

International Year of Biodiversity — Adjournment Debate

HON ALISON XAMON (East Metropolitan) [10.15 pm]: I rise this evening to welcome the Council to the International Year of Biodiversity. For those members who do not know, the International Year of Biodiversity is a United Nations initiative designed to bring international attention to the need to preserve biodiversity internationally.

The United Nations website states —

Biodiversity, the variety of life on Earth, is essential to sustaining the living networks and systems that provide us all with health, wealth, food, fuel and the vital services our lives depend on. Human activity is causing the diversity of life on Earth to be lost at a greatly accelerated rate.

These losses are irreversible, impoverish us all and damage the life support systems we rely on every day. But we can prevent them.

2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. Let's reflect on our achievements to safeguard biodiversity and focus on the urgency of our challenge for the future. Now is the time to act.

Although Australia as a whole is recognised as a mega-diverse country for biodiversity, members may or may not be aware that the south west corner of Western Australia from Shark Bay to Israelite Bay is Australia's only entry in the top 25 biodiversity hotspots in the world. Therefore, we are actually living and working in Australia's only internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot. According to the WWF, botanists call Perth the biodiversity capital of the world because it is considered to be home to one of the richest floras on Earth. In fact, the metropolitan area is the richest zone for plant life within the south west of Australia. Therefore, I think Perth's very special place in this biodiversity hotspot internationally deserves recognition.

In 1995 and in decades prior, the Western Australian government committed to preparing a strategic plan for the conservation of bushland on the Swan coastal plain portion of the Perth metropolitan region as it was identified then in the urban bushland strategy. In 1996 the Western Australian government committed to the national strategy for the conservation of Australia's biodiversity, which sought to establish a representative system of protected areas. By 2000 the government had produced Bush Forever, an implementation plan that had at the time the ambitious, and I think quite laudable, goal of protecting and saving at least 18 per cent of the original vegetation of the Swan coastal plain, which represented 26 vegetation complexes. A further goal was to save at least 10 per cent of each of these vegetation complexes.

Basically, Bush Forever is a world leading plan and we need it as Perth's biodiversity is one of the highest recorded in any major city in the world. That means we have so much more to lose than nearly any other city on this planet. On census night in 2001 Perth already had more than 1.3 million residents and by the middle of 2009 Perth's population was estimated to be more than 1.6 million. In the space of only 10 years we have welcomed at least another 300 000 people to Perth's wonderful lifestyle—who can blame anyone for wanting to live here, frankly—and we expect that by 2027 Perth's population will increase by at least another 680 000 people. That means we are looking at bringing the population of Perth alone to more than 3.3 million people. That will mean a huge increase in the number of people who need homes, recreational facilities, workplaces and all the things needed to make society tick. The need to adequately house and look after all these additional people on top of our existing population will put our remaining urban bushland under ever-increasing pressure. Indeed, it already is under enormous pressure.

The Bush Forever sites that we have already identified as worthy of preservation are under threat from development. The Anstey–Keane bushland in Forrestdale, which I have spoken about before in the Legislative Council, is Bush Forever site 342 and it contains 381 varieties of plant life. That comprises far more varieties than there are in Kings Park and includes two unusual types of vegetation complex. It is under threat from a road to be built down the middle to save a few minutes driving around the perimeter. The internationally significant Beeliar wetlands, Bush Forever site 244, is likewise threatened. This government is determined to drive Roe Highway through it, regardless of being told repeatedly by its own agencies that it will be extremely difficult to make that proposal environmentally acceptable.

My grave concern is that the management of Bush Forever sites has not been undertaken in any concerted or meaningful way. Although some sites have a management plan, are attended by quite diligent managers and have been adopted by friends of various bushland groups, many sites have no protection or no consistent protection. There are unfenced sites that have been damaged to a greater or lesser extent by off-road vehicle usage and illegal dumping of rubbish. I have recently been working to try to protect Bush Forever site 385 in Mirrabooka as a direct result of being approached by concerned constituents and wildlife workers. Numerous off-road vehicle tracks run through it and extensive illegal dumping of household goods has occurred there, which is heartbreaking to see. There has recently been the death of a black-gloved wallaby population on

Northwood Drive. Again a road has been built through the middle of the site. All over Perth our Bush Forever sites are being cut away at the edges to allow the overflow of next-door development.

We have discussed in the Legislative Council the issue of Jindee, Paganoni Swamp and Errina Road. We are looking at losing two per cent here and five per cent there. If we let this go on there will be nothing left of value to protect. State Planning Policy 2.8, otherwise known as the “Bushland Policy for the Perth Metropolitan Region” is still only in draft form, yet the opportunity for public comment closed in 2004! I want to know when we can expect to see this policy enshrined in statutory regulation. I have asked about the time frame for Bush Forever in this Parliament and have heard, at best, non-committal answers. I am finding that the management plans to protect these sites simply have not been developed. In many cases not even a manager has been appointed to look after the sites. Land has been acquired to protect Bush Forever sites and ignored while off-road vehicles, whether they be four-wheel drives or motorcycles, are tearing tracks through them, rubbish is being dumped, arsonists are repeatedly lighting fires, wildlife is being lost and weeds are being introduced. The integrity of the overall sites are being reduced. This is the International Year of Biodiversity, the year that Perth should be in the spotlight for providing some superior guardianship of one of the most significant regions of biodiversity on this planet, yet we cannot even fully protect those sites, whose importance has actually been recognised for nearly 10 years.

So, members, this is the year to get it right. This is the year that we should be able to say to our community and to our nation and to the world that we recognise the value of what we have in Perth, and that we are going to protect it as the treasure that it is. We need to make the International Year of Biodiversity mean something.

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 10.25 pm
