and Investment, is considering changes which may be required to allow for the proposal and identification of wilderness over Crown-timber land, subject to an Integrated Forestry Operations Approval, where the Minister for Primary Industries agrees these are not required for timber supply purposes.

## **15 Homebush Marina**

- a. Has DECCW made any assessment of the environmental impacts of the proposed marina development at Homebush for which an Expression of Interest has been released?
- b. Is the Department monitoring water and sediment pollution at the site?
- c. What pollution of concern is located at the site?
- d. Are levels of pollution at the site above recommended levels?
- e. Are levels of pollution at the site above levels deemed safe?

### **Answer**

If the question relates to the proposed Wentworth Point Maritime Precinct, Homebush Bay West, the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water offers the following answers to the questions:

- a. The Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water has recently provided a submission to the Department of Planning, as the determining authority, on 25 September 2009 for the concept plan application for a maritime precinct.
- b. The monitoring of water and sediments in Homebush Bay is related to the major sediment remediation works that are underway. Thiess Services is undertaking the remediation in accordance with an Environment Protection

Licence issued by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water.

- c. I understand that the proposed maritime precinct is primarily land-based and DECCW does not have specific data on any land contamination at this point. Any relevant information would come through the assessment process. Homebush Bay is contaminated with a range of contaminants associated with former industrial activities. Contaminants of particular concern include of organo-chlorine compounds such as herbicides, insecticides and dioxins, organic chemicals as well as lead.
- d. See response at (c).
- e. See response at (c).

## **16 Floodplains**

In the Government's Floodplain Development Manual, Gazetted in May 2005, the Flood Prone Land Policy provides for "technical support from the State Government to local councils in ensuring the management of flood prone land is consistent with flood risk and that such development does not cause undue future distress to individuals nor unduly increase potential flood liability to them or the community":

- a. Have professional engineering staff in the floodplain management branch of her department have reduced to a third of those a decade ago?
- b. Is this below the critical mass for such a specialist group needed to assist local government in meeting its obligations under that Policy?
- c. How many projects have received funds form the Regional Floodplain Mitigation Program and NDMP in the last 5 years?
- d. What is the quantum of funding for projects from the Regional Floodplain Mitigation Program of the last 5 years?
- e. How many projects have received funds from the Natural Disaster Mitigation Package in the last 5 years?
- f. What is the quantum of funding for projects from the Natural Disaster Mitigation Package of the last 5 years?

### **Answer**

- a. The Floodplain Management Branch was transferred to the Department in April 2007 and precise information on staffing levels a decade ago is not available. It is estimated that staffing levels are now approximately one-half of what they were in 1999/2000.
- b. No. Service delivery methods can vary depending upon the resources available.
- c. The Commonwealth's Regional Flood Mitigation Program ended in 2006/07. Over the relevant period funding offers were made to 28 projects in 2004/05, 21 projects in 2005/06 and 47 projects in 2006/07.

The number of projects receiving funding under the Natural Disaster Mitigation Program over this period is outlined in Question e.

- d. Approximately \$3.36 million of State funding was used to match Commonwealth funding offers in each of the following financial years, under the Regional Flood Mitigation Program: 2004/05 (\$3.36 million); 2005/06; (\$3.36 million) and 2006/07 (\$3.36 million).
- e. The Natural Disaster Mitigation Program is a Commonwealth Program managed by Emergency Management NSW for the State Emergency Management Committee in NSW. This program, which ended in 2008/09, provided funding to more than just flood projects, and is being replaced by a new Commonwealth program.

Emergency Management NSW advise that the number of flood works and studies funded in the relevant period are as follows: 2004/05 - 43; 2005/06 - 17; 2006/07 - 22; 2007/08 - 41; and 2008/09 - 43.

- f. Emergency Management NSW advise that the quantum of funding for flood works and studies projects under the Natural Disaster Mitigation Program in the relevant period are as follows: 2004/05 - \$5,508,076; 2005/06 - \$2,569,510; 2006/07 - \$2,528,696; 2007/08 - \$6,288,030; and 2008/09 - \$7,411,664. These figures include State and Commonwealth contributions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JR' followed by a stylized flourish.

John Robertson MLC  
Minister for Climate Change and the Environment