

SOFTWOOD INDUSTRY STRATEGY

777. Mr G.M. CASTRILLI to the Minister for Forestry:

Minister, I was pleased to hear about the launch of the softwood industry strategy for Western Australia on 22 September. Can the minister please inform the house about the strategy and what it will deliver?

Ms M.J. DAVIES replied:

Indeed it was a great day and very warmly welcomed by the softwood sector of the forestry industry. It marks an enormous commitment from this state government to a sustainable softwood sector and comes along with an investment of \$21 million to allow the Forest Products Commission to essentially double its annual planting rate, with a goal to expand the state's softwood estate by 10 000 hectares over the next five years. That means we will be planting 2.7 million seedlings every year. That is an extraordinary investment from this state government to support an industry that supports many jobs right throughout this state.

It is more than just a financial investment. It is a strategy that lays out six planks that allow the industry, from the private sector point of view, to invest as well and identify opportunities on which the state will be focusing its attention. Industry will be in very clearly identified hubs where there are currently processing facilities, in the member's electorate predominantly. It makes sense to have those types of facilities close to where we will be establishing and increasing the number of plantations. It means that we are closely linking businesses that have connections through their value chains, and through their use of resources and technology, and the workforce, and hopefully will encourage others through the farm forestry and private sector to invest also.

The second plank will be to continue to pursue —

Ms M.M. Quirk: Plank! Very funny!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: There are six planks, yes. I can be funny sometimes, member!

The second plank of the strategy is that we will continue to enhance the value of the entire chain through best practice certification. The Forest Products Commission and industry value this enormously. It means that we can establish to our markets that we are doing everything to the best of our ability to maintain a sustainable sector.

The third is a focus very much on minimising what will be the number one threat to the industry, which is wildfire. FPC is working with the Department of Parks and Wildlife and industry on a number of things to manage this risk. It is unfortunate that over years gone past this has been something that has massively impacted on our ability to maintain a sustainable sector, so this is something that we will all be very much focused on. We will be working, of course, through the Ferguson report, and FPC has been working very closely with the Minister for Emergency Services' department, and also with DPaW, because there are crossovers in that space.

We also need to make sure that we can communicate to the community the value of our softwood sector and forestry in general. It provides opportunities for things other than just growing the trees and cutting them down; there are multiple uses available, particularly in Margaret River, where mountain biking events are hosted and trails developed. We need to be flexible so we can encourage that use of our state's forests for recreation and tourism, and that is something we work very closely with those two industries on. We also need to make sure we are encouraging and facilitating innovation, and today we have created a very small innovation fund, which we think will encourage those in science and technology, more than the processing side of things, to invest some of their money and expertise to come up with more uses for what is an amazingly flexible product. We will continue to work through those six planks with industry. This has been done in consultation with industry. I have to tell you, Mr Speaker, that it was very, very warmly welcomed by those who have made significant investments themselves.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Armadale.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: We will continue —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: We will continue to work with industry. It is about creating jobs, particularly in the south west of our state. That is something members on that side talk about often, but we are actually delivering.