

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
Question On Notice

Wednesday, 21 September 2016

4415. Hon Robin Chappie to the Minister for Planning representing the Minister for Environment

I refer to Corella deaths in the past five years, especially in Tom Price, and ask:

- (a) has 'water source' as a possible cause of Corella deaths, been considered or tested for contaminants in areas such as Hamersley Ranges, for example Karijini Gorges or the flowing creeks near to Tom Price, following significant rainfall;
- (b) if yes to (a), will the Minister table the test results;
- (c) if no to (a), why not;
- (d) has 'atmosphere' as a probable cause of Corella deaths, been considered or tested for particulates that have the potential to cause Corella deaths;
- (e) if yes to (d), will the Minister table the test results;
- (f) if no to (d), why not;
- (g) was any testing performed during 2016;
- (h) if yes to (g), what was tested and will the Minister table the results;
- (i) if no to (g), why not;
- (j) is the Minister aware of the Corella deaths in the past five years;
- (k) if no to (j), why not;
- (l) if yes to (j), is the Minister concerned about the Corella deaths; and
- (m) if yes to (l), does the Minister have a plan to prevent this from happening?

Answer

I thank the Hon Member for some notice of this question.

The Minister for Environment has provided the following response.

- (a) No.
- (b) Not applicable.
- (c) Corellas found dead in 2015 and 2016 in the Tom Price area were sent to the Department of Agriculture and Food, Animal Health Laboratory for pathological testing. Both the final report for the 2015 cases and the interim report for the 2016 cases indicate that tests were unable to determine whether contaminants or toxicity contributed to cause of death in these birds. For birds tested in 2015, biochemical testing of the brains excluded organophosphate toxicity, while for the birds tested in 2016, testing of the brains was not indicative of organophosphate or carbamate toxicosis.

In 2015, the final report revealed that for gross examination of all birds examined, birds were in poor to very poor condition. Furthermore, poor condition and a lack of

significant volumes of ingesta is highly suggestive of inanition (the exhausted condition that results from lack of food and water) as a contributor to weakness.

In 2016, five birds were examined. The interim report indicates that an overall pattern of pathology was not found in the birds examined.

There is no evidence to suggest that water sources in the area, such as in the Hamersley Ranges, Karijini Gorges or local creeks, contributed to corella deaths in the Tom Price area. Testing of local water sources has therefore not been considered necessary at this point in time.

- (d) No.
- (e) Not applicable.
- (f) There is no evidence to suggest that local atmospheric conditions contributed to corella deaths in the Tom Price area. Testing of local atmospheric conditions has therefore not been considered necessary at this point in time.
- (g) Yes.
- (h) In 2016, five dead corellas have been examined. The Department of Agriculture and Food, Animal Health Laboratory's interim report indicates that an overall pattern of pathology was not found in the birds examined. However, it was observed that birds examined had not recently eaten and that unidentified causes may be present. It is considered more expedient to await the final report to determine whether greater certainty of cause of death of these corellas is identified, as findings may guide further testing.
- (i) Not applicable.
- (j) No.
- (k) The relatively small numbers of corella deaths observed were not considered to be significant or extraordinary events and were not reported to the Minister. Current indications are that corella deaths observed are a part of a naturally occurring phenomenon, where a small fraction of the population is affected by a general lack of natural food, especially after consecutive months of dry weather conditions. Anecdotal information indicates that sudden weather changes in temperature and possibly humidity experienced after first rains may possibly cause stresses within the corella population, contributing to mortalities.
- (l) Not applicable.
- (m) Reasonable rates of mortalities observed within wild populations are considered to be acceptable, with mortalities operating as natural mechanisms contributing to the overall health of the species in question. Prevention of natural mortalities occurring under adverse environmental conditions is therefore considered to be impractical and inappropriate.

