

**PRESCRIBED BURNING — SOUTH WEST**

*Statement*

**HON DIANE EVERS (South West)** [10.09 pm]: Earlier this week I received a letter addressed to the Minister for Environment, but I think this letter is so reflective of many people in the south west that I would really like everyone to hear it. It states —

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your email ref. 62-20788 received by me the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2020. I have written to Mr. Luke Bentley asking to supply me with the peer reviewed research you are referring to in your letter.

I am very aware of the prescribed burning practice being the policy of the McGowan government. I am also very aware of the fact that in the 2018–2019 fire season 77,000 square kilometers was burned in this state, comprising of 42,000km<sup>2</sup> of wildfire and 35,000km<sup>2</sup> of prescribed fire.

I want to point out that I am not against prescribed burning, but am saddened to see the current system of burning large area's far from human activity, at a very cost effective rate (\$10–20 per ha), which incorporates edge burning and burning the interior at very high temperatures, in comparison to the indigenous approach of small mosaic style burning in cool conditions.

As someone, who spends a lot of his time in the natural estate, it is clear that this is unsustainable. And it is not just me, who is concerned, prominent scientists I am in contact with hold the same view.

From my reading of management plans of Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), plus my extensive fieldwork over a large area of the Great Southern, I am convinced that this department is not adhering to it's own policies.

In both the Walpole Wilderness and Adjacent Conservation Lands (2008) and the Forest Management Plan 2013–2023 it clearly states that the preservation of flora and fauna are paramount of importance.

Peat (taken 5000 years to form) area's are be excluded from fire as well as granite outcrops and their flora and fauna communities.

Today I visited the northern part of the Denbarker block, which was prescribed burned (edge burned and within a couple of days completely incinerated, with no escape for fauna) on the 6–7<sup>th</sup> of November 2019.

*4.5M dollars were raised for the preservation of koala's after the wildfires in the eastern states. Here we burn millions of animals, completely within the law, each year without the blink of an eye.*

I saw on Google Earth that there was a likelihood of a large swamp in the northern part of this block. I walked in there and sure enough I found a large swamp with a layer of peat up to 700mm thick.

From my observation, and as the adjoining photo's show it had been extensively burned. Machinery had been in there and pulled a break around the swamp, but obviously no effort had been made to either exclude it from fire or extinguish the fire once in the swamp. From my observations some peat swamps were still alight 2 months after the initial burn, of which I have photo proof.

Trees in this swamp were dead and not resprouting. Nor was there evidence of obligate seeders like *Hakea Quercifolia*, producing any seedlings.

A few weeks ago I visited a granite outcrop in this block, and this had also not been excluded from fire, as is the policy set out in the management plan.

I, a simple apiarist for the last 45 years, however in alignment with some of the most prominent scientists in the country, am sure, that this continued onslaught of frequent burns on a 4–10 year rotation in most of our Conservation Estate, including all National Parks, is unsustainable, as most species require 20–40 or more years to recover from fire.

We are privileged to have some of the most diverse flora and fauna systems in the world, and not so privileged to have one of the highest extinction rates in the world.

I and many other citizens are of the opinion, that a review of this practice is of the utmost importance in order to retain our flora and fauna, before it is too late.

I am sorry to write to you on a regular basis with these concerns, but as there is no other avenue to express my concerns, apart from writing to the Premier (which I have) I just have to keep informing you of my findings and of my concerns of the non adherence to management plans by the Department under your tenure.

With the kindest regards,

Bart Lebbing  
Denmark Fire Study Group.

This letter is representative of so many different people I hear from. As my colleague Hon Alison Xamon spoke about, climate change is not being addressed, and our forests are one of the places where we can address that. Our forests store carbon; they bring in more carbon and create cooling of the atmosphere and create rainfall. There are so many benefits to them, yet we continue to abuse them through such unnecessary and intense fires, just to be able to reach that target of 200 000 hectares in the south west.

I have walked in a few of these forests and I have been in some that have gone long unburnt; Dalgarp National Park is one of them. People walk in those forests and there is biodiversity like they have never seen. They can see the soil on the ground with some leaf litter, and these are not high fire fuel areas, yet if a fire is put through there and the people come back in four or five years, they will see that the fuel will be there for an intense fire because it grows back more quickly when the canopy has been burnt out.

All I can say is: please, over the next few weeks, come down south and visit the forests. If members need an example of which forest to go to, wherever they happen to be, I am sure I can find someone who can give them some good examples. It is worth it to everybody to get down there, walk through the forest, see what we have and enjoy and appreciate it. Bring your families, bring your friends; we are looking forward to seeing people down there because too many people are too dissociated from the forest and the environment, and just getting into the forest and feeling it and seeing that biodiversity. All too often after these fires we end up losing species, and we need biodiversity because we are causing one of the greatest extinctions on Earth. A significant part of it is happening here in Australia and here in south west Australia. We have one of the biodiversity hotspots of the world, and it is in such great danger from human activity.