

PRESCRIBED BURNING PROGRAM — SOUTH WEST

1390. Hon Nigel Hallett to the Minister for Environment

Further to question No. 1213, I ask —

- (1) Will the Minister instruct the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) to plan, rather than 'seek', to cover the shortfall in prescribed burning, should the weather conditions remain suitable?
- (2) As the Fire Review Report was obviously correct in its estimates, will DEC add another \$1.5 million to the amount budgeted for prescribed burning?
- (3) As no practical training is given to city based officers of DEC, can the House be assured that officers, who do not have practical fire experience, have no input in the prescribed burning planning process?
- (4) With regards to grazing in south west forests, if there is very little grass fuel under the forest canopy, historically why did many farmers graze their stock in these areas?
- (5) If 45 percent of the fire management budget goes on planning prescribed burning, where is the majority of the budget spent?
- (6) If DEC consults as suggested in question 9, —
 - (a) do they train Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA) and Local Brigades in prescribed burning; and
 - (b) do they follow local advice and wishes with regard that land to be burnt?
- (7) When an Act states a Conservation and Land Management (CALM) officer, does this also include all officers of the DEC?

Hon DONNA FARAGHER replied:

- (1) The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) has planned in excess of 300,000 hectares of prescribed burns for 2009/10 in its south-west forest regions. This provides the necessary flexibility to conduct planned burns under suitable conditions. The capacity to achieve and exceed the 200,000 hectare target is dependent on a large number of factors including availability of suitable weather, fuel moisture conditions, fire danger conditions, smoke management constraints and commitments to wildfire suppression activities elsewhere. I have also relaxed the management guidelines which have the potential to impact the levels of smoke haze over Perth and I did this because we need to do everything we can do to avoid future fire threats.
- (2) DEC has sought and obtained significant increases in budgets for prescribed burning and fire management in recent years. Relative to a 2002/03 base, the cumulative increase in the fire management budget has been as follows: 2003/04 — \$2.986M; 2004/05 — \$3.621M; 2005/06 — \$5.621M; 2006/07 — \$7.551M; 2007/08 — \$7.551M; 2008/09 — \$12.264M.
- (3) DEC does provide training in prescribed burning and fire management functions to city based staff as well as staff throughout the State. DEC receives valuable input into prescribed burn plans from a wide range of staff within DEC and the Forest Products Commission throughout the State and Perth. They include staff involved in fire operations, nature conservation, forest management, parks and visitor services and research who need to use fire to achieve land management outcomes.
- (4) Grazing within State forests and timber reserves has been largely concentrated in areas such as the south coast and eastern woodlands where sufficient grass may exist for grazing, or immediately adjacent to private property where there may be some grass intrusion into forest areas. However, grazing is not an effective means of hazard reduction for the vast majority of forest areas.
- (5) The answer given to question No 1213 was that 20% of the total fire management budget was spent on burn planning and administration, not 45%. The remainder of the fire management budget is allocated to a number of areas including prescribed burning, staff training, fire detection, fire preparedness, fire suppression, aircraft, equipment maintenance, radio communications and information systems, and liaison.
- (6) (a) DEC provides opportunities to local government bushfire brigades and Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA) staff to undertake formal training in prescribed burning via the distance learning course developed by DEC in conjunction with FESA. DEC also actively provides opportunities to local bushfire brigades to gain operational experience in prescribed burns undertaken on DEC lands located near private properties.

- (b) Yes, wherever this is practical to do. In most cases DEC assists in the planning and takes part in burning operations with bushfire brigades, particularly if the area in question is contiguous with DEC-managed land that is to be burnt at the same time.
- (7) All DEC officers who are accredited to undertake identified key roles within the Australasian Interagency Incident Management System are appointed as authorised CALM Act Officers under the Bush Fires Act 1954. The accreditation is provided on the basis of the officer's training, knowledge and experience in those specific fire roles.