

NO CONSULTATION

Swan River Trust axing a surprise for managers

■ Daniel Mercer

Senior Swan River Trust managers were kept in the dark about the State Government's decision to scrap the agency until it was officially unveiled in September, the trust's head has revealed.

Mark Cugley, the trust's acting general manager, conceded at a parliamentary committee hearing last week he was not involved in discussions about the move before it was announced.

On September 26, Environment Minister Albert Jacob said the Government was "amalgamating" the river watchdog with the Department of Parks and Wildlife to enhance the waterway's protection.

At the time, Mr Jacob insisted the decision was flagged in the

run-up to the March State election and claimed the Labor Party also planned to axe the trust.

Mr Cugley, who has been at the helm of the trust since Rod Hughes went on indefinite leave, said he had not been aware of the Government's plans.

Asked by estimates and financial operations committee chairman Ken Travers what work was done between the trust and the Government prior to the plan's announcement, Mr Cugley said "nothing specific".

"There were interactions with officers going about our regular business, but I would, in answer to your question, say no, there was nothing specifically discussed between officers about the

amalgamation," Mr Cugley said.

Mr Jacob denied the trust was being scrapped, noting its board would continue to advise the Government despite it ceasing to be a stand-alone body.

He also defended the Government's handling of the change, saying it was up to Cabinet to make executive decisions. "These decisions do not require discussion between agencies to be developed," Mr Jacob said.

Shadow environment minister Chris Tallentire denied Labor had wanted to disband the trust, saying Mr Jacob deliberately misrepresented its position.

He said putting a catchment manager into a parks management agency was not the right fit.



Making a splash: Nikida Baldwin, 4, enjoys the Swan unaware of decisions about the river trust. Picture: Sharon Smith