

FORESTRY — SOFTWOOD PLANTATIONS

488. Ms E.J. KELSIE to the Minister for Forestry:

I refer to today's announcement that the McGowan Labor government will invest a record \$350 million to expand WA's softwood timber plantations. Can the minister outline to the house how this investment will support the future of the forest industry as well as secure Western Australian jobs?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

I thank the member for the question and for the passionate work she has done in her community since she has come into this house. I was very pleased to be part of the announcement this morning. As part of the announcement with the Premier we announced a \$350 million expansion of WA's softwood timber estate. This is a massive investment. It is the biggest investment in WA's history in plantation timber, and probably the biggest investment of its type in Australia. That is the scale of it. We all know that pine is an essential critical resource for WA's construction industry. Sadly, the plantation estate has been allowed to run down over many years. At its peak we had about 90 000 hectares. If something was not done, we would have ended up at around 40 000 hectares over the next 20 years. That would have created a critical shortage of timber in Western Australia. One of the reasons that we are in this position is because the previous government did not invest in this area.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The Leader of the Opposition says that is not true. The figures speak for themselves. We will invest \$350 million over 10 years, which will plant over 30 000 hectares of pine. In the eight years of the previous Liberal government, on average, it planted 175 hectares a year. When we look at the year-by-year figures, in 2010 and 2011, it planted five hectares of pine; and in 2012, it planted zero hectares of pine! The Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Forestry during a period of the previous government along with the former member for Warren-Blackwood, Terry Redman. The Nationals WA let this estate run down. On this side of the house we are investing \$350 million in the softwood estate to give security to the thousands of workers who work directly in the mills that process that pine, places like Wesbeam, Wespine Industries and Laminex, and the thousands of workers who process that pine, plus the thousands of workers who work in the construction industry. That is what we announced today.

We also announced a \$50 million transition package for workers who currently work in the native forestry industry. I note that members opposite have been out complaining this morning about the decision. The impacts of climate change are real. There has been a 20 per cent reduction in rainfall in the south west of WA since the 1970s. The science says business as usual for native forestry is just not sustainable. That is what the science says; that is why there needs to be change in this industry. The trouble is that members opposite do not support the science and they do not understand the impacts of climate change. That is why they have their head in the sand on this issue. We are putting together \$50 million as part of the transition package. We will get industry, unions and the community together to work on a transition package for workers and businesses impacted by this change. It may be retraining or transitioning to other industries and it could be businesses pivoting to deal with the limited volume that will still be available. We will sit down with those communities, those businesses and those workers with this transition package and ensure that those communities have a future. Whether it be in softwood or in native forestry, the key is that it has to be sustainable in the long run. That is the only way that we will protect Western Australian jobs.