

## FEATURE-GRADE FURNITURE INDUSTRY

### *Statement*

**HON BARRY HOUSE** (South West) [3.56 pm]: I want to bring to the attention of the House a sleight of hand bordering on deception that is being perpetrated on the craftsmen involved in the fine furniture industry in Western Australia. I will explain why I have made that claim.

The Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries will recall that yesterday I asked a question about the tender process for feature-grade sawlogs. I asked how many cubic metres were being offered and when the process would be completed. My concerns are based on the answers I received from the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. I believe that Hon Christine Sharp asked a further question today that relates to the same sorts of thing. I have not been able to read the *Hansard* on that, but I will be interested to read it in due course.

Hon Kim Chance: It was a different question; Hon Christine Sharp's question was about craft wood.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I think there are some linkages.

Let us take our minds back a little bit to the Labor Party's policy on old-growth forests. It was predicated very much on the assumption that it would move the wood and timber industry of Western Australia into value adding. The most productive type of value adding is in the very fine feature-grade furniture industry. The top-value value adding is in those magnificent jarrah and she-oak pieces of furniture that we see. I am sure that the public was led to believe that we were going to preserve the jarrah for the best uses and that is the best use to come out of fine feature-grade wood. My uncorrected copy of yesterday's *Hansard* reads -

I refer to the request for tender 2679, which is sale of native forest feature grade sawlogs from the south west.

- (1) How many cubic metres are being offered?
- (2) How many cubic metres are being sought by fine furniture craftsmen?
- (3) When will the successful tender applications be publicly announced?

When he replied, Hon Kim Chance did not tell me how many cubic metres were involved. He gave me an answer in tonnes. He stated that the "Request for tender 2679 offered approximately 8 500 tonnes". I am sure that Hon Kim Chance was also a bit taken aback by that because tonnes is strange terminology. In fact, it has not been used in any of the debate surrounding the old-growth forest industry.

Hon Kim Chance: But it is the way in which these tenders have been let; that is why we used tonnes rather than metres.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I know. That is why I am saying that a sleight of hand has been perpetrated. Some people would say that it was more than that and that it is straight-out deception, because that terminology has not been used for 20-odd years at least.

Hon Kim Chance: Tonnes is still used in the system.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The fact is that 8 500 tonnes sounds like a pretty impressive figure. However, we are talking about the whole bole, or log, which is measured in tonnes. We know that a 40 per cent recovery rate from that log is about the norm in the sawn timber world. If we reduce it to 40 per cent of the actual volume and convert it to cubic metres - let us concentrate on fine jarrah - somewhere between 80 and 100 cubic metres of fine feature-grade jarrah is being made available to the fine furniture industry throughout Western Australia through this tender process.

Hon Kim Chance: But that was not your question.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: It was. I asked a question about cubic metres.

Hon Kim Chance: No, your question was about native forest feature-grade sawlogs, not the amount that comes out in a cubic metre.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I am converting the minister's answer to the real situation that will apply in the craftsmen's workshops. They will have between 80 and 100 cubic metres of feature-grade jarrah available to them to sustain the industry.

Hon Kim Chance: You are wrong again.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: No, I am not.

Hon Kim Chance: Yes, you are. That is high-grade feature-grade sawlogs, which are different.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon George Cash): Order, members! The minister can respond in a moment if enough time is available. However, other members are listed to speak before the minister will get a chance.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The minister is right. I am talking about high-grade jarrah. That is what the fine high-grade feature furniture is made from; it is not made from low-grade jarrah or bole.

Hon Kim Chance: That is not the question you asked. If you wanted to ask that question, you should have asked it.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is a clever sleight of hand. That is exactly why I am on my feet.

Hon Kim Chance: You cannot ask one question and pretend I should have given another answer.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The Government has suddenly introduced into the debate terminology that nobody has been familiar with for a long time.

Hon Kim Chance: Are they not familiar with tonnes?

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The people used to justify the old-growth forest policy were involved in high value adding in the timber industry. Now, at the eleventh hour, just a few weeks before an election will be called, the Government is letting the tender for the furniture to sustain the industry.

Hon Kim Chance: The tenders were let a year ago.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The Government has realised that it has about only 80 or 100 cubic metres of fine feature-grade jarrah available. People involved in the high value-adding processes of the timber industry have referred to statements the minister made a couple of years ago in which he said that 40 000 cubic metres would be available for this industry.

Hon Kim Chance: It is.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: For this industry?

Hon Kim Chance: Yes.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: The minister is absolutely wrong.

Hon Kim Chance: It is.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: It is for the industry in total.

Hon Kim Chance: That is the volume that is available for the furniture industry.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I am talking about the fine feature-grade furniture industry.

Hon Kim Chance: Now you have shifted the goalposts again.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: No, I have not; the minister has. The minister might like to listen for a few minutes.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Barry House has three minutes left.

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon BARRY HOUSE: That is the peabrain member with a loud mouth.

A few more questions will be asked about this matter in the next couple of weeks. A deception is being perpetrated on a very valuable industry to Western Australia. The industry does not have the supply of timber that it was promised in the first place. That is what it comes down to.

Hon Kim Chance: It was getting 2 500 tonnes and it is now getting 8 500 tonnes.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Five minutes before an election is to be called the industry is being told the volume of timber it can use in language that has not been used in the industry for some time. The Government has done that to confuse the people in the industry, and they are feeling pretty cheated off about it. The minister should read the answer he gave to a question asked by Hon Christine Sharp, in which he admitted that this is the last piece of the process.

Hon Kim Chance: That's right.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Should the Government not have started with that part of the industry of the highest value? Should the Government not have started with the fine-furniture industry - a value-adding industry - and then worked its way down?

Hon Kim Chance: No. The salvaged end of the market is done at the end of the process.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: This process is an afterthought. It has been tacked on after everything else has happened, and the Government has been caught out.

Hon Kim Chance: We have not been caught out. I told you I would do this at the beginning of the process.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: People in the industry realise they have been duded. They know that the Government has duded them and the public of Western Australia. What the Government has delivered is a long way from what it promised.