

VINEYARDS - SMOKE DAMAGE FROM PRESCRIBED BURNING PROGRAM

Statement

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West) [10.10 pm]: I want to make a couple of comments to follow the debate that was run a couple of Thursdays ago on the last day of the previous sitting when I moved the motion -

That this house acknowledges smoke-taint damage to many vineyards in the south west and calls on CALM to consult more closely with vignerons and wine industry associations to introduce flexibility to the prescribed burning program to avoid conflict in the future.

I worded that motion very carefully because I did not want to be seen to be critical of the Department of Conservation and Land Management's prescribed burning program. I am a very strong supporter of the need for a prescribed burning program. The call was merely for consultation with the wine industry as a major stakeholder in that whole exercise. I guess I was a little surprised that the government opposed that motion. I can understand the reservation about acknowledging smoke-taint damage because of the government perhaps exposing itself to future litigation, although I tried to word the motion in such a way that it would not compromise anybody. The major point that I was trying to get across was the need for CALM to consult more closely and cooperatively to put flexibility into its prescribed burning program, so that the impact on the wine industry, which is a major stakeholder, would not be as great.

I guess I was still quite surprised during the question time that followed. I was reading, just by chance I suppose, the media statement by Hon Kim Chance, the Minister for Agriculture and Food, in which he praised Palandri Ltd for its marketing efforts in securing a major contract in the United Kingdom. I share those sentiments. It is a significant achievement by Palandri. Because of my surprised state, I suppose, following the motion, I asked how Hon Kim Chance reconciled that obvious support for the wine industry with the opposition to my motion. I suppose I was just trying to make a point because of my surprise at the outcome of that debate. Let me inform the house that Palandri is certainly worthy of praise, as Hon Kim Chance delivered it in his media statement in response to its marketing success. However, the point I want to raise is that even the more successful wineries and larger wineries like Palandri are not immune to the situation that I was trying to raise in response to CALM's lack of consultation on its prescribed burning schedule. In 2001 Palandri took some fruit from Barwick Wines in Pemberton. Members might recall that Barwick Wines had been involved in some litigation with the government. I believe it sought an injunction at one stage to prevent a prescribed burn. Palandri bought 60 tonnes of fruit at a cost of about \$1 200 per tonne. The fruit was then processed at the winery at a cost of between 50c and \$1 a kilo, which, according to my rough calculations, amounts to about \$75 000 to \$80 000 worth of product. That investment was lost completely as the winemakers at Palandri Wines soon realised that something was very wrong with the wine. It was tainted by a smoky-like character that could not be removed. Unfortunately, a prescribed burn had occurred up to the boundary of the vineyard that provided that fruit in the Treenbrook National Park that borders Barwick Wines. That was confirmed when Palandri Wines sent samples of the wine to the Australian Wine Research Institute in Adelaide. The institute identified that the wine was tainted by smoke and, therefore, ruined. The only option was to throw away all the wine. The value of it was roughly \$80 000 and the owner's costs would also have been attached. It was a significant loss to a couple of wineries. That loss could easily have destroyed a smaller winery.

Other large wineries in the south west and great southern regions take a special interest in the Department of Conservation and Land Management burns that occur around the various vineyards. In a market in which people can be selective, people are not prone to taking chances by purchasing fruit from vineyards that they know have been exposed to smoke taint of various sorts as a result of a nearby prescribed burn. Not only is Palandri an example of a successful marketing venture in the wine industry but also its recent experience reflects the effects of some prescribed burns on the wine industry.

In addition to that situation, a couple of days after the debate I was contacted by Dan Pannell, the owner and chief winemaker of Picardy Winery in Pemberton, which is closely associated with the Pemberton wine industry. He rang me, rather incensed, to inform me that during the evening he had received a phone call from CALM notifying him of a burn-off of a silviculture lot a couple of kilometres from his winery. Many wineries still have the bulk of their red grapes on the vines. This is compounded by a cool season, which has moved harvesting back at least a couple of weeks and, in some cases, a month. The three points he made about that were that he received a phone call as notification from CALM. It was not consultation; it was notification that a burn-off was to take place the next morning on that lot. Dan Pannell was incensed about what he considered to be an uncaring attitude. Furthermore, the wind patterns the next day were obviously going to drift the smoke from that burn across his vineyard and several surrounding vineyards. The other point he made strongly was that it was not a karri burn; it was a silviculture burn. That means the dead wood that had effectively resulted from pruning the tree plantation was to be burnt. The timing of that is not as critical as it is with the other burn. That silviculture

burn could easily have taken place a week later or a fortnight later in consultation with the wine industry next door. He was very annoyed about that situation and predicted that more litigation would occur, particularly over silviculture burns for which greater flexibility could be exercised. This situation will be raised this Friday at the Margaret River wine industry field day, which the minister will be attending. A seminar-workshop will also be held at the Cowaramup hall on the Friday morning. I think the minister will find that some quite robust discussion will occur. The main point is that a second appeal will be made to CALM to be more cooperative in its consultation with the wine industry on this matter.

House adjourned at 10.20 pm
