

**CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2002**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from 8 May.

**MR OMODEI** (Warren-Blackwood) [1.43 pm]: Before I begin, I seek an extension of time.

[Leave granted for the member's time to be extended.]

Mr OMODEI: The last time this Bill was discussed, I spoke about some specifics of the forest industry, and particularly about my concerns that the ministers responsible for forest products and for water resources would be removed from the consultation process in the formulation of a forest management plan. As I mentioned in my previous remarks, forest management plans occur only about every decade. At the end of 2003, it is expected that a new forest management plan will carry the State through to 2013. The deliberations that will occur during that forest management plan process are vitally important. Prior to the election, the Government managed to propagate - pardon the pun - the perception that the Minister for Forest Products had primacy over the forest management plan. Any scrutiny of the former legislation that split the two roles of conservation and land management into the Forest Products Commission and the Conservation Commission of Western Australia will show that there is no definite situation in which the Minister for Forest Products had primacy.

The formulation of a management plan that manages forests, those lands and everything on those lands, including the flora, fauna, wetlands and so on, should include the minister responsible for wood production. After all, this State has a very viable timber industry, albeit a very reduced one, which can be maintained. The expertise in the timber industry resides with the Forest Products Commission and those scientists who are recognised worldwide for their expertise. It is similar to the management of our water resources in this State. I note that when national parks and reserves are set aside, those vestings always include national parks and water. When water conservation and consumption in Western Australia is of vital importance, it is an absolute travesty that the minister responsible for water resources will be taken out of the equation.

I mentioned previously that there are a huge number of water surface suppliers and a large amount of unconstrained water in the south west. There are something like 67 sites, including 38 storage sites. I went on to discuss the prospect of the selective thinning of the water catchments and the mosaic burning of those catchments. Since then, I have had the opportunity to talk to people from the Water Corporation about the potential for this to occur. I found that such a program - it is not new; it has been around for a number of years and a number of studies have been conducted - would deliver 22 gigalitres, or 22 million tonnes, of water into the system for little or no cost. I want members to understand that the proposal we are now considering to augment the current water supply by sinking three bores into the Yarragadee formation will cost \$37 million to extract 15 gigalitres of water. The conservation movement and a number of other people are concerned that drawing this water from the Yarragadee or the deep underground formation could pollute surface aquifers, including surface water in some of the lakes, particularly in the northern part of the metropolitan area. It is a genuine concern. Until the quantities and the recharge capacity of the Yarragadee formation can be assessed, that is a risk. The natural water falling in our dam catchments could provide an extra 22 gigalitres at little or no cost to the State; in other words, it would save \$37 million just by the sensible management of those catchments. There are something like 150 000-plus hectares in the water catchment areas of the 16 surface dams. Timber resources are at a premium because of the Government's policy to reduce the timber industry. Water is at a premium because of the shortage of rainfall, and surface dams are at an all-time low of 15 per cent of capacity. When I was the Minister for Water Resources six years ago, the surface water dams were at about 37 per cent of capacity. Members can see the seriousness of the situation. Perth has a serious water shortage, mainly because drinking water is being put into swimming pools and onto gardens, so something needs to be done about that. There must be a long-term plan.

To remove the minister from the equation does not make sense. It is interesting that, in the Bill, the amendments to section 60 of the Act refer to leaving the minister responsible for mines in the equation. If I am wrong about whether the minister responsible for mines will stay in the equation, I want the Minister for the Environment to correct me during the debate, if she would, because if ever an industry rapes the environment, it is the mining industry.

Mr Masters: I object to that, member for Warren-Blackwood.

Mr OMODEI: In the first instance, that is the case. I refer, for example, to the Boddington gold mine or Alcoa World Alumina Australia. Those companies take away 20 feet, or six or eight metres, of the surface soil. Yes, they reinstate it, and their record is very good. It begs the question. This debate is more about politics than commonsense. The Labor Party is placating the concerns of the Greens (WA) so that the Government can get its

legislative program through this Parliament. One could say that that is politics, but does it make sense? Is it good for the State and the community? I put it to the House that it is not.

My conspiratorial mind gives me the impression that the Government is not game to take on the mining industry - the Boddington gold mine or Alcoa - but it will decimate the powers of the Forest Products Commission, which, by the way, presides over one of the most sustainable and environmentally friendly industries that exists in this country, if not in the world. We know that when forests are harvested they regrow. Incidentally, it is interesting to note what is used by the Government in its documentation to promote tourism and the environment. Guess what it uses? It uses regenerated forest, and it is usually at Boranup or somewhere around the Manjimup or Pemberton area where forests have been harvested -

Mr Masters: The 100-year-old forest.

Mr OMODEI: The 100-year-old forest, which is now 140-odd years old. It also uses the forest at Big Brook Dam. I used the Big Brook Dam forest in my election material because the forest surrounding Big Brook Dam is absolutely magnificent. It is one of our major tourist attractions, smack bang in the middle of a piece of karri forest that was decimated in 1930. It was burnt by a wildfire, totally clear-felled, and has now regrown into a magnificent forest. Guess what is happening? We are now leaving untouched forests 100 kilometres plus from the towns of Pemberton and Manjimup, to which nobody will ever go. When all the dust surrounding this political issue settles, nobody will ever go to those forests. Guess where the people go? They go to Big Brook Dam. The local people and the visiting tourist public go there every week; yet we are logging in Big Brook forest. We are logging in those areas that have been regenerated because the timber is good quality. I intend to raise those issues under the various clauses of and amendments to this legislation.

I will reiterate my concerns. This is purely a political exercise to placate the concerns of the Greens. There is a terrible perception about the minister responsible for forest products. I can understand that because of the Greens' phobia about forest industries, logging and creating magnificent buildings, similar to the one that we are in today, which would be 90 per cent timber. However, to take the minister responsible for water resources out of the equation completely defies logic. The very arguments that I put about capturing water in dam catchments and about the ability of the Water Corporation to have an intricate knowledge of the forests as part of the management of our surface and ground water are absolutely fundamental.

What is the Conservation Commission afraid of? These people are supposed to be professional public servants who have sworn to carry out their duties for the benefit of the State. We are witnessing the growth of the Conservation Commission. Divisions are already occurring between the Conservation Commission and the Forest Products Commission. The Forest Products Commission is being decimated to the extent that it is almost no longer relevant. With a stroke of the pen, the activities of the Forest Products Commission could be given to a private sector consultant or some small arm of the Department of Conservation and Land Management, and it would no longer exist. That would be a great shame, because a great number of professional people are in that organisation. They came from the old forest department and have great pride in what they do. Their main aim in life is to protect the environment. They want to allow for a viable timber industry and protect the environment in the catchments. One need only look at a logging plan nowadays to see the change in the size of the coupes, the protected areas and the gaps that have been created for habitats for nesting birds, shelters for flora and fauna, and so on.

If I am repeating myself, I do not apologise for it. This is a political exercise to placate the concerns of the Greens, who really do not care about the outcome of this. The professionalism of the forest managers is being compromised by this decision. It is a sad day for the Parliament, because legislation is being used to deliver a political end for a minor party in this State.

**MR SWEETMAN** (Ningaloo) [1.56 pm]: I rise mainly to support my colleague, the opposition spokesperson for the environment. He wishes to get a response from the Minister for the Environment during her second reading summing-up to allow him to put into context comments that he wishes to make during the consideration in detail stage of the Bill.

I refer to the April 2002 publication of *The Greener Times* - a publication of the Conservation Council of Western Australia. For the benefit of Parliament, I will read a small article into *Hansard*. It is headed "Marine 'Right of Veto' Must Go As Well" and states -

At the time of writing, amendments to the Conservation and Land Management Act had just been tabled in Parliament. These would remove the 'power of veto' of the Forest Products Minister and the Water Resources Minister over forest management plans.

The Minister for the Environment will now have final say on the implementation and development of forest management plans.

This amendment keeps the Government's election commitment and is an important step in ensuring management of forests moves to a sustainable basis.

While it is pleasing to see that the Government has moved to remove the right of veto by resource ministers over forest management, there remains another similar right of veto over marine parks. The Minister for Fisheries and the Minister for Mines both have to give concurrence to the establishment of a marine park.

This right of veto means we are likely to get poor compromise parks that do not reflect the best conservation outcome for the marine environment. The draft management plan for the proposed Jurien Marine Park was a good example. Readers may remember that marine conservation groups are opposing this park as we do not believe it delivers good conservation outcomes. In our opinion decisions were made in the planning phase to pre-empt issues of concurrence from the Minister for Fisheries.

It is essential for marine conservation in WA that the right of veto of resource ministers over marine parks is also removed. The principle that the Minister for the Environment has the final say on forest management must apply to planning for the marine environment as well.

I and my colleagues look forward to a response from the minister during her second reading reply.

Debate adjourned until a later stage, on motion by Mr Johnson.