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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2014-2015

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Wednesday, 18 June 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Wednesday, 18 June 2014 Page 163 Questioner Speaker Irons, Steve, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr IRONS (Swan) (17:54): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. My question will be to the minister, and I am sure that you would be capable of answering the question, as you indicated earlier, but I will make sure I address it to the minister! It is in relation to the Swan and Canning rivers in Perth, but first I want to provide the minister with some context, obviously, on environmental issues in my electorate of Swan—environmental volunteering and some previous approaches to the environment in my electorate.

As the minister might know, Swan is like an inland peninsula, surrounded by rivers on three sides while on the eastern side there is a series of small lakes and swamps. It is a very environmentally sensitive area; it is a bit of a jewel in the electorate because there are not many people who are aware of it. But I know that the minister has been down there; he visited it with me some time ago. I do appreciate that and the people of Swan appreciated his taking the time to come and look at that particular jewel down in the electorate.

The people of my electorate interact with the local environment all the time and environmental issues are therefore particularly important in the electorate. I do remember that one of the first times I went down to the Canning River regional area, we were in the process of releasing some swans that had been injured. An environmental group in Victoria Park had retrieved them, saved them and brought them back to health, and we went down one Sunday morning and released them back into the Canning River. The only real negative to that was that about half a dozen planes flew over the top as we were doing it and scared them! But at the same time, the high aircraft usage over that area does have an effect on the environment down there.

The wetland areas were degraded over time, which has created many issues. Some of the degradation that we are still dealing with today includes use as a rubbish tip, which was on Burswood Island; dumping of toxic waste at Castledare in Wilson—chemicals being dumped in the area; asbestos being dumped in the area; and all of this, obviously, was not helped by antisocial behaviour like the dumping of shopping carts from the Carousel shopping centre.

There has also been an issue with the introduction of non-native species and weeds, which have taken over large areas and which have caused problems for aquatic life in the river systems. They have also reduced the biodiversity. A serious example of this is the hydrocotyle weed, which is one of the things that I showed the minister when he came down and looked at the Wilson Lagoon. That was introduced to the river in the 1980s. For those who do not know, hydrocotyle is an imported pet weed. It was initially in fish bowls but it was released into the local river area, unfortunately. In the right conditions it can double its biomass in three days to a week, creating a green mat over the entire area—particularly on the Wilson Lagoon. Since then it has caused major problems, and periodically there have been very bad years of growth; for example, 1992 and 2013-14 have been extremely bad years.

SERCUL, which is one of the local volunteer environmental groups down there—I am sure the minister is aware of them—has in the past directed over \$77,000 to tackling the hydrocotyle over the past decade. The Two Rivers Catchment Group has directed \$27,000 as well over the same time, but a greater investment is needed to finally get on top of this issue because it is causing enormous damage to the environment down there. This was at the heart of our proposal to the minister for the Swan-Canning River recovery program.

Much of the work to remediate the environment will need to be done at the local level by local groups. And even when the funding is delivered the larger body of work also tends to be done at the local level. The majority of the action involves weeding, revegetation and removal of the hydrocotyle, which is a pretty difficult issue. I went down there myself with one of the Wilson Wetlands groups and with a group of schoolchildren from Wilson Primary School. I put on some waders and went out into the lagoon and removed some of the hydrocotyle in there. It is an extremely long process which will require a lot of time from the local environment groups.

In the past, the Howard government's appreciation of the need for environmental action at the local level has been a strong focus. The focus under Labor has been solely on climate change and offshore credits, neglecting on-the-ground action down in the areas. This was epitomised by the reduction that NRM had in their funding under the last government.

But just to get on to the question: can the minister outline the government's Coastal River Recovery Initiatives program and the areas that will be targeted? And what funding has been allocated for the Swan-Canning rivers, and how will this improve the environmental health of the waterway?