

WHITELAND MILLING, BUNBURY

185. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Forestry and Fisheries:

- (1) Following his recent meeting with small sawmillers in Bunbury, can the minister guarantee an adequate annual sawlog allocation in the vicinity of 16 500 tonnes to Whiteland Milling of Busselton, so that it can meet its commitments to existing customers and proceed with its planned downstream processing facility?
- (2) If not, what sawlog allocation will Whiteland Milling be given, and when?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

- (1)-(2) I am not going to discuss the individual business details of any of the persons I met with on Saturday a week ago, but I will attempt to answer the question because I understand the spirit in which it was asked. At this stage I certainly cannot guarantee any given volume through to 2014, because of issues involving the moratorium areas, and the areas of regrowth within defined boundaries of national parks, which are still to be resolved. The whole question of national parks must go through a process. The Government does not know at this stage what yield of timber may be available to the industry out of the current moratorium areas, or the areas identified for consideration for inclusion in national parks. Until those facts are known with precision, I am unable to be certain, to the last tonne, exactly what will be available to Whiteland's mill, or any other mill, for that matter. Even more important, and closer to the issue, is that the final answer to a question like that, on behalf of this mill or any other, will depend on the process of identifying those mills which will choose to take the business exit allowance.

Hon Peter Foss: The longer a decision is delayed, the more of them there will be.

Hon KIM CHANCE: In answer to an earlier question, I have already indicated that the Government is keen for the exit allowance offers to be taken up as soon as possible.

Hon Peter Foss: Most of these people cannot last for long, so they will request it.

Hon KIM CHANCE: Precisely. I understand the point being made by Hon Peter Foss, but it is the desire of the Government that those people who choose to exit the industry will take the offer up as soon as possible.

Hon Peter Foss: It is one of those offers you cannot refuse.

Hon KIM CHANCE: It is still their choice. The Government is keen to meet, on a case-by-case basis, with any mill owner who has received an offer, and believes that the offer is deficient or unsatisfactory in some way. The Government is keen to find a way to accommodate people's needs. Whether a business is exiting or not, we want to speak with all the small millers, because there are ways in which, through that process, the Government can identify each mill's particular needs. There are some difficult cases in which the Government will find it hard to satisfy immediate and long-term needs, but the larger the number who choose to exit, the greater the volume of timber that will be freed up. As much as the shadow Minister for Forestry and Fisheries might be critical of the amount of time this is taking, it is an immensely complex issue, and the Government is trying to come up with the right answer. I appreciated the opportunity of speaking to Mr Whiteland and the other millers, and I want to continue that process, because I believe we advanced several months in the process of seeking an answer, by simply talking through the issue with those people.