

SOFTWOOD PLANTATIONS

**589. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Forestry:**

I refer to the government's decision to shut down the native forestry industry. In the estimates session for the Forest Products Commission, the minister suggested that land has been identified for softwood plantations. Is that the case; and, if so, what consultation has been done for the purpose of identifying this land and when did this process begin?

**Mr D.J. KELLY replied:**

I am very pleased to get a question on this issue and I am pleased that the member has made reference to the estimates committee discussion around this issue. I was surprised during estimates that the member did not take more time to ask me some questions about forestry.

**Ms A. Sanderson:** Three minutes!

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I had a 90-minute session; I got an intense grilling from members opposite about a \$3 million commitment we have made to build a scout hall in Tapping and I got two questions —

**Ms S. Winton** interjected.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** It is a very good scout hall, member for Wanneroo. My recollection is that I got two questions on forestry; and one of them was on sandalwood. During estimates, there was virtually no discussion from the other side about the announcements we have made in respect of forestry. I am very proud that the member has asked about the softwood expansion. The \$350 million that we have committed to expand the softwood estate is the biggest investment in the state's history. The federal minister from Tasmania, Senator Duniam—he likes to call himself “Jonno”—gave the announcement 10 out of 10, when I spoke to him. “10 out of 10” is what he said! In respect of the expansion of the softwood estate, he gave the announcement 10 out of 10.

The member asked where the land would be sourced from. Obviously, it needs to be within a reasonable distance of processing facilities so that transport costs are reasonable. It needs to have a certain level of rainfall in order for the plantations to flourish. Beyond that, they will be commercial decisions made by the Forest Products Commission. We are not going to go out and say that we have identified these bits of land that we want to buy, because of course the people who own them would then say, ‘That’s great. We’ll now talk to you about the price.’ There are a range of opportunities in the south west to purchase the land that is needed and the Forest Products Commission will make those commercial decisions.

I got a question today in the other place that seemed to suggest that opposition members think we are going to compulsorily acquire land from farmers to do this. I can assure members that we are not going to be forcing farmers off their land to plant pine trees. That is an absolutely ludicrous proposition. If people want to sell their land to the government for pine plantations, that will be a commercial decision that they make. I do not know why the opposition is trying to say that this proposal is somehow detrimental or trying to scare farmers about it. No-one will be forced off their land, despite the scaremongering they are obviously running. People will make commercial decisions. That softwood will guarantee the jobs of hundreds of employees who are currently employed in those mills and it will underpin the jobs of thousands of Western Australians in the building industry. We have a plan to do it, as opposed to when the Liberal and National Parties were in government. As the member for North West Central said, they were going to source pine from New South Wales. That was an absolutely ridiculous proposal.