

VINEYARDS - SMOKE DAMAGE FROM PRESCRIBED BURNING PROGRAM

Motion

HON BARRY HOUSE (South West) [10.04 am] - without notice: I move -

That this house acknowledges smoke-taint damage to many vineyards in the south west and calls on CALM to consult more closely with vignerons and wine industry associations to introduce flexibility to the prescribed burning program to avoid conflict in the future.

I thank the Leader of the House and Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Kim Chance, for agreeing to swap time slots. This was to be the government's time slot for its business and the Leader of the House graciously agreed to swap today with our time on 4 May. I appreciate that because this issue is very timely in light of recent events.

I could commence my remarks in a flippant way by referring to boutique wines to drink with smoked salmon; however, I assure members that this issue is far too serious a matter for that sort of consideration. The Liberal Party and I fully support the Department of Conservation and Land Management's prescribed burning program. It is absolutely essential in a state like Western Australia. The fuel on the forest floor must be suppressed to have orderly management of our vast areas of the state forest and national park, particularly in the south west of the state. The program is necessary to prevent large wildfires which, thankfully, we have not seen in Western Australia since 1961 in Dwellingup and Karridale. However, there have been many examples of wildfires in the eastern states. Members will recall events like Ash Wednesday and, more recently, the 2003 fires that burnt into Canberra with disastrous results. There they have a less rigid regime of prescribed burning and they pay the price.

Members know that CALM has a backlog of fuel loads with its burns. The figures I was able to obtain show that this year it has burnt 112 000 hectares out of its target of 200 000. It is some years behind in achieving its target. The fires that now occur are often hotter than they would be in a perfect world. Fires are burning in areas that have not been control-burned for 15 years or more. That in itself is one issue. We are dealing with an issue that is related to that.

This issue has emerged in recent years because of a clash between CALM and the wine industry. The autumn burn season, which is primarily between February and April, coincides with the vintage in many parts of the south west. This year it is a more pronounced clash because of a late vintage. The vintage is two to three weeks late, and that has been brought about by a cool summer. About 90 per cent of the red grapes are still on the vine waiting to be picked. Most of the white wines have been picked, although it varies as we move from region to region in Western Australia. I reiterate that this issue has emerged in recent years. Initially, many vineyards were reluctant to indicate any damage because they feared the damage to their reputation may be more severe than losing a crop. For some years it was an issue that was, to a certain extent, kept underground. Already there has been legal action in several quarters. Barwick Wines in Pemberton claim that in five years two of its vintages were ruined and the cost to it was approximately \$1.5 million. In recent years, the company has been to court, as have two or three other vignerons in Western Australia.

As a result of complaints by constituents earlier this year, I focused on the Pemberton-Manjimup area. To give members an indication of the scale of the industry in the Pemberton-Manjimup area, the Pemberton Wine Region Association reports that more than 600 people in that region are employed in this industry; wages paid to employees in the industry amount to about \$5 million per annum, and are growing every year; capital investment in the area is approximately \$50 million; and the estimated turnover of the wine operators is more than \$12 million, which goes into the Western Australian economy and of which the Shire of Manjimup receives about \$4.5 million. The value-added industries such as restaurants, galleries and associated tourism activities must be included in an evaluation of the economic importance of the wine industry. Other complementary services to the wine tourism industry include boutique breweries. Jarrah Jacks Brewery, which opened recently, is an outstanding example of that; I would recommend it to anybody. Just a few of the wineries in that area which have had difficulties with the prescribed burning program and which have suffered crop losses include Salitage Wines, Picardy Wines and Howard Park Wines. I understand that 19 wineries from the Pemberton-Manjimup area have complained to the Department of Agriculture and Food about smoke taint recently. Some of those businesses have resorted to legal action. As a result, the first action I took this year to raise the profile of the issue was to release a media statement on 23 February 2006. I am not standing here today speaking after the event. Earlier in the season, as the vintage was approaching, it was obvious that there was a problem and that something needed to be done. My media release summarises the situation, and states in part -

2004 was disastrous for the department, particularly in the Karri regions of Pemberton-Manjimup where some wineries lost their crops due to smoke contamination.

This year we had the unfortunate situation where vintage is happening a lot later, which means the clash between the prescribed burning schedule and the unharvested grapes is going to be extended by at least two or three weeks.

In 2004, the Environmental Protection Authority recommended CALM dedicate more of its resources to public consultation and communication processes.

From what I am hearing, that has not happened to an acceptable level. It continues -

CALM could, and should, adopt more flexibility after discussions with neighbouring landowners with so much at stake.

CALM should update their practices from the time this review was conducted (October 2004) to give a higher priority to the economic affects on neighbouring stakeholders such as Vignerons and Wine Industry Associations, to match the stated priority areas of biodiversity outcomes and exposing urban communities to unreasonable level of smoke.

When conducting prescribed burns, CALM should put the economic stakeholders such as wineries on the same level as the preservation of biodiversity and the prevention of smoke spreading across urban areas. As a follow-up to my press release, on Wednesday, 22 March I asked a question without notice to the Minister for Agriculture and Food about this issue. I will not repeat it; it is in *Hansard*. The Minister for Agriculture and Food is obviously aware of the issue and of its complexities. I believe he is very sympathetic to doing something to address the issue.

I concentrated on the Pemberton-Manjimup area at that time. However, members know that the wine tourism industry in Western Australia spans many other areas. The Swan Valley has a historic role in the wine tourism industry and continues to play a vitally important part in it. The hills area, Peel region, Geographe - encompassing Ferguson Valley - the great southern, Frankland and the Blackwood Valley are significant wine-growing areas. That brings me to Margaret River. The scale of the wine industry in Margaret River probably outdoes the rest. I am not claiming superiority. Some single vineyards in Margaret River have invested up to \$40 million, and there are more than 100 of them. The capital investment in wine tourism infrastructure in that area is enormous. I believe it leads the world. We are not dealing with an insignificant industry. In recent days this debate has shifted to the Margaret River wine region. This region has seen spectacular growth since the 1970s when John Gladstones conducted a soil analysis of the area and Dr Cullen at Cullen Wines and Dr Cullity at Vasse Felix pioneered the industry. They were followed by many others, such as Leeuwin Estate Winery, Voyager Estate, Lenton Brae Estate, Redgate Wines, Cape Mentelle Vineyards and Xanadu Wines, to name just a few. In recent years many others have followed in quite spectacular style. I recommend that if members want to see the evidence of the type of investment that is still occurring in the area, they should drive to one of the latest cellar door facilities being constructed by the Lurance of Margaret River winery on Caves Road. Members will see that the centrepiece of the cellar door facility is a magnificent sculpture emerging out of the middle of a lake. That alone will create an amazing focus and attraction. That is just one winery and, as I said, there are more than 100 others in the area. The Margaret River region has been the world leader with associated complementary activities such as restaurants, galleries and events. The Leeuwin concert events lead the way in that regard. That makes Margaret River a world leader. I am sure that the marketing aspects of Margaret River will become a case study in many universities around the world. The Margaret River brand name has an enviable international reputation, which has been achieved through amazing hard work, commitment, a lot of money and perhaps a smidgeon of good luck. However, it is backed up by a fine product. I am sure, Mr President, you are aware that although the Margaret River wine region produces only three or four per cent of the volume of Australian wines, it is responsible for about 26 per cent of the premium wine market. That is the scale of the industry.

It was originally planned that the prescribed burn by CALM this week would burn 450 hectares around Witchcliffe, which is just south of Margaret River. Last Thursday's controlled burn jumped the road in a westerly direction into the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park. That area had not been burnt for more than 20 years. A serious problem was created. It burned right through to the coast at Contos Beach. In total it burned a total of 1 900 hectares. It was a major fire event, which created a vast, dense smoke bloom last Friday that hung around for most of last weekend. Of course, that is where the issue arose with the many neighbouring vineyards in the area. There are about 40 vineyards in the immediate area of the burn, comprising many of the area's prime wine leaders. Many vineyards and wineries were affected, mainly red grapes, as I said, as the white ones have predominantly been picked. Members will see if they visit the area that most red grapes - at least at the edges of the vineyards - are still covered in netting to protect them from the birds. About 90 per cent of red grapes are still on the vines and will probably be picked this coming week.

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One issue in this matter is that most neighbouring properties and vineyards - that is, stakeholders whose economic viability is at stake - had no notification at all from the Department of Conservation and Land Management about the burn. Another issue is related to the timing of CALM burns. It appears that CALM burns are locked into a rigid, inflexible timetable early in summer. CALM does not appear able to develop a more flexible approach to burning at different times to allow for weather events. In this case, CALM should have allowed for events involving its immediate neighbours, such as the wine industry, which would not have minded if the burn had taken place in two weeks, as that would have had no impact on the industry at all.

I guess there is also an issue involving the excuse proffered by CALM that the damage done by the burn was not CALM's fault. CALM says that it lit the fire and there was then a wind shift. Weather patterns in that part of the world are pretty well known. In the documents that I read on the matter, a CALM spokesman said that a sea breeze came in and took the fire into an area where it was not planned to go. I do not believe that anyone needs to be a weather forecaster to know that there is a sea breeze on most days of the year in that part of the country, as there is across the whole of the Western Australian coastline.

I will quote briefly from a couple of media articles to give the house a flavour of that event. One article is from yesterday's edition of the *Augusta-Margaret River Mail* and quotes a spokesman from a neighbouring vineyard, Eagle Vale Estate Pty Ltd, which sustained minor damage to fences and bulldozers that CALM has said it will repair, but which also sustained major damage to the vineyard's grape crop. The article states -

The winery's main concern was that it had not been notified of the burn.

The Margaret River Wine Industry Association is angry that the burn, permitted during the region's vintage, went out of control with potential devastating aspects for local wineries.

Association president Ron Fraser said CALM had shown a lack of consideration for the wine industry, with vineyards now facing potentially smoke-tainted grapes.

"It is a well known fact that smoke taint comes out in processed wine thus meaning that the wine is ruined, costing wineries hundreds of thousands of dollars -

When that is accumulated, of course, it runs into millions of dollars -

as they are unable to sell their product," Mr Fraser said.

"It is time CALM was held accountable for its actions and the financial impact that these burn-offs are having on our wine industry and region.

"I understand and appreciate there has to be fire management but there is no consideration in the timing of these 'controlled burns'."

Cape Mentelle viticulturalist, Steven Meckiff said about 95 per cent of red grapes were still on the vines, and it would be the end of the year before they knew whether the smoke had affected them.

"CALM has acted poorly," he said.

Leeuwin Estate owner Denis Horgan considered CALM's position to be grossly negligent, with poor or no notification to wineries of the burn.

On notification, a CALM spokesman, Mr Griffiths - not you, Mr President - said -

... people were notified by letter up to 12 months in advance that a prescribed burn would take place.

There were advertisements on their website and they liaised with local authorities on such burns.

They are required to give 28 days' notice under the Bushfires Act.

Some notifications went to landowners rather than the tenants in the property.

That alone poses a couple of questions about the notification process. First of all, I suggest that notification 12 months in advance of a prescribed burn is of little value, as weather conditions change day by day. I suggest that advertisements placed on CALM's web site are of limited value to neighbouring industries. I agree that CALM is legally required to give 28 days' notice under the Bush Fires Act - we all understand that - but I believe there is an additional requirement on CALM to work in conjunction with its neighbours and to be a good neighbour. They are therefore the issues surrounding that event in Margaret River, which of course have attracted media comment in recent days. In this debate though, I must ask: what is the science of this matter and what research has been done in this area?

Earlier my office contacted Peter Godden of the Australian Wine Research Institute. My notes taken from that conversation read -

The willingness to acknowledge that there is a problem has been a long time coming. CALM needs to liaise with the industry.

The key is in the research. Identifying the time in the development of the grape, which is most vulnerable to smoke. This maybe in the early pre-verayson stages, despite popular belief. This assumption is based on the fact that when the fires went through Victoria a few years ago, it was a very slow burn over about 6 weeks. There was a lot of smoke around. The grapes on the vineyards amongst this smoke were at post-veraison. The smoke-taint in these grapes was compared to the pre-verayson grapes coming from the fire-affected areas of Bridgetown, an area that fires swept through in just 6 hours. Surprisingly the grapes from Bridgetown were substantially more damaged by smoke. This is a significant discovery. But it needs more research, and it's in the States interest to fund this research.

From those observations and I guess the development of this issue over recent years, a collaborative research project is under way between Curtin University of Technology and the Department of Agriculture and Food in Bunbury, which aims to define the degree of susceptibility of smoke taint in the life of a developing grape. This, according to many in the wine industry, is the key to resolving the issue. The research itself will not get under way until I think this year, although my notes say 2007; the Minister for Agriculture and Food may be able to update us on that; however, it has been a long time coming.

A research paper was published in the wine industry newsletter from the Department of Agriculture and Food in Western Australia. I do not know who wrote it, but it is headed "Smoke taint in grapes and wine", and reads -

The Australian Wine Research Institute . . . was prompted to conduct an investigation into the nature and amelioration of taints in grapes and wine caused by smoke resulting from bushfires due to the incidence of the bushfires in Victoria and southern New South Wales in January and February 2003.

AWRI's Industry Services team consider this issue of smoke taint as its single largest problem in terms of value and the number of wineries and grapegrowers affected. The investigation reports on the main compounds responsible, the sensory properties of smoke taint and possible treatments both for vineyards and wineries.

The main compounds isolated from smoke tainted grapes and wine was found to be guaiacol and 4-methylguaiacol of which are formed by the degradation of lignin however it was concluded that these were not solely responsible for the identified taint. Guaiacol was found in the skins of tainted grapes but no trace was found in the pulp, because of this and the nature of the red winemaking process maximum extraction would occur during red wine maceration in the presence of ethanol.

Members can understand from the language used in that article that it is very complex scientific research. It is pleasing that some of that research is being conducted in a comprehensive way. I will not read the entire article, but those few paragraphs give members the flavour of the article.

It is significant to know that a paper will be given on smoke taint at the Cowaramup field day on 4 and 5 May. The Cowaramup field day has become the largest wine industry field day in Australia. Sometimes it is conducted annually, although I think it is now held biennially. I recommend to those members in the chamber who have an interest in the wine industry to attend the field day on 4 and 5 May this year. The field day provides an outstanding showcase of the industry. It takes on broader dimensions because it promotes and advocates the need for research into various aspects of the wine industry. This issue has become one of its main focuses.

Let us consider what the Department of Conservation and Land Management advocates for its prescribed burning program. I sourced a few documents on CALM's processes and responsibilities. A draft fire management policy was published in February 2004. I will quote one paragraph of the document, which states -

- During the planning process for prescribed burning the Department will consult with traditional owners, the community and specific stakeholders regarding the Master Burn Plan, fire regimes for the conservation of biodiversity, the scope of the proposed burning program, individual burns and burning methods, road and track maintenance and other fuel management treatments. Fire management will also be considered during public consultation on the content of area management plans prepared for the Conservation Commission.

The Conservation Commission is the custodian of prescribed burning in Western Australia. It continues -

Consultation processes will also be used as an opportunity to develop community understanding and support for fire management programs.

Yes, CALM can point out that it has outlined a consultation process in its policy. The issue is not whether the consultation process is on paper; the issue is how it is carried out in the community. The "Review of the Fire

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Policies and Management Practices of the Department of Conservation and Land Management” was published in October 2004 by the Environmental Protection Authority, bulletin 1151. I will refer to its conclusions. The document states -

The EPA was requested by the Minister for the Environment to conduct a review of CALM’s fire policy and management practices in its Swan, South West and Warren administrative regions in the context of the Department’s obligations to manage fire on the lands it manages for the multiple objectives of:

- *protection of human life;*
- *biodiversity conservation and protection;*
- *protection of assets including strategic infrastructure on managed lands;*
- *protection of environmental health; and*
- *the reasonable protection of neighbouring properties and assets.*

In that sense, its broad objective for consultation with stakeholders such as the wine industry seems to attract only passing reference; it is not a core priority. There is no mention in its conclusions of the wine industry or the impact of smoke on its products. Another paragraph of the conclusions, which is the only one I could find that refers to consultation with immediate stakeholders, states -

With respect to neighbouring properties and assets in peri-urban developments and towns and communities in the south west forest areas, CALM has an obligation to manage the risk of wildfire either entering or exiting the lands it manages and applies a risk management approach to discharging its implied fire protection responsibilities to minimise wildfire impacts and potential liabilities.

CALM’s focus seems to be on limiting potential liabilities for CALM, rather than looking at it the other way around; that is, how it will impact on industries. They are good words, but I suggest that CALM is not achieving its goals if those are its goals in this matter. The summary of recommendations states -

A fuel reduction programme, as employed by CALM, is seen and endorsed by the EPA as a key strategy in reducing the extent and damage to biodiversity and other assets which might otherwise be caused by wildfires.

The EPA provides the following recommendations:

I will pick out a couple of the recommendations -

1. In planning the annual burn programme, assessment of fire requirements for biodiversity outcomes be given first consideration, and that any shortcomings from this approach for the other objectives be taken into account in a second round process to achieve all priority objectives.

That states clearly that its top priority is biodiversity issues and everything else is secondary. It goes on to state -

4. CALM should further develop and support appropriate community involvement programmes to provide an effective interface in relation to its prescribed burn programmes, and report to those communities on the outcomes of any recommendations made, with such reports to be available to the general community.

That is not advocating direct consultation with economic stakeholders; it is advocating a broad consultative approach, which in this case seems to be failing to hit the mark in the wine industry. It continues -

5. CALM should document for the public and make readily available its planning and operational processes for prescribed burning.

That is fine. It seems that on some of these issues CALM is falling down in its consultation with the wine industry community. In summary, I will reiterate that prescribed burning is vitally important to Western Australia. No-one, and certainly not the wine industry, is advocating that we stop the prescribed burning program. The issue is that CALM needs to take more seriously the impact of its prescribed burning program on the wine industry. It can do this through more meaningful consultation with wine producers and wine industry associations. The wine industry in Western Australia is pretty well organised, bearing in mind the nature of the people who get involved in the wine industry, who can tend to be individualistic mavericks. However, that aside, I believe that they are committed to their industry, by and large, and in many cases are prepared to pool their efforts on advocacy, research and marketing. By and large, I think they do a good job. The Wine Industry Association of Western Australia is very active in the state, and the regions for the most part have very good wine industry associations as well. The Margaret River Wine Industry Association is very active and does a good job representing the industry.

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The issue for CALM is to examine its timetable for prescribed burns. People do not understand why CALM cannot be more flexible in its approach. The notification of procedures seems to be inadequate for immediate stakeholders, such as the vignerons during the vintage, which is a critical time of the year. Research will reveal in time whether this is the only critical time of the year, or whether a fire in January is just as damaging. I do not know, but the research will reveal that in a few years. Many people are pointing to an attitude and culture problem within CALM - some even describe it as arrogance - in its dealings with stakeholders with other interests. That is the issue. I believe it is an extremely serious situation for an industry that has become a very important, vital and innovative industry for Western Australia. I am not exaggerating when I say that the Western Australian wine industry, coupled with the wine tourism industry, is a world leader. It has brought huge credit to Western Australia and will continue to do so in the future. All the industry is asking for is a reasonable approach from CALM on these matters, with consultation and a bit more flexibility in its prescribed burning program. I urge the house to support the motion.

HON BARBARA SCOTT (South Metropolitan) [10.43 am]: I shall make a brief contribution to this very important motion that has been moved by Hon Barry House today. In fact, the motion is quite timid in asking that the house acknowledge smoke damage to many vineyards in the south west and call on CALM to consult more closely with vignerons and wine industry associations to introduce flexibility into the prescribed burning program to avoid conflict in the future. There are more serious issues that we need to call on the government to take heed of and exercise caution with in this area. I suggest that CALM has been derelict in its duties to the industry, which Hon Barry House has described so well.

I find it fascinating that I stand here in the Parliament on this Holy Thursday, as Christians around the world prepare for the celebration tonight of the last supper, of which wine is, of course, a major part. Hon Barry House mentioned that the major bushfire damage occurred on Ash Wednesday - another significant feast day. Sometimes our focus is brought to bear on significant events in the most curious of ways. Of course, wine is connected in many ways to major celebrations. The marriage feast of Cana at which Christ was ordered by his mother to turn the water into wine was a significant event.

This is a very important issue for Western Australia and Western Australian winegrowers. The motion moved by Hon Barry House has covered very clearly the issues surrounding CALM's prescribed burning at this time, without proper notification having been given to winegrowers and major and small producers of wine. Hon Barry House has been very responsible, as the local member, in issuing warnings to CALM and urging CALM to exercise caution. I think it is a little bit of a nonsense, and I cannot believe that CALM would defend its actions by saying that it sent out a letter 12 months previously that described when the prescribed burns would take place. As I was listening to Hon Barry House, I could not help but draw an analogy between the ripening of grapes and the birth of a baby. Grapes are not picked on a prescribed day; grapes are picked when they are ready; so too do babies arrive when they are ready. This is where CALM has fallen down. It may send out a notice 12 months before the event, but obviously consultation with the wine industry has not happened and messages are not getting through.

I made a point of telephoning my son earlier this morning, because he is a senior winemaker in the south west and is working in the middle of a vintage. I guess I must declare that I have an interest in this as well, but I also have an interest from the perspective of Western Australia. There is clearly no technical or scientific way in which, other than through sensory perception, one can determine at this early stage whether the grapes still on the vines will be damaged. A winemaker with a good nose will detect smoke. Winemakers will test for other chemical properties, and pickers will be called to bring the grapes in when they have reached a chemical readiness. Smoke damage to any grapes can be to the detriment of the final product. There is no other testing. This is why it is particularly difficult in litigation further down the road to determine when the damage was done and how much was done. It is only when the wine is put into the bottles that chemical testing can be done to determine categorically that there has been smoke damage.

I believe that CALM has been grossly negligent. I will not go over the issues that Hon Barry House has raised, because he has done it so comprehensively, other than to say that Western Australia has a very successful, innovative, outstanding wine industry that has brought life and gain in a whole range of spin-off jobs to the south west of the state. It has placed Western Australia on the map. For instance, Leeuwin Estate, which is famous for not only its wines but also its concerts, has made Western Australia a tourist destination that is known around the world, yet a government instrumentality is on the verge of endangering the whole industry, its good reputation, its integrity and its good wine. This is a very serious issue that Hon Barry House has raised, and I believe the minister in charge of this area should put in place immediately a structure of very good interaction with winegrowers, major wineries and the industry in general, to make sure that CALM does not conduct burns at any stage when they can damage white or red grapes. The only reason the white grapes are all in at the moment is that there was the threat of rain, which would have split the grapes. The red grapes, of course, ripen later. Of the

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court cases mentioned by Hon Barry House, some have been lost on a technical issue. It is very difficult, other than through sensory perception, to ascertain whether or not there has been smoke damage. The issues raised by Hon Barry House about further scientific investigation, the Cowaramup wine industry field day and the paper that is being presented, will contribute to a widening focus within the industry upon the likely damages resulting from decisions by the Department of Conservation and Land Management about when to conduct its burning program. CALM could burn in spring or autumn; it needs to make sure that it takes into account the concerns of this major industry, which could be harmed for many years. Winegrowers work very hard and long to get their wines into the marketplace and known internationally, and to build up their integrity and reputation. It is totally unacceptable that it should lose that through a fire that should never have happened at that stage. I support the motion, and commend Hon Barry House for bringing such an important matter to the notice of the Parliament.

HON NIGEL HALLETT (South West) [10.51 am]: I offer my support to the motion by Hon Barry House, and acknowledge the comprehensive coverage he has given this issue. I also acknowledge the hands-on effect that Hon Barbara Scott has added to the issue. I would like to go back to my experience with CALM when I was farming in the Bridgetown-Boyup Brook area. I had a very close relationship with Rick Sneeuwjagt, who is the manager of Fire Management Services within CALM. He quotes the failure of his department to keep up with the burning program as contributing to the severity of fires that have surrounded Perth over the past summer. I have spoken to several CALM people in the south west, and they acknowledge that they now have a window of approximately three to four weeks in which to operate - late March to early April - after which a line is drawn in the sand and it is considered too wet. Twenty years ago, the burning season commenced after the first rain and continued right through into early spring, depending on the wetness of the winter. There would always be spring rains to extinguish any late fires and make the area very safe for summer. Now, with only a month in which to operate, the burning program has fallen years behind, while the wine industry has grown over the past 20 years; the coincidence has married the two events together, and the result of much heavier burns is far greater damage to the bush and the habitats of native animals.

We certainly need to look at CALM. Originally it worked very well with landholders in the area. It would give people notice of burns one or two weeks out. It would work with people; if the winds were wrong or the weather was changing, there would certainly be a phone call saying that the burn would not be done. If CALM wanted to get in earlier, it would contact people and work together with them. This seems to be lost now. There seems to be a lack of staff with an understanding of the areas and the weather conditions. I certainly question whether CALM now has good, hands-on, qualified staff. The burns are now taking place far too far apart. They were generally two to three years apart, and were always a cool burn. There was very little damage; there would be areas that would not creep through. In general, the bush was in a far healthier state. There were certainly never any issues of smoke damage, whether it be to fruit, grapes or whatever. It was never an issue in those days.

I do not think there is a lot more that I can add, other than to back up Hon Barry House in saying that CALM certainly has a responsibility to work much more closely with landholders, and to have more staff to get this burning program back up to date. We acknowledge that the situation is not like that in Canberra, but we certainly need to get things moving and bring CALM back to where it was in previous years.

HON PAUL LLEWELLYN (South West) [10.55 am]: This year has been a very difficult year for CALM, in the sense that it has had a very large burning program for the south west region - something like 200 000 hectares - on the books. It has been a pretty wet season and CALM has not been able to schedule its burning program in the way that it would wish to. Contrary to popular belief, the Greens (WA) has some sympathy for CALM in its task of managing complex landscapes and environmental systems, as well as managing community conflicts that arise from its burning programs. For at least two or three decades in my memory, the Greens (WA) and the conservation movement have brought up the matter of prescribed burning, and to some extent have been somewhat misunderstood over the issue. Firstly, we are not opposed to prescribed burning. For the record, I was actually involved with CALM, writing management plans for the Shannon Park and D'Entrecasteaux National Park in the early 1980s. In that role I was one of the principal planners and drew up the fire management plans for that region, which ran from Walpole through to Augusta and covered almost 180 000 hectares.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: It's not an easy job.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: It is not an easy job. The matter of controlled burns tends to end up in a clash between community values and concerns. In this case, it is the concerns of the wine industry. In other instances, it is the fear of loss of private property values. There are other complex values surrounding biodiversity and the impact on biodiversity of large-scale prescribed burning and, indeed, the serious matter of maintaining the protection of built community assets.

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It is interesting that the wine industry, driven by tax breaks, has expanded very rapidly throughout the landscape - not dissimilar to blue gums, which have also expanded very rapidly through the landscape - adding to the complexity of the management task that CALM must undertake. It used to be that CALM had almost a blank palette. Farms and farming operations cleared land, forests and other bushland. Now CALM has a far more complex system to manage. I have some sympathy, given the complexities. Not only is wine growing something of a science and an art, but prescribed burning is itself something of a science and an art. In fact, burning can take place only under the right conditions, and those conditions have to be picked so that it does not result in either a dangerous conflagration or an ineffective waste of resources. Notwithstanding that, it is quite possible that we can reach some kind of compromise and planning solution. That solution is about, first, communication and, second, the approach that the Department of Conservation and Land Management takes to its prescribed burning responsibilities. The community cannot have it both ways. It wants extensive prescribed burning of thousands of hectares and it wants its assets - the fences, houses and so on - protected but it does not want any side impact. That is a complex matter to resolve.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: When they get into government, they can work out how to have a fire without smoke.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: The Greens (WA) have had to deal with governments of all persuasions on the issue of fire and I am afraid there is a longstanding culture within our government agencies that seems to ride roughshod over any government. CALM has an entrenched commitment to expanding its burning operations against, I dare say, good scientific judgment. We are on a collision course because of the competing interests of wanting to have prescribed burning to protect assets and, as Hon Nigel Hallett said, perhaps to facilitate some biodiversity objectives, and wanting to protect community values. CALM has chosen a particular style of management. From my observations, the primary source of fires on the landscape is not wildfires but prescribed burning. Therefore, it is the primary source of smoke and wildfire threat. I make this assertion for the following reasons: fire escapes are the norm, not the exception, for CALM fire management practices. Considerable evidence is now coming to light on the number of times that CALM will light a fire, sometimes when hazardous weather conditions are forecast, and at other times not in hazardous conditions, and the fire escapes and burns out thousands of hectares. That happened in Margaret River recently. That is not an exception; it is almost the norm. We need an inquiry into how many times CALM's prescribed burning has led to a wildfire, particularly in the southern region. I will give some examples.

Hon Barbara Scott: Who will take responsibility?

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: We can deal with the issue of who takes responsibility for a rational regional planning scenario for fire management. Underpinning this concern of fire is smoke damage, and it is interesting that it applies to an industry that is worth multimillions of dollars. It was the conservation movement that raised concerns about the biodiversity impacts. We can have this debate, but we need to rethink the way in which fire is managed in our region. One of the underpinning assumptions is that we need to burn extensively to guarantee the protection of communities. Another assumption is that we need to burn because the bush likes it - the bush regenerates and that is good for it. Both assumptions can be challenged. Biodiversity is not served by repeated burning, particularly burning every three, four, six or eight years. Some systems need to go through a full ecological cycle to get a different level of ecological succession. That is called fire succession. The Greens' contention is that we are burning far too much of the landscape and we could undertake far less burning and maintain our community and fire safety objectives in the region by taking a smarter approach to fire management.

It is all about communication with the community. CALM puts an enormous amount of its resources into fire succession and prescribed burning operations. Its resources are used for helicopters, trucks, light-duty and heavy-duty appliances, aerial spotters and aerial bombers, all of which are part of a highly intensive, almost military-style operation to execute these very large-scale burns, many of which escape. This machinery causes considerable environmental damage, let alone the smoke damage caused by the burn. More assets and resources should be used for communicating with communities to make the households and communities of our small country towns - indeed all the people who live in a fire-prone environment - fire ready and fire safe. The communities should be made to take some responsibility for living in a fire-prone environment. We could then have a finer instrument to plan the more complex decisions, including when the grapes are picked. The problem with the current fire management scenario is that CALM is planning, with military precision, burning operations on the basis of a large-scale map, detailed understanding of the construction of the fuel and the conditions of the fuel, and taking into account the changing weather conditions. However, it is igniting fires when it believes that the area is at its optimum to achieve its prescribed burning objectives.

Unfortunately, because of the short notice of this motion, I do not have the figures, but a remarkably small amount of CALM's resources is spent on communicating with the community. It should be talking to the community about what kind of actions can be taken and how to make households fire safe. Instead, it is

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introducing very large-scale prescribed burning into a landscape and, as a consequence, industries are suffering smoke damage and other damage and having to deal with wildfires. This occurs despite the fact that the very objective of the prescribed burning operation is to reduce the incidence of wildfires. Members should think about the fact that most of the wildfires in the south west region occur because of CALM's prescribed burnings. Let us have an inquiry into that.

Hon Barry House interjected.

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: There is no lack of resources. CALM is a highly resourced institution and it is spending most of its money on toys for the boys - heavy duty trucks, aircraft, helicopters and so - and very little on community communication. I am not saying for one second that we do not need highly organised fire management institutions. The problem of the impact on the wine industry arises out of the same failing; that is, poor community relations and poor community planning -

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: When the wine industry sprays, apparently it kills the fish harvested around the south west.

Hon Norman Moore: Is that right? Do you have proof of that?

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Things happen. The question is: how can we address the matter of prescribed burning of the landscape as well as the fallout that is occurring? I will give members some examples of prescribed burns that have gone wrong. I will read a letter dated March 2003 from Peter Robertson to the then Minister for the Environment, Hon Judy Edwards. Peter Robertson is a well-known conservationist and is one of the organisers of the Western Australian Forest Alliance. This is an unholy alliance; the wine industry is lining up with the same arguments that the conservation movement has put up, but for quite different reasons. The letter states -

Here is a small sample of the fire disasters just in the south cost region in the past couple of years:

D'Entrecasteaux (Pingerup) National Park wildfire (burning now; ~ 10,000 ha; initially lightning, then escape from CALM backburn);

Northumberland fire (Walpole Wilderness reserve; lightning strike-wildfire, then escapes from CALM backburns; 35,000 ha);

Sharpe/Mitchell/Crossing (Walpole Wilderness reserve; escape from CALM burn; 40,000 ha);

Sheepwash/Redmond (Walpole wilderness reserve; escape from CALM burn; several thousand hectares);

West Cape Howe National Park (arson?; nearly whole park burnt out after CALM failed to suppress a small fire);

It chose to let that fire burn. It probably chose to let it go because all its resources were operating a prescribed burn elsewhere. I do not know, but that is what happened a few weeks ago. The letter continues -

Nuyts Wilderness (Walpole-Nornalup National Park; lightning strike; 4,000 ha, suppression withheld in favour of big backburns);

When small lightning strikes occur, CALM burns out a whole area with its sophisticated firefighting equipment. To some extent that may might make some sense. However, CALM is burning vast areas of the landscape and some of the burns are causing damage to the grape industry. Many of them are causing significant damage to the south west ecological system. The letter continues -

Waychinicup National Park (escaped from CALM burn; several hundred hectares . . .

D'Entrecasteaux National Park ("Quitjup fire"; started by lightning; 7,000 ha; suppression deferred in favour of letting the fire "burn itself out", then large backburns).

There is a problem with the management of fire in the south west region. It is not just the Greens (WA) or the conservation movement that believes unnecessary burning is being conducted. We have become very complacent with the view that fire should play that role in our landscape. It is a natural consequence that eventually it will clash with some high-value industries. Wait until a few blue gum and pine plantations are burnt, and another high-value industry says, "Oops, we are on the wrong path". Just a few weeks ago I was involved in a controversy regarding a CALM-lit fire in the D'Entrecasteaux National Park. CALM says it lit the fire on a 23-degree day. I have a detailed daily log of the weather conditions from someone who was listening to CALM's radio communications. The day after the fire was conducted, it was 34 degrees and northerly winds were blowing. A small burn to protect a species of banksia in the Wool Bale Hills, which was supposed to be highly controlled, jumped a boundary. CALM back-burned 4 000 hectares. The fire jumped into the inlet block

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just south of Broke Inlet Road and was inflamed by a southerly wind. CALM lit the fire when there was a cyclone up north. We know how to predict weather; it was inevitable that the fire would spread. I attended that fire the other day on the way back from Parliament. It has had an extraordinary impact. The karri forest on the hills was decimated. About 8 000 hectares was burnt. I apologise to Peter Bidwell from CALM because recently I said on radio that 10 000 hectares was burnt; it was about 8 000 hectares. CALM back-burned the entire area. The fire was nearly completely out of control when it reached an area of Pingrup that had been control-burned two years previously. That was the site of another controlled burn that became a big conflagration.

We must seriously rethink how the landscape is managed by fire. We must consider how we protect our assets and what is in the best interests of the ecological communities. We should not presume that because it suits us to burn regularly, we should do it. That is unscientific and unproven, and it is not good for either the ecological or commercial communities, or the broader community. We will have to manage the communication better and put more of CALM's extraordinary assets into developing community preparedness and communicating its intentions. We should have a whole-of-community fire management strategy. It was discovered during the large fires in New South Wales that once the fires had got going, the extremely expensive water bombers were by and large useless and that the best investment the fire agencies had made was in small fire units in local areas and in training the local community. The small, well-maintained fire unit that was sitting in someone's shed was a better investment than were the big aerial bombers.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Why?

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Local communities have local knowledge and can protect their own assets. They can move quickly to attack fires. If a spot fire begins in someone's backyard as a result of a cinder, the local community can put it out. The big aircraft were facing the main fire on many fronts. For good fire control measures, it is important to invest in smaller assets and community preparedness ahead of investing in big suppression technologies. I am not saying that we should not have highly competent, well-resourced and professional firefighting services. The current approach is a Big Brother, big government and big investment approach. The Liberal Party and all governments have done this. They have invested in a nanny agency that is provided with many assets and has become a big business. CALM has a very big budget and many people are employed in controlled burning exercises. I call it a military-scale fire suppression and fire management exercise. This imposes an expense on the government. The government could be spending more on communities. We could then move towards implementing an integrated community strategy whereby the CALM scientists could choose when to light a fire - not too often, because they burn far too often - and the vignerons could choose when to pick their grapes. The two could coexist based on an intelligent design - I am not referring to the other "intelligent design"!

Fire management for the regions could be based on intelligent community engagement rather than on a Big Brother approach. That is what happened in Margaret River last week. CALM believed it was burning for the community's own good, and the fire escaped for the community's own good. I do not want to beat up CALM. I worked for it. I left at a time when I was involved in debates on fire management. A very senior member of CALM management issued a circular from the department stating that if Mr Llewellyn thought CALM should not be burning, he should look at the landscape in Brockman National Park where some karri forest was seriously burnt. I went and looked. In fact, I have been looking at that forest cover for 20 to 23 years. The karri forest has recovered. Brockman National Park is looking quite good. For those members who do not know Brockman National Park, it is in the Pemberton area. It had a very intense burn. I am not in favour of intense burns but they occur. We need some strategic fire management planning to reduce the risk to the landscape, the community and valuable assets. Why is CALM burning forests? It is primarily to protect human assets.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: Yes; and?

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: Yes, but we are burning them right now and the fires are damaging assets. We must untangle ourselves from unintelligent, regional-scale planning and design, as that would cost multimillions of dollars and would be a bad investment, and move towards the notion of intelligent operations that avoid, or at least minimise, the kind of damage that occurred the other day.

Some other things have occurred. I will relate to members a little anecdote. On the day of the D'Entrecasteaux National Park fire a few weeks ago a massive plume of smoke blew across the south coast, and, consequently, the South Coast Highway from Denmark to Walpole was closed. I am referring to an escaped fire from a prescribed burn on a hot day. The same plume of smoke blew out over the sea. I do not know whether this story is true, but someone rang me and said that a pod of dolphins had been washed up at Broke Inlet. That person said that we should check whether smoke damage had caused the wash-up. I do not know whether autopsies have been conducted on the dolphins, but I put on the public record that there ought to be an autopsy to

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determine whether those dolphins had come up for air and copped a big plume of that bushfire smoke, which knocked them out before they were washed up at Broke Inlet. I would love to have taken up that issue, but that is an example of potential fallout from a fire that went horribly wrong on that day.

I asked a question in this Parliament about how much it cost to rectify the damage that that escaped fire caused. Let us untangle this issue. The Greens (WA) are not saying there should be no prescribed burns; we are just saying that they cause very serious and sometimes unlikely outcomes. Who would have thought 10 or 20 years ago that vignerons would have to deal with this kind of issue today? The Greens did. It was going to happen, as the complexity of the landscape has changed.

Hon Barbara Scott: Did you warn CALM? What did you do?

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: We have been talking about getting a more rational fire management strategy for the region, based on community engagement and preparedness, instead of burning out large-scale landscapes.

Hon Barbara Scott: Have you been working on this?

Hon PAUL LLEWELLYN: I think I started working on these issues in about 1980. In fact, I started working for CALM in about 1981-82. We were trying to rethink fire management that did not involve unnecessary broad-scale burning of the landscape. We are here today because of the complexity of our landscape. As I said, the owners of blue gum plantations will be the next to complain. There will be litigation when a CALM fire jumps. A prescribed CALM fire will escape and go straight through one of those assets, and we will have that to contend with as well. Investment in a blue gum plantation was another tax-driven activity that resulted in poorly laid out blue gums on the landscape. In other words, because it was tax driven, it expanded across the landscape with very little order. A similar thing has happened with the wine industry. I am not saying that people should not be driven by tax incentives; I am asking where the tax incentives are for renewable energy. We would like to see signs of renewable energy across the landscape as well; however, it has not happened.

Members, therefore, must acknowledge that there has been smoke-taint damage to many vineyards in the south west, that a genuine issue must be attended to, and that CALM must consult more closely with not only vignerons, but also the community. CALM must review the strategic objectives of its fire management policy, and introduce more flexibility into its fire management program so that we can move forward and reduce the conflicts in the future; members must support that.

I hope that at this short notice we have been able to introduce some new ideas about how to move forward on the matter of fire management in the region so that we can reduce conflict. Conflict is normal, but it must be managed in a way that benefits the community. We must take out the Big Brother element from CALM's management strategies that suggest that it knows what is good for us and that it will burn everything. We must bring fire management back into communities, get CALM seriously involved and put serious resources into a community-based strategy. Communities should be resourced to look after themselves, rather than rely on this Big Brother strategy, which more often than not goes wrong.

HON ROBYN McSWEENEY (South West) [11.27 am]: I support this motion, but I also say at the outset that I am an avid supporter of prescribed burning.

Hon Paul Llewellyn: So am I.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I am on the record in this place as saying that I am an avid supporter, and I know that most members on my side of the house support prescribed burning.

The motion arose because 450 hectares that were intended to be burnt in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park spread to 2 000 hectares. Wine producers are particularly angry, because the smoke has tainted their crops. I understand that 95 per cent of grapes remain unpicked. As the Margaret River wine industry is worth millions of dollars, wine producers have a right to be extremely angry. I have received some phone calls from wine producers who are extremely upset. I wrote to the minister yesterday on this issue asking that he look into the issues surrounding this burn, as this industry is very important to the region.

I was interested to read a document from the Institute of Foresters of Australia, which answers the question -

How important is it to keep smoke from prescribed burns away from communities?

It states -

The question the community has to ask is whether it is preferable to be subjected to short term smoke events from prescribed burns or enormous amounts of smoke from a wildfire, which also has the potential to kill people.

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Yes, wildfires do have the potential to kill people, but this motion is asking for flexibility from CALM. Could it not burn at a different time, when it is not so important for vineyards and when the grapes are not on the vines? In answer to the question about what measures CALM should implement to ensure that communities are informed about intended prescribed burns and that they have the opportunity to participate in burn planning, the Institute of Foresters of Australia said that it considers that CALM has more than adequate procedures in place to advise and consult with adjoining landowners and the community and that consultation at a strategic level is reasonable. It also said that any attempt to consult too extensively beyond that may mean that the achievement of the annual prescribed burning target would be severely compromised. That must be weighed up. The Institute of Foresters is saying that the policy and procedures are in place, but Hon Barry House is saying that CALM is not being flexible in adhering to those policies and procedures. We are talking about millions and millions of dollars, and that flexibility is needed. I note that CALM's indicative prescribed burning plan states -

The burn program for autumn 2006 includes up to 90 proposed burns covering an area of around 145,000 hectares. The program deliberately builds in flexibility - for example, to enable CALM to take advantage of prevailing weather conditions - so planning has been done for a larger area than CALM intends to burn. CALM's overall burn program for the south-west forests in the 2005-2006 year is in the order of 200,000 hectares.

CALM means flexibility with weather patterns. I do not know that it has looked at flexibility with producers and, in particular, wine producers. Perhaps CALM needs to be more flexible in its dealings with those producers. That is why I have written to the minister to ask him to consider the issue.

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan - Minister for Education and Training) [11.31 am]: First, I thank members for their contributions to this very important debate. However, the government will oppose the motion. It is interesting to note the comments of members. On the one hand, they accept that it is very important for CALM to undertake its business, part of which is prescribed burning. On the other hand, they recognise that this may have some impact on the wine industry. At the end of the day, it is similar to not being able to make an omelette without breaking an egg. Frankly, this issue boils down to the fact that it is very hard to protect the community from fires without prescribed burning. Some people might argue that prescribed burning must take place in the interests of the broader community. However, there is no doubt that the wine industry in the south west of the state is rapidly expanding. It is a growing industry. The south west has one of the fastest growing regional populations in Western Australia. A lot of that growth is happening in the greater Bunbury area and in the Shires of Augusta-Margaret River and Busselton. This is a significant economic region. It is also an economic region that has become much more diversified over time. In fact, of the state's nine regions, it is probably the most diversified economic region. The activities in the region include agriculture and horticulture, timber and forest products, mineral extraction, processing, manufacturing, retailing, tourism, construction, other types of manufacturing, service industries and fishing and aquaculture. First, it is a significant area; secondly, it is a growing area; and, thirdly, it is a very diverse area. In recent times, there has been not only accelerated growth in the tourism sector in the south west, but also phenomenal growth in the wine industry.

I grew up in the Swan Valley, and it is interesting to note the comparisons between the Swan Valley and that region. The Swan Valley has maintained its wine production and there is limited capacity for it to expand, but in the south west there has been enormous growth in wine production. Of course, at the end of the day, everybody wants to protect their interests. There is no doubt that the winemaking and grape-growing communities want to protect their interests. However, CALM obviously has a legislative responsibility to protect the interests of the broader community. We are seeing these competing interests come up against one another.

The government supports the Department of Conservation and Land Management's achievement of its annual prescribed burning program of 200 000 hectares in the south west. The government recognises, as I am sure other members in the chamber recognise, that prescribed burning is essential for the protection of human life, the community and natural assets. This is not a new activity; this activity has been taking place for well over 80 years. Since the introduction of prescribed aerial burning in the mid-1960s, the incidence and severity of damaging summer wildfires have been significantly reduced, and I am sure that CALM will continue to reduce the incidence of these fires. However, the opportunities for prescribed burns depend primarily on certain factors. CALM cannot just undertake a prescribed burn when it feels like it. Certain conditions must prevail for CALM to carry out a prescribed burn in a safe way that will not pose any risk to the broader community. In carrying out its prescribed burns, CALM endeavours to minimise the impact of smoke and ash on neighbouring properties and rural communities. Of course, this is achieved by trying to ensure that it selects the most favourable weather conditions for each of the burns in consultation with neighbouring landowners. However, it is fair to say that this is not an exact science. It is also fair to say that members of this chamber have recognised that that is the case. If this were an exact science, and CALM could control all the variables, the simple fact is that CALM

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would obviously do so, because I am sure that it also does not need the headache. CALM is not able to give assurances or undertakings that it will not conduct prescribed burns near vineyards should the opportunity arise.

In regard to the impact of smoke on wine grapes, there is no evidence that short-duration smoke drift over vineyards causes a taint in the wine. It is interesting that this point was acknowledged by the members who have spoken. In fact, Hon Barry House said in his speech that we need to do some more scientific research on the impact of smoke on wine. There seems to be two schools of thought: the first is that it makes no difference at all and that this is just a bit of a furphy, and the second is that smoke does have an impact. It is an issue that probably needs to be settled once and for all. I would also be a great supporter of good research going into this area.

Although it is not possible for CALM to give an undertaking that no smoke will drift over vineyards, it has always been CALM's policy to take all reasonable steps to ensure that smoke is directed away from vineyards. CALM consults extensively with grape growers and wine producers on scheduling and conducting key prescribed burns and grape harvesting, to minimise the smoke effect on neighbouring vineyards. It is fairly important that we recognise the extent to which CALM goes to ensure that community consultation takes place. When CALM starts the consultation process, it usually involves pre-season community consultation on CALM's three-year and annual prescribed burning programs with key stakeholders, including grape and wine producers. I do not think people will recognise this, but it also includes one-on-one consultation with individual neighbours when prescribed burns are imminent and on the day of prescribed burns. An example of this sort of public consultation is the comprehensive community liaison CALM undertook before commencing a prescribed burn adjoining the Pemberton town site and near several vineyards. CALM conducted a community consultation in October 2005. Prior to the prescribed burn, CALM delivered 600 advices to town and rural residents, delivered prescribed burn notices to CALM's neighbours within three kilometres of the burn and advertised monthly prescribed burning operation lists in local newspapers. On the day of the prescribed burns, CALM also posted prescribed burn community consultation plans on web site noticeboards and made personal contact with recreation and tourism business operators and local wine and grape producers.

This reminds me of when members of Parliament go into the community to consult on a matter. I will take the issue of when we doorknock during campaigns. I am sometimes amazed when I hear people say that they have never seen a politician at their door. The person may well not have, but that does not mean that a politician has not been to that person's door. Sometimes the person has not been home. I use this as an analogy: irrespective of the efforts made by a politician, the simple fact is that contact has not been made. The same applies here. CALM will undertake certain activities or cause certain things to happen to better inform the community of what it intends to do and the dates of prescribed burns, and if somebody does not pick up his local paper and find out when prescribed burns occur, he does not get the information. If he does not go to town and does not see the notice on the pin-up board, he will not have access to the information. If he was not one of the 600 people who were directly consulted in the example I have just cited, or if he was not home or contacted, obviously consultation outcomes will not be 100 per cent. There is also the argument about how much consultation can be done. I do not have a problem. We should always try to get the maximum benefit or outcomes from consultation to keep people informed. However, people tend to be a bit tough on CALM by being critical about its efforts to consult. I am confident that CALM endeavours to do a good job, but for a number of reasons maybe it is not as successful as it could be.

I also want to put on the public record that CALM is seeking additional information from industry representatives on specific issues of concern, and will be having further discussions on those issues. The Minister for the Environment, Hon Mark McGowan, is arranging to meet a representative of the wine industry in the not-too-distant future.

Hon Barry House interjected.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The minister is capable of handling the matter. Is the member saying there should be no prescribed burns in the south west?

Hon Barry House: I am not saying that at all.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Is the member saying that CALM can prescribe-burn at any time of the year? The member had better be careful about what he is saying, because even he must recognise that sometimes there are competing interests and that these matters are not black and white. CALM has been burning for the best part of 80 years. The state has experienced a massive growth in its wine industry over the past 10 or 15 years, because it is tax effective. All of a sudden, major adjustments must be made. Those adjustments will be made, but they will take some time and ongoing dialogue to get the best results.

Hon Paul Llewellyn made a point about fires escaping. Of course, it is always regrettable when fire escapes from a prescribed burn, as occurred a few weeks ago in the Margaret River area. However, I point out that out of

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the 1 646 wildfires attended by CALM throughout the state in the three years from 2002-03 to 2004-05, only 30, or 1.8 per cent, were the result of escapes from CALM's prescribed burns. I am sure that even CALM recognises that this is one of the potential risks with prescribed burns. I am sure that one of CALM's objectives is the reduction of that figure from 1.8 per cent to zero per cent, but, once again, it is not a perfect world and prescribed burning is not an exact science. CALM can do only what it is physically able to do.

Having made those remarks, I reiterate that the government will not support this motion.

HON NORMAN MOORE (Mining and Pastoral - Leader of the Opposition) [11.48 am]: I had not intended to speak on this motion until the minister indicated the government's opposition to it. I find the government's opposition rather strange, because the government is taking exactly the reverse position of that of Hon Barry House. I will go through the motion to try to demonstrate to the government what it is acknowledging by voting against this. The motion calls on the house to acknowledge that smoke-taint damage has occurred to many vineyards in the south west. By voting against that, the minister is suggesting that it did not occur.

Hon Kim Chance: No, there is an action in the Supreme Court. You cannot expect the state to acknowledge it while there is that action in the Supreme Court.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: If the Minister for Agriculture and Food wanted to, he could amend the motion to say that the house is aware that smoke-taint may be damaging, or something like that. The motion then calls on CALM to consult more closely with vignerons and the wine industry. That is a benign request. By voting against the motion, is the minister intending to say that CALM should not consult? I find that quite strange, bearing in mind that all this motion does is say that CALM conducts prescribed burns, which we support, and that CALM should consult with people who will be affected by the prescribed burn to the capacity it is able to. The motion then seeks to introduce flexibility to the prescribed burning program to avoid conflict in the future. I would have thought that it is a very benign request of CALM to take more care about what it does. If the government's view is that CALM takes every care and that it is bad luck if something happens as a result, that is rather a negative way of approaching this matter. Hon Barry House has not criticised anybody in any significant way at all; he has drawn a problem to the attention of the house. Some potential solutions to the problem are to undertake a significantly greater level of consultation with the industry and to introduce some flexibility in the prescribed burning program. That is a perfectly legitimate and proper request; therefore, I am really quite surprised, to tell the truth, that the government will not support the motion.

In her comments, the minister referred to the wine industry as an industry that has been successful because it is a tax-effective way of dealing with cash. That shows a complete lack of understanding of what has actually happened in the Western Australian wine industry. Some tax concessions probably have been available to people who invest in the industry, as is the case in many other industries, particularly the film industry. I have not heard the minister criticise that. However, the industry has been extraordinarily successful because of the right combination of soil, climate and expertise. We have created in the south west of Western Australia in particular a world-class wine industry. We should be very proud of that, and to suggest that it occurred because people wanted to avoid paying tax is a serious insult to the people who have put a huge amount of energy, expertise and hard work into developing an industry that is making WA very well respected throughout the world. Western Australia is in some areas producing wines that are as good as any in the world. That is something we should be proud of. Members should not comment that it is simply some tax-effective industry that happens to have done all right and, therefore, we should not worry about a bit of smoke getting on the grapes. The minister does not understand how important this industry is to Western Australia, and her misunderstanding translates, regrettably, into a decision to not support this motion. She is taking the view that it is bad luck that this industry is being affected by smoke.

Somebody mentioned the resources of the Department of Conservation and Land Management. Thirty-five CALM officers work in Shark Bay. Anybody who says CALM does not have enough resources should look at how it uses its resources. At Shark Bay, half a dozen dolphins come into the shore, yet there are 35 CALM officers to look after them. It is absolutely outrageous. Maybe the officers should be spread around the state a bit more to deal with other issues, including this one that Hon Barry House has quite properly raised today.

The government ought not to vote against Hon Barry House's motion. Rather than take the view that this is just a smokescreen, so to speak, it should give some thought to moving a quick amendment that satisfies its requirements and gives us a motion that we all agree with.

HON KIM CHANCE (Agricultural - Minister for Agriculture and Food) [11.52 am]: Similarly, I was not going to rise until I heard the Leader of the Opposition speak.

Hon Norman Moore: Had I known that, I could have made three speeches!

Hon Barry House; Hon Barbara Scott; Hon Nigel Hallett; Hon Paul Llewellyn; Hon Robyn McSweeney; Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; Hon Norman Moore; Hon Kim Chance

Hon KIM CHANCE: The Leader of the Opposition put a connotation on the view Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich expressed that I am sure she did not intend and is remote from what she intended. The fact is that we are supportive of the spirit of the motion. We are appreciative that Hon Barry House has brought this very topical and important issue to the attention of the house. As I indicated, matters are before the Supreme Court, and I am not sufficiently qualified to amend a motion of this kind to the extent that I could be confident that it would not have an effect on those matters. The fact is that I think that what we say in this place is more important than the way in which a particular vote is taken. That is why I was a little concerned about the spin that the Leader of the Opposition put on the quite reasonable statements by Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich. That spin does not reflect the government's intention; however, since that connotation could be placed on those words, it is appropriate for me to clarify the government's position in this regard.

Although Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich was commenting on behalf of the government in her capacity as the minister representing the Minister for the Environment, as the Minister for Agriculture and Food, obviously I have a view that can be expressed in somewhat different terms. I am concerned about the issue of smoke taint in our wine industry. I am happy that Hon Barry House has acknowledged that there are things that we do not yet understand about the way smoke taint affects a vintage. For example, we do not understand whether smoke-taint damage is as bad in January as it can be in March, April and May, which is closer to the end of the vintage. We need a better understanding of that. The other issue that has been raised by people - not in this debate in the chamber but in our discussions outside the chamber - is whether it could be possible to substitute some of the autumn burning with spring burning. My understanding from matters discussed with me, in my capacity as the Minister for Forestry, is that although spring burning has actually worked quite well in a large part of the jarrah forest, it is much more difficult to carry out in the far more humid environment that exists in the karri forest. Indeed, I understand it is difficult to achieve a karri burn at all and almost impossible to achieve one in spring. These issues all form part of the aim of the motion, which is to encourage the government to consult more effectively than it is consulting now - I accept that that is a necessity - and to develop a better understanding of the science so that we know the appropriate time to burn and when burning and the vintage come into conflict, and have a more precise definition about the months when that conflict might occur. I know that my colleague Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm, a great wine producer himself, has a particular interest in and is well aware of the issues that arise. The one aspect that we did seem to agree on is the necessity for the prescribed burns. I think that was supported by every speaker, with the possible exception of Hon Paul Llewellyn. I did not quite follow -

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: No, he supported it.

Hon KIM CHANCE: He said he supported it, but then seemed to speak against it. Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich made the point that although escapes from prescribed burns have been an issue recently, they are in fact very rare. The number she cited was 30 escapes from more than 1 600 prescribed burns, which represents less than two per cent of the total of burns. Hon Paul Llewellyn implied that they were far more frequent than that, and said there were also escapes from the back-burning activities that are put in place to mitigate damage caused by wildfires, which are, in fact, caused by lightning strikes and arson attacks. There will always be a risk with back-burning. Anybody who has been involved with firefighting knows that back-burning is a highly risky proposition. However, that is clearly not related to the issue of prescribed burns; it is an attempt to mitigate the risk from wildfires. Escapes from prescribed burns are very rare. We have known since the early 1960s that if we do not prescribe-burn, we place everybody at huge risk. That includes not only vineyards, but also the people who live in and adjacent to the forest and who operate enterprises, including farming and plantation growing, near the state forest.

The evidence that emerged from the Dwellingup fires in Western Australia, and so tragically repeated in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory in recent years, is that without a prescribed burning process the whole state is placed at grave risk. Members who were reading eastern states newspapers, particularly Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales newspapers, after the Canberra fires will know that the ACT and New South Wales have a higher regard for prescribed burning practices in Western Australia than we do. In fact, we were held up as the paragon. We all knew we were not the paragon; we knew our prescribed burning practices had fallen well behind the desirable levels.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management has been caught in a conflict. It understands that in order to hold its own and catch up a bit with the amount of prescribed burning, it needs to be targeting a burn area of approximately 200 000 hectares a year. I compliment CALM because it has tried very hard to achieve that target figure. The conflict is, and it is a classical land use conflict, that even though the prescribed burns have been taking place for 80 years, as Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich said, they have come off a fairly low base. We are now seeing an increasing level of catch-up prescribed burning. Over the latter two decades, but particularly the last decade, we have seen a massive increase in the planting of vineyards, not only in the south west but also now in the great southern. It is a classical land use conflict and it calls for the development of science so we can

Hon Barry House; Hon Barbara Scott; Hon Nigel Hallett; Hon Paul Llewellyn; Hon Robyn McSweeney; Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; Hon Norman Moore; Hon Kim Chance

better understand the issue and the development of a better consultation process. I do not think that the Minister for the Environment would have any objection to me saying that.

Land use conflict is two ways. There are always complaints about land use from vineyards impacting on other land users. One of the key areas in which this occurs is in the conflict between aquaculture and vineyards. Vineyards, by necessity, use insecticides, and, most particularly, they use an insecticide group called alphacypermethrin, which is a synthetic pyrethroid and it is very gentle on most living things, but it is deadly on fish, particularly crustaceans. If a person is unfortunate enough to operate a marron farm within any kind of proximity to a vineyard that is using an alphacypermethrin, his whole stock will be wiped out overnight. This has happened particularly in the Mt Barker area, as Hon Robyn McSweeney would be well aware. That is not the fault of the vineyard industry.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to sessional orders.