

STATE FORESTS 22, 23 AND 25

Partial Revocation of Dedication — Motion

HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan — Minister for Environment) [9.11 pm]: I move —

That the proposal for the partial revocation of state forests 22, 23 and 25 laid on the table of the Legislative Council on Tuesday, 10 November 2009 be carried out, and the Legislative Council invites the Legislative Assembly to agree to a similar resolution.

The state forest revocation proposal that has been tabled relates to four road proposals that require partial revocations from state forests 22, 23 and 25. The total area proposed to be revoked is about 11.7 hectares. All four proposals require no further clearing because the roadworks have already occurred. Changing the land tenure from state forest to dedicated road will formalise the on-ground situation.

Area 1: As part of its Canning Dam remedial works project, the Water Corporation has requested an excision from state forest 22 to allow for the dedication of Canning Dam Road. The road was constructed several decades ago, but formal dedication has not been pursued until now. The portion of the road under construction is about 10 kilometres south east of Armadale. Five severances are proposed to be excised, with a combined area of 8.1386 hectares.

Area 2: This area concerns the proposed excision of 0.5907 hectares from state forest 23, situated approximately two kilometres west of Dwellingup. It is being sought by the Shire of Murray to allow the dedication of an existing private property access route known as Briggs Close to formalise access to lots 941 and 942.

Area 3: The Shire of Murray has requested the excision of 2.1976 hectares of state forest 23, located about one kilometre north west of Dwellingup to allow for the dedication of Warren Road. Warren Road provides access to several lots in the locality. This proposal will regularise that situation.

Area 4: This area concerns the proposed excision of 0.7998 hectares from state forest 25 to allow for the dedication of a small portion of Pile Road, which is situated about 18 kilometres east of Dardanup. Pile Road was constructed many years ago and was surveyed in 2003.

All four proposals have the support of the Forests Products Commission, the Department of Regional Development and Lands and the relevant local government authorities. They have also been endorsed by the Conservation Commission of Western Australia, the vesting body for state forests. I recommend this revocation proposal to the house.

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [9.13 pm]: Again, I indicate that the opposition will support this motion. These are, indeed, new partial revocations, so this is the first time that the house has been able to consider them. I know that the minister told us that she does not have advisers with her tonight.

I want to point out something to the house in relation to the proposed excision of state forest 23. However, it certainly appears, on the maps that we have been provided with, that there are a couple of alternative access routes that might be marked. The advisers informed me that they were marked for possible closure in the future. It would be interesting, if the minister has some notes on this, to hear her opinion in that regard. That is in relation to the access road one kilometre north west of Dwellingup to allow the dedication of Warren Road.

Again, in relation to this particular submission, it occurred to me that we can see the operation of the communication between local officers on the ground and more senior people in Perth when assessing these partial revocations. I understand that the reason for not closing the existing access way to the north of this area is that a landowner to the west is considering subdividing. There is no way of course that a bureaucrat in Perth would be able to know that without good local input on the ground. That points to the fact that we need information from a variety of sources to make the right decisions. I understand that the road marked for possible closure is a road to the south of that area. It would be pleasing indeed if we could see some of these promises called in to replace part of the forest that is being excised. I note they are relatively small areas. Once again, I note that the Conservation Commission of Western Australia has endorsed these proposals. The opposition is happy to support the motion.

HON GIZ WATSON (North Metropolitan) [9.15 pm]: Again, the Greens (WA) support these revocations. I will make similar comments to those of Hon Sally Talbot. When I looked at this map and had a conversation with the advisers about state forest 23 in particular—there are two excisions there—I looked at the boundaries and possible other routes. In the case of access to a particular block, it certainly seems that there is already a road there. My comment is that there is a danger, with state forests in particular, that a track can be established because it is the quickest or easiest route for a person to get to their block. Over time, that track becomes an established track and then obviously the damage is done. The simplest thing is to say, “We will take a slice out

of the state forest and dedicate that as a proper road.” It seemed to me that there were alternatives in the case of those revocations. I was assured that they had been thoroughly surveyed and were environmentally sustainable. I had to take the advisers’ word on that, unless I was to drive down to Dwellingup myself and have a look, which is something that I could have done but I did not get around to.

Historically—perhaps it still occurs today—there was a practice whereby people used vehicle access in state forests to access property or simply move around in state forests. There certainly has been a tendency in the past to formalise some of those tracks and simply say, “The track is there now. Let’s go through the required process of revoking a bit of state forest to make it a formal road.” A bit of that is probably okay, but my concern is a more general one about the amount of vehicle movement in state forests. It is not just a matter of the track itself; there is also the potential to spread dieback and there is the potential for erosion to occur. If the track traverses steep country, there could be quite a lot of damage as a result. We know that motorbikes and off-road bikes create similar damage potential.

I wish to put on record that the Greens (WA) are not happy with the level of management of tracks in state forests, some of which at some point are formalised through this sort of process. I know it is an expensive and difficult management problem with every man and his dog with a four-wheel-drive vehicle wanting to go out and drive—state forests being the obvious place. However, it is an issue about which I have heard regular constituents’ concerns, and I have seen the evidence myself over many years. We need a better management approach to vehicle access into state forests. If that means rationalising some of these tracks and revoking one part and making it a formal track, the other side is that we need to address some of the informal tracks, which are really just there because people want to drive around. That creates direct damage to the vegetation and breaks up vegetation types; and the creation of islands of vegetation that basically damage the integrity of the forest ecosystem is a very serious issue. It is obviously worse in state forests nearer population centres—the hills area is probably the prime example. I have had conversations about this with Tony Simpson, the member for Darling Range. I know that he is similarly very concerned. As this debate is about the erosion of state forests, I take the opportunity to encourage the minister—I realise that state forests are not just her responsibility—to take a very serious look at how the state manages vehicle damage in state forests. If a fresh look is taken at the strategies and policies around that, it would be something that the Greens (WA) would very keenly support and something in which we would be very keen to participate. With the increased population pressures and people continuing to drive vehicles that they are able to take out to the bush, there will be ongoing impacts on and segmentation and degradation of the state forests unless we really do take the matter in hand. The Greens (WA) are happy to support the revocations.

HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan — Minister for Environment) [9.21 pm] — in reply: I again thank the house for its support for this motion. I just say to both members who spoke that I do not have any detail on the questions that were posed by them during the briefings, but I undertake that I will get back to both members separately outside the house on those issues.

I do not disagree with some of the issues that were raised by Hon Giz Watson. The reality is that the Department of Environment and Conservation has management responsibility for thousands and thousands of kilometres of road, trails and all those sorts of things. The department would certainly agree with the member, and I certainly agree with her, in the context of issues surrounding dieback and the like. It is important that we address these issues. I am very keen for us to do that.

The member mentioned the member for Darling Range. I had a meeting with him just last week, not only about this issue of four-wheel-drive vehicles and the like, but also about those who use bikes and the like inappropriately. Unfortunately, no matter how many measures we put in place, there will be people—I think Hon Giz Watson would agree—who will do the wrong thing. I have seen examples when I have visited particular problem areas in various parts of Western Australia with officers from the department. They have actually put strategies in place to stop four-wheel drives entering these areas. When they come back the next day, after having spent a great deal of money and effort putting in obstacles or whatever, they see that people have come in overnight in whatever vehicle they have used, pushed away the obstacles and thrown them in the river—probably as a sign to say, “Here you go; I can still do it.” I think that is very unfortunate and I am sure all members would agree that it is unfortunate. The department obviously needs to look at all the roads and tracks for which it has responsibility. I suppose it is also a general reminder to others that it is a matter of caring for the environment and that what they are doing is not in keeping with what we believe is a good thing for these forests and other areas. However, I thank the house for its support.

Question put and passed.