

STATE FORESTS - PARTIAL REVOCATION OF DEDICATION

State Forests Nos 15, 39 and 64 - Motion

Resumed from 27 November on the following motion moved by Dr J.M. Edwards (Minister for the Environment) -

That the proposal for the partial revocation of state forest Nos 15, 39 and 64, laid on the Table of the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday, 26 November 2003, by command of His Excellency the Governor be carried out.

MR B.K. MASTERS (Vasse) [3.31 pm]: Again, the Opposition is pleased to support the revocation notice that will take a number of parcels of land from state forests to be used for purposes I will briefly describe. Some trade-offs are involved as land will come into state forest or under government control for conservation-related purposes. Overall, the Opposition is satisfied that there is genuine need for the revocations to proceed.

Having said that, I raise some concerns, and I hope the minister can respond specifically to one concern; the member for Stirling will also raise another matter shortly. Area No 1 relates to an area of state forest impacted on by the relatively new Harvey Dam. The area in question, totalling 18.6 hectares, has already been cleared and inundated with the rising water from the Harvey Dam. The vegetation and environmental qualities of that land have been lost. This was done in the name of increasing Perth's and the south west's water supply; therefore, ultimately, it is an understandable and acceptable use of that land. However, as an offset, the Water Corporation has provided two alternative areas of land to try to compensate for the land lost. The plan before me shows that a fairly large area of land associated with lot 105 was purchased by the Water Corporation and will be added to the conservation estate as part compensation. In addition, just south of Hamel, which is just south of Waroona, I believe -

Mr J.L. Bradshaw: Yes.

Mr B.K. MASTERS: I thank the member. Another freehold parcel of land owned by the Water Corporation is in location No 5322 in that area. I am informed that it contains a rare and endangered, or certainly a threatened, ecological community. I am aware of difficulties experienced by Cable Sands (WA) Pty Ltd in its attempts to access a mineral sand deposit contained in crown land immediately to the west and south of this parcel of land. The land itself is of significant environmental value. For that reason, the Department of Environmental Protection has advised CALM - I think the minister is well aware of this situation - that it is extremely unlikely that location No 5322 will ever be made available for mining. Ultimately, we must balance development and environmental protection. It would not surprise me if this parcel of land is never mined. However, the Department of Industry and Resources has objected to location No 5322 being immediately converted to a nature reserve because that process would immediately make it far more difficult for this area of land to be considered for any mining potential. Although mining is unlikely, the ability to assess whether mining should go ahead is important. If it is to go ahead, under what conditions will it do so and what possible offsets for compensation will be provided by the mining company involved? The company in this case is Iluka Resources Ltd. That process needs to be retained to see whether the potential exists for a better deal to be done by the mining company, with land of higher conservation value than that in location No 5322 being made available to the conservation estate. I understand that the intention is for the land to be retained as freehold land under the control of either the minister or the Department of Conservation and Land Management, and that it will not be put into a nature reserve classification until the mining issue has been resolved. That is an important process - no-one knows its outcome - and needs to be protected. I would be grateful if the minister could confirm that matter.

The second parcel of land relates to a section of state forest No 39 to the south west of the Pemberton town site. The Shire of Manjimup wishes to use that land as a transfer station. Next door is an existing sanitary landfill site. The land is significantly degraded. Its environmental values are reasonably low, and CALM is happy with the loss of that land from that area of state forest. As compensation, the shire has agreed to give up its vesting in reserve No 16396, which currently has the purpose of sanitary site. I am told that the environmental values of that land are not greatly higher than the section of state forest to be handed over to the shire, but certainly the reserve currently vested in the shire to be handed over has the potential to be rehabilitated to a higher environmental quality. This revocation of portion of state forest No 39, with the offset I mention, is acceptable to the Opposition.

The final area of revocation - namely, area No 3 on the paperwork provided - relates to an area five kilometres north west or north east of the town site of Denmark. The Shire of Denmark has been keen to obtain additional land for light industry. I am informed that a study has been paid for by the shire. The parcel of land totalling 19.88 hectares has been determined by the independent consultant to be most suitable for the purposes sought by the shire. CALM has assessed the land and is agreeable to its excision. Also, the Walpole wilderness

stakeholders group has looked at the loss of the area of state forest from the conservation estate. I am informed that it is generally agreeable to the proposal. Given the caveat on the last area to be revoked, to which the member for Stirling is about to refer, and the caveat I mentioned earlier on location 5322, south of Hamel, that it will not be immediately placed into a nature reserve but will be retained as freehold land within the Department of Conservation and Land Management, the Opposition is otherwise pleased to support this motion.

MR M.G. HOUSE (Stirling) [3.39 pm]: I will confine my remarks to area No 3, which is the area of land that is to be revoked from state forest No 64. That area is slightly north east of the Denmark town site and is the area that the Denmark Shire Council has earmarked for an industrial area. This problem - that is, to find some area for the expansion of the Denmark town site - has been an issue for some time. People who know the physical characteristics of Denmark will be aware that it is somewhat hemmed in for land that could be made available for a number of uses, including for industrial land but also for housing land. Obviously to the north and west of the town are the river and ocean and a fairly hilly area. That means that we must look to the east, which is where the agricultural college has its grounds and where the golf course is located, both of which have been placed on the do not touch list by people. In fact, some years ago the shire held a referendum to see whether the golf course or the agricultural college should be shifted, and people overwhelmingly supported their remaining where they were. At that time there was a proposal by a developer by the name of Graham Robertson to shift the agricultural college to a new site and turn the land into a housing estate. That proposal was overwhelmingly rejected in a referendum.

Mr B.K. Masters: Is that the same Graeme Robertson who is with the Department of Agriculture?

Mr M.G. HOUSE: Obviously not; Graeme Robertson from the Department of Agriculture is a civil servant, not a developer. The task then for the Denmark council was to find an area to meet the needs of the expanding industrial businesses in the region. Finally, after a lot of debate and soul-searching, it settled on the area that is the subject of this motion. It was not done easily. It was not done without a lot of consultation. I think it is fair to say that it does not have total agreement in the community. A number of people are opposed to this. However, those people have found it very difficult to come up with an alternative. In the summary of that debate, one must find a compromise that allows Denmark to progress, allows a site for industry to be established and satisfies the needs of that community for those requirements. Frankly, this is about the only solution. I stress that there has been a very exhaustive debate on and search for other solutions, and it comes down to this. This is not the end of the debate on finding land for various purposes in Denmark. We had a lengthy debate on the area on which to establish the new senior high school when it was built five years ago. We have had a long debate about the proposed site for a new hospital, and one hopes that this Government will keep its commitment to that new hospital because Denmark desperately needs it. Nonetheless, the site for it has been the subject of some debate and discussion. We need a new primary school in Denmark; that is, in addition to the school we have now. I do not mean "new" in the sense that we need a new one; I mean we need a new primary school because of the number of children. It is not possible to put further buildings on the existing site; there is not enough area. There are a number of other debates about the expansion of the shopping centre and the housing area, which need to be addressed. None of that will be easy, particularly in an area that values its conservation, the forest around it and the open green space around the town. It is one of the things that makes Denmark a unique place.

One of the councillors who was elected to the Denmark council at the last election, Carole Powley, stood solely on the basis of opposing this excision. The Powleys own the land around this area. Their forebears were one of the original inhabitants of the area, and they feel very strongly about it. However, it is fair to say that they have agreed to some compromise. I will not say that they have agreed willingly, but they understand the compromise that must be made. Provided that the buffer zone around the industrial area is sufficient - I stress to the minister that it is vitally important that the buffer zone is sufficient to screen activities and takes account of whatever noise might be created in the area - the majority of people have somewhat reluctantly agreed to support this excision. I stand here today to give the council and the people of Denmark that support and to make it clear where I stand. I support what the minister is attempting to do. It is very hard to make a decision on this issue, but, having made that decision, we must move forward. The excision has my support.

DR J.M. EDWARDS (Maylands - Minister for the Environment) [3.46 pm]: Again I thank members opposite for their support of this revocation motion. I will go through some of the points that have been raised. I confirm for the member for Vasse that in area 1, Wellington location 5322 will be left as freehold land but control will be transferred from the Water Corporation to CALM, so that, as the member put it, the process can be maintained, and discussion will go on particularly with the DOA. I do not need to comment on area 2, but area 3 warrants some comments. I thank both members, but particularly the member for Stirling, for their comments. It is a brave member who makes comments about such a contentious issue when he could have let it slip through. As the member for Stirling has pointed out, there is an issue in Denmark, most particularly for the shire to find suitable land for light industrial development and to relocate some existing industry. Equally, within that town

there are very strong feelings about the values of conservation, the local forests and its green space. I take this opportunity to commend the community. I had the privilege of opening an international conference on fungi in Denmark in July. It was the tenth such international conference. The first was held in the country of Denmark, and Australia managed to attract it for the first time to the town of Denmark. It says a lot about the local people, the shire, which gave the conference its total support, and CALM, which gave it some assistance, that they attracted international visitors to the town of Denmark.

Mr M.G. House interjected.

Dr J.M. EDWARDS: The shire president grew up in the same country town I grew up in, so we reckon we have a common bond. I will take into account the member's comments about the need for a sufficient buffer zone and seek more information on that and the measures that government can impose to ensure that that happens. Some of these issues can be incredibly difficult and I know that this one has been quite long, difficult and contentious for the local community. However, all the concerns raised have been listened to carefully and, at the end of the day, the Government believes that this revocation in Denmark is appropriate.

Question put and passed.

Request for Council's Concurrence

On motion by Dr J.M. Edwards (Minister for the Environment), resolved -

That the resolution agreed to by the Legislative Assembly relating to the partial revocation of state forest Nos 15, 39 and 64 be transmitted to the Legislative Council and that it be invited to agree to a similar resolution.