

WARRUP FOREST TRAMWAY

Statement

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [5.50 pm]: I want to bring to the attention of Parliament some serious questions about the way the Forest Products Commission is handling the logging of the forest around the historic Warrup forest tramway. This was brought to my attention by an article on page 5 of the *Donnybrook-Bridgetown Mail* on Tuesday, 27 March, headed “FPC decision sparks protest”. I will share the contents of this short piece with honourable members. It reads —

The Doreen Mackman motion upheld by the Bridgetown–Greenbushes council asking the Forest Products Commission (FPC) to preserve forest settings around the tramway through the Warrup has been considered by the FPC.

The FPC have told the shire it is prepared to preserve the forest setting of the tramway between the northern end of the embankment and Miller Road.

However, Bridgetown–Greenbushes Friends of the Forest (BGFF) president Richard Wittenoom said they still intended to log on both sides of the tramway along the full length of the embankment with only a narrow buffer strip on each side.

“We regard the preservation of this forest setting as non-negotiable and need the support of the community to make this point clear to the FPC, to the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and the government,” he said.

The BGFF has organised another peaceful rally to support the forest environment of the historic Warrup forest tramway.

A recent protest picnic was attended by 90 residents and supporters.

The rally is scheduled for tomorrow with anyone wishing to attend to meet at the Bridgetown railway station at 9.30am for car pooling.

BGFF believes the Warrup tramway offers significant opportunities for future local tourism in the Jarrah forest.

I want to put on the record tonight that we in WA Labor fully support the arguments of the Bridgetown–Greenbushes Friends of the Forest that the forest setting along the tramway should be preserved. It is my view, and that of others on this side of the house, that BGFF has done a great job by getting the FPC to admit that the forest setting is worth preserving. Mr President, you, like me, are a member for South West Region, and you may well have walked that tramway reserve in Bridgetown. It is a beautiful area, and we certainly cannot walk it without being aware that we are walking through a very beautiful forest. If the FPC thinks that retaining the forest setting means just leaving a thin ribbon of trees along the tramway, then that is a complete betrayal on its part. It has given an undertaking that the forest setting will be preserved, and yet it appears that it thinks that the objective of preserving the forest setting is being achieved by just leaving a thin buffer strip either side of the tramway.

I ask you, Mr President, to visualise what this might mean. People will be walking down this track and they will obviously be able to see through the thin layer of trees to an area of native forest that has been logged. That is not what retaining the forest setting means. Retaining the forest setting clearly means that when people walk that track, or however they care to use it, they are entering a forest area. It is of great concern to me, and it is of great concern to local community members who showed how much they care about protecting the tramway when, as I have just shared with the house and as reported in the local paper, 90 people turned up to that protest picnic.

I know that certainly some members opposite raise their eyebrows when they see people chaining themselves to large yellow machines—I personally have never endorsed that tactic as a first line of defence; I think it is always much better to argue and discuss to try to reach compromises than it is to take that kind of direct action. Equally, of course, I believe that the view of most people who end up doing that is that they have been pushed to a point of believing that other avenues have, effectively, been exhausted. But whatever members feel about that kind of protest, this is not what we are talking about in relation to this protest picnic about protecting the forest environment of the tramway. These were just ordinary local people who do not want to lose that amenity from their town. It is an amenity—an asset—that is valued by the whole community for its beauty. They actually enjoy going there—it is part of their hometown—and for people who live in and around the south west it is somewhere that they might care to visit or to take friends to on a Sunday afternoon walk. But also, of course, it is valued by the community for its tourist potential. That is something we need to consider much more seriously when we talk about the values of the forest in the south west. Nowhere is that better demonstrated than by the

success of the treetops walk, which has attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors in the year it has been open. Our forests are a major tourist asset, and the people of Bridgetown want to see those assets protected.

Today I call on the Minister for Environment, Bill Marmion, and the Minister for Forestry, Terry Redman, to step in immediately. There cannot be delays here—we know how these things happen. We have, unfortunately, a sorry history of valuable conservation areas being destroyed and violated in this state because a contractor goes out without proper instructions. In fact, it makes me very sad that when I am taken around some of these coupes that are contentious areas, nine times out of 10 when DEC or FPC officers—who are trying to do a very difficult job—actually turn up on site and see places where logs have been snigged in the wrong way so that they have altered watercourses, or habitat trees that have been clearly marked as being retained have been destroyed, they respond, “It’s the contractors; they don’t always understand what they’re supposed to be doing.” That is a very, very sorry situation. I can tell members that as an explanation for some of these mistakes that are being made, it does not make people feel any better if they know that the action was taken in error.

I call upon Ministers Marmion and Redman to step in right now to make sure that the FPC understands that preserving the forest setting of the tramway means that the tramway must remain surrounded by forest, not simply lined by a buffer zone that is supposed to keep the logged areas alongside the tramway out of sight.