

FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICY — DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

Statement by Minister for Environment

HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan — Minister for Environment) [11.07 am]: I inform the house of some decisions the state government is taking in respect of fire management following the release yesterday of the “Review of Western Australia’s Bushfire Preparedness” document by the Premier. The government has approved the Department of Environment and Conservation’s policy and approach to prescribed burning and fire management generally. Prescribed burning is an inherent and important component of land management for the protection of life, property and biodiversity. The department is amending its fire management policy to include the requirement that it consult more closely with local government and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority before approving DEC’s annual master prescribed burning plan. DEC will also be more flexible in applying its smoke management guidelines, which have the potential to impact the levels of smoke haze over Perth, in order to maximise the safe achievement of the annual prescribed burn program. The smoke guidelines will continue to conform to national air quality standards.

I also take this opportunity to inform the house that as of 20 October 2009 the department has completed 32 prescribed burns in the south west forests, and has partially completed a further 14 burns for an overall total of 47 204 hectares. This is more than three times the area that was prescribed burned in the south west forests at this time last year and is a reflection of the concerted effort that the department is making to manage fuel loads and consequently reduce the threat from summer bushfires. Twelve months ago the department had burnt only 11 815 hectares, primarily due to unfavourable weather conditions.

It is important to recognise that, although DEC’s three south west regions extend over approximately 5 000 000 hectares, my department is responsible for the management of half that area. This is why the ongoing management of fuel loads through necessary activities such as hazard reduction burning is a responsibility of all landowners and managers.

Consideration of the statement made an order of the day for the next sitting, on motion by **Hon Ed Dermer**.