

REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT, TOURISM PROJECTS

726. Dr EDWARDS to the Minister for the Environment:

Will the Minister advise of the current status of the following tourism projects announced as part of the Regional Forest Agreement -

- (a) \$2 million for a tourist attraction in the Donnelly River Valley;
- (b) \$2 million for three eco-lodge camping and chalet sites;
- (c) \$1 million for a scenic drive in Pemberton;
- (d) \$1 million for tourism development at Wellington Dam; and
- (e) \$2 million for sealing Mowen Road between Nannup and Margaret River.

Mrs EDWARDES replied:

- (a) An open competition was run to attract innovative concepts for the development. Seventy-one entries were received - six entries were awarded prizes. Suggestions included sculpture parks, laser light shows, bike trails, river trails, a virtual tree, railways, an aboriginal interpretive centre, a bush theatre, theme parks, mazes, many variations on getting into the canopy of the forest - lifts, gondolas, flying foxes, monorails, sky rails etc. Suggested sites were mainly the Diamond Tree area, One Tree Bridge area and a steep part of the Donnelly Valley 30km west of Manjimup. In the next phase of the project, expressions of interest were called for professional groups or other interested parties to put forward proposals to develop further any of the seventy-one concepts received in the public competition. Forty-nine syndicates received project-briefing packages; five have been short-listed to develop project proposals further. A judging panel, which includes representatives from the tourism industry, nature conservation, ecotourism, government and community, will convene in November. With the assistance of consulting engineers and architects, quantity surveyors and business consultants, the judges may choose one of the syndicates to proceed to design drawing stage. Construction is expected to commence in Autumn.
- (b) Qualitative research was undertaken by consultants on behalf of the WA Tourism Commission (WATC) and CALM to determine user group preferences for camping and cabin accommodation in the South West. This research is being combined with a recently completed camping and accommodation study of the CALM Southern Forest Region, visitor surveys, WATC studies, and information gathered for other plans, to form the basis of the RFA Camping and Cabins Development Plan. The development plan document will articulate the range of developments proposed, their potential locations, and how they might be developed, including funding models. For example:
 - Walk-in huts in national parks;
 - 4WD group huts on the coast;
 - Camping areas with some basic huts; and
 - Basic wilderness resorts.Management models, which include partnerships, private developments and CALM operated sites, will be included.

The Development Plan is proposed to be available for public consultation by December. There will then be a commercial feasibility testing, then expressions of interest called for individual or grouped projects (by May). Design detail and approvals (by October) and a construction phase during Spring/Summer 2001.
- (c) A project master plan was released for public comment, and a public consultation meeting run in Pemberton in July. Feedback from the meeting is being incorporated into the plan.

Key features of the plan are:

 - Upgraded access to Big Brook Dam from both Pemberton and Manjimup;
 - New picnic areas and interpretive radio stops along Rainbow and Tramway Trails;
 - Picnic areas in Giblett State forest;
 - Upgrade of road, car park, toilets, trails and boardwalks at Beedelup Falls;
 - Upgrade of picnic and camping sites in Warren National Park; and

Market the drive as a package with other attractions.

Work to upgrade access and facilities at Beedelup Falls commenced last year, and were recently completed. Tenders are in the process of being called for associated road works. Work is expected to be completed by mid 2001.

- (d) A Recreation and Tourism master plan for the Wellington National Park and surrounding areas has been prepared to aid the development of road access, public amenities and walk trail networks emanating outward from the dam wall recreation site. Existing access tracks and service road networks in the park will be rationalised in accordance with interim management guidelines that are being developed. Unnecessary roads and tracks will be closed and rehabilitated. Negotiations with private sector proponents for a commercial tourism development to include accommodation services and public amenities at Potters Gorge are continuing.
- (e) No money from the RFA was allocated to Mowen Road. This financial year will see about \$1.3m spent on the project to date. The \$2m was moneys brought forward in budget papers from the original allocation to the MRD for the seven year project. The Shire of Augusta-Margaret River is the project co-ordinator and holds the funds each financial year which are allocated by the MRD. All work to date is west of Sues Road and it will be about two years before commencing the eastern part of the project.