

**COMMITTEE REPORTS AND MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS - CONSIDERATION**

*Committee*

The Deputy Chairman of Committees (Hon Barry House) in the Chair.

*Joint Standing Committee on the Anti-Corruption Commission - Report on Hearing With the Anti-Corruption Commission on 7 April 2003 - Fourth Report*

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: I move -

That the report be noted.

One of the problems that has beset the Anti-Corruption Commission has been the difficulty communicating to the public what it actually does, due to the requirement for confidentiality contained in its legislation. It therefore finds itself unable to respond to various reports about cases it is dealing with that achieve notoriety, or when people say that it is a waste of public money because it has not put too many corrupt offenders into prison, and so on.

In that respect the constraints of confidentiality have been difficult for the Anti-Corruption Commission to contend with. The joint standing committee has similarly been somewhat constrained in reporting matters that are divulged to it by the ACC. Under the terms of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act the commissioner may give information to the Joint Standing Committee on the Anti-Corruption Commission. However, the committee is bound by the same requirements of confidentiality as employees under the Act, hence information given to the committee by the commissioners has also to be regarded as confidential. The committee established with the ACC from the outset - some six or so years ago - a protocol of quarterly meetings at which the ACC would table a report on its proceedings. Unfortunately, because of the constraints of confidentiality those reports tended to be lists of numbers that did not make a great deal of sense and that did not divulge a great deal of information. Therefore, all the committee could do was look at trends in numbers according to categories of offence and offending, and at matters such as the duration of cases that were before the commission to attempt to ensure that they were dealt with in minimum time.

The question of public relations in respect of the ACC was raised in the interim report of the Royal Commission Into Whether There Has Been Any Corrupt or Criminal Conduct by Western Australian Police Officers. Following that report the committee resolved that its meetings with the ACC should be open. Previously, at the request of the ACC, the meetings had been closed. Under the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly, if a meeting is closed, the proceedings remain confidential for 10 years; and if at the request of a witness and at the decision of the committee a meeting is held in camera, the proceedings remain secret for 30 years; they have almost the same status as matters that are dealt with under the Official Secrets Act. The net result was that when the ACC requested that the meetings be closed, it simply meant that the committee could not report to the Parliament any information that it might have been able to report on the basis of those quarterly reports from the commissioners. At the committee's most recent meeting with the commissioners it was resolved that the meetings should be open, and that if there were any strictly confidential matters that the commissioners wished to remain confidential they could request that the meeting proceed in camera, as they did in a couple of instances in which they gave explanatory information that necessarily divulged strictly confidential information.

The second decision, which was made in consultation with Terry Lewis, the manager of public relations of the ACC, was to change the format of the reports so that although the requirements of confidentiality that exist in the Act would be honoured, sufficient information could be given to inform the community and the Parliament about the activities of the ACC. Therefore, I draw attention to the information contained on pages 9 to 12 of the report in pie-chart form. A total of 1 398 cases were reported in the three years between 1999 and 2002, of which 47 per cent related to police officers; 33 per cent - 496 cases - to public officers in government departments; and the remaining 20 per cent - 383 cases - to other public officers, such as local government officers, members of Parliament and officers of statutory authorities covered by the Anti-Corruption Commission Act.

To what did those cases relate? Page 10 of the report states that of the 1 398 cases reported, 42 per cent related to criminal conduct; 34 per cent - 475 cases - to serious improper conduct; and 15 per cent - 207 cases - to corrupt conduct.

Who reported those cases? As you know, Mr Deputy Chairman (Hon Barry House), the Act contains two reporting provisions in sections 14 and 16. Section 14 requires senior public officers to report to the Anti-Corruption Commission any reasonable concern they have about serious improper conduct through to corrupt conduct by persons under their jurisdiction. Section 16 enables a citizen to make a complaint or lodge a report with the commission. Of the 1 398 cases reported in that three-year period, 80 per cent were from the principal officers of public authorities; only 17 per cent were from the general public; and three per cent were own-motion cases.

I labour these points to indicate that although the ACC has been called a discredited commission, it has been a very active commission. Another point I make is that the large number of cases brought to the attention of the ACC by the principal offices of Western Australian public authorities illustrates the awareness that public offices have of their obligations of probity under the Public Sector Management Act and relevant legislation. The very fact that 1 121 cases were reported by the principal officers of public agencies indicates their acute awareness of the anti-corruption function. That, in itself, must be acknowledged as one of the significant values of the ACC.

Only 139 of the 1 398 cases reported were substantiated, which again says something about the probity of the public sector. A very small number of allegations go to the full extent of either administrative discipline or criminal charges. Of those 139 substantiated cases, only 47 cases resulted in criminal charges; 72 cases - 52 per cent - in disciplinary action; and 20 cases in administrative action by the relevant authority.

The final point I will make about the value of the Anti-Corruption Commission is to indicate the outcomes on pages 15 to 19. In this report the ACC has tabled all the matters under the nature of the alleged serious misconduct and the investigation outcomes, and lists criminal charges and the outcome of the criminal charges, the disciplinary action and what the disciplinary action meant and, most important of all, the administrative changes that were brought about as a result of the report of the ACC. The ACC did not simply pursue, investigate and have either prosecution or disciplinary action taken; as result of its investigations, it also identified flaws in procedures whereby there might have been advertent or inadvertent abuse or a mistake made by public officers. It leads to change in administrative procedures. Although the ACC has been described, unfortunately, as a discredited agency, in the past three years it has more than fulfilled its obligations.

I now turn to one other matter about which the ACC has been subjected to some unfair criticism. When this report was tabled in the other House, some careless interpretation of the telecommunications interception data by the ACC was offered to the House. I draw the attention of members to page 8 of the report and the number of telecommunications interception warrants obtained and executed by the ACC - only 45 warrants related to 24 named persons. The other warrants were service warrants. Seven of the warrants executed on behalf of the ACC related to the Western Australia Police Service and the others to something called "SAPOL". I am not quite sure what that means; it looks like the South Australia Police but clearly it is not. The other warrants were served on behalf of the royal commission. Of the 45 telecommunications interception warrants obtained and executed by the ACC, 25 were for joint operations with the police royal commission. Although criticism might be levelled at the fact that there were 45 warrants - I put to members that that is a very small number of warrants - 25 of those warrants were on behalf of the royal commission. Members who have been following the royal commission will be aware that those telecommunications interceptions have been very effective instruments in exposing not only the extent but also the nature of corruption by some police officers. This might be where the number becomes worrying. Those 45 warrants - 25 for the police royal commission and 20 for the Anti-Corruption Commission's specific operations - led to a total of 61 599 telephone call interceptions. Telephone interception is not a cheap process. The ACC is on a very stringent budget and, given the numbers of cases it is required to investigate, it is not profligate in its decision to use it simply because it is an expensive instrument of investigation. It is also, however, as demonstrated by the royal commission, a very effective instrument of investigation.

I draw members' attention to paragraph 1.4 on page 3 concerning the future of the Anti-Corruption Commission staff under the impending Corruption and Crime Commission structure. When the decision was made to replace the ACC by the CCC on the recommendation of the interim report of the police royal commission, the Government, through the Attorney General, made it clear that it wanted to start with a clean slate. Given that the ACC was seen to be a discredited institution, the desire was to commence with a new commissioner and new investigative staff - a whole new investigative organisation. Part of the intention was that the investigative team from the royal commission would be absorbed into the staff of the CCC so that there would be a seamless transfer of cases still under consideration by the investigative staff to the CCC, as a result of the royal commission investigations. Therefore, the corporate knowledge and continuity of investigation would be preserved. The other staff of the new CCC were to be recruited on merit. The commissioners considered that this raised serious concerns about the future of the Anti-Corruption Commission staff, on two grounds.

First, in the same way that it was appropriate for the royal commission investigators with corporate knowledge of the investigation of misconduct by police officers to be transferred from the royal commission to the CCC - if the staff from the royal commission were transferred to the CCC - likewise it could be argued that the corporate knowledge of ACC investigators of misconduct by public officers other than police officers should be preserved and transferred with the investigative officers of the ACC to the CCC. Otherwise, the corporate knowledge and ongoing investigations of public officers other than police officers would be lost. The files and the intelligence would be transferred but the corporate knowledge that belonged to the investigators would be lost. For that reason, the commissioners of the ACC were concerned about the government decision to replace the staff.

The second ground is simply a human resources problem. If the ACC staff - who have been recruited as recently as the past 12 months - had no continuity of employment, what was to be their fate? The handling of their fate could be perceived to have been perhaps a little unjust. They were short-term contract people; they were not permanent employees of the public sector. Therefore, they were not entitled to some of the privileges of, say, voluntary or employer-initiated redundancy at the termination of their service. They were left out on a limb, were unemployed and experienced a considerable loss of benefits. The Anti-Corruption Commission had responded to a directive that all staff in the public sector on fixed-term contracts be transferred to permanent employment. It sought information about whether its employees were caught by that provision. The ACC asked whether the staff of the ACC on contract employment were entitled to be transferred to permanent employment under the new arrangement. The advice given was that yes, that was so. Initiatives were taken to transfer the staff. Therefore, if during the transition from the ACC to the CCC staff were not employed on merit, they still had entitlements such as employer-initiated redundancy.

Unfortunately, that matter reached an impasse. When the commissioners reported to the Joint Standing Committee on the Anti-Corruption Commission, the matter was being negotiated among the relevant authorities within government - including, possibly, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet - the Community and Public Sector Union and, of course, the ACC. To the best of my knowledge, that matter is still in limbo. The standing committee does not offer an opinion about that in this report. However, it thought the matter was of such significance that it should be brought to the attention of the Parliament. Hence on page 3 of the report the detail of the information given to the committee by the commissioners is reported.

With those brief comments I commend the motion.

Question put and passed.

*Draft Forest Management Plan - Statement by Leader of the House*

Resumed from 15 August on the following motion moved by Hon Peter Foss -

That the statement be noted.

Hon PETER FOSS: Last week I went through the various aspects of forest management. There is an illusion on the part of many people that our forests, and even our environment, will stay still and be preserved if we do not do anything. In fact, the environment is undergoing a major change due to the presence of western settlers in Western Australia. The use of fire is a particular example. We have stopped natural fires and prevented Aboriginals from regularly burning. We are entering a phase in which controlled burning has been reduced across most of Australia and in some places has been cut out. This in itself is creating a change in the environment of our forests. One of the consequences of that was the massive fires that took place at the beginning of this year in which 2.5 million hectares of native forest were burnt. That is equivalent to 42 years of logging. Although 42 years of logging will result in some timber and locked-up carbon, the burning of that much timber in one go does not provide anything. However, it has other consequences. It remains to be seen whether we will feel the same effects as were felt in the United States when it went through a similar anti-fire regime. That had a rather nasty effect and led to an increase in insect damage to trees. The increased amount of litter on the forest floor was a fantastic breeding ground for insects, which attacked the trees. That led to the deaths of many trees and to more litter on the forest floor. Most people who followed that issue saw the consequences, which was the disastrous fires that occurred in the western United States and led to the destruction of timber. That is one of the threats that now face our forests.

Another threat is the uncertainty of the future of the forest resources. Bipartisan support between the two major parties to protect forests has ceased. Unfortunately, the Government has put in place populist policies, which I do not believe are right. Forest resource can now no longer be guaranteed. That applies to natural resources, regrowth and native and foreign trees. Again, members can look to the experiences in the United States, where the majority of federal forests are regrowth on farms that became the Dust Bowl during the Depression. Most of the timber in the USA is grown on privately owned plantations. The United States has been subject to the same types of green pressures that have been applied in Australia. Green groups applied pressure to first conserve old-growth forests and then high-conservation forests. Next they will move to conserve all forests and then, no doubt, plantations.

At the recent Timber Communities Australia conference a speaker talked about the several stages that occur during the course of a plantation. The first is when people plant trees and are happy with them when they grow to about eye level. When the trees are at that height, people think they are pretty. However, when the trees grow above eye level, people ask what has happened to their view. They notice the area has become awfully dark and dull. Fifteen years after the trees have reached eye level, people say, "Don't you dare touch those big, beautiful trees". It is a matter of generational change. People's attitudes change over time. They do not like change. People get used to seeing trees. A person could plant a tree about which a neighbour complains. The

neighbour's children would grow up with the tree and, because it was part of their childhood, would complain when the person who planted it wanted to chop it down.

When bipartisan support for forestry is lost, nobody can safely and confidently invest in forestry in Western Australia. Forestry is a big spender. People must be encouraged to put money into it if they want it to continue to operate in Western Australia. It is a big employer both directly and indirectly. A classic example of that is when the Government was going through the process of developing its forest management plan. The first people who noticed the pinch - before anyone said that timber could not be harvested or that timber mills would close - were those who mended the machinery used in the industry. People whose job it was to service machinery in Bunbury, Manjimup and other places were the first to get hurt. Mill owners asked why they should put more money into their industry if they had to close. The effect crept through the industry and affected other workers. The last people affected were the mill workers. The effect worked down the supply chain to the mill and back up the supply chain from the mill to the people who work the fine timber. As I said the last time this matter was debated, the previous Government put a huge amount of effort into encouraging people in the jarrah industry to value-add. Much of the equipment those people owned has been sold off privately or has been bought by the Government under the exit scheme. While I am on the subject, can I put in a little plug for something else? I do not know what has happened to all the little bits of mills that have been bought by way of compensation payment from people exiting the industry. East Timor needs some mills. If the Government happens to have any odd little mills that might be suitable for a relatively primitive society, there is a country that would not mind having them.

Hon Kim Chance: When a business is purchased under the business exit assistance program, the miller retains ownership of the equipment.

Hon PETER FOSS: What does he do with it? Does he flog it?

Hon Kim Chance: In many cases the owners go on milling private material.

Hon PETER FOSS: That may be so, but I thought the Government might have the odd small mill.

Hon Kim Chance: I am pleased to hear what you say, and I will certainly pass it on to the Forest Products Commission.

Hon PETER FOSS: I urge the Government to help the Timorese in a number of ways. I complain about all the dreadful things that happen here under this Labor Government, but it is nothing compared with what happened to the Timorese under the Indonesians. We complain about our state of affairs. I believe we can afford to have it 10 times worse before we begin to have a vague understanding of what it is like to live in a place like Timor.

Hon Kim Chance: I used to complain that I had no shoes until I met a man with no feet, as the saying goes.

Hon PETER FOSS: That is exactly the situation. To go to our country's nearest neighbour and see the way in which people live is a very sobering experience. I digress. I only mention Timor because it seems a good opportunity to put it on the record. I have found that many people are very receptive to helping the East Timorese. The Deputy Chairman (Hon Barry House) is very interested in this because he has been busy contributing to East Timor, and I know his feelings towards it.

If people are to remain in the timber industry, money must be spent. Many people will be unemployed as a result of the massive contraction of the industry. It would be very difficult to find out how many. We can pick up the obvious ones. The most important aspect of it is that it is an industry that should grow, and it does grow. The fascinating thing about trees is that they grow. What better act is there for the environment than to grow a tree, to turn the tree into timber and to create beautiful furniture? If members look around them, they can see the odd bit of timber. The demand is still there.

Hon Kim Chance: Two sawmillers visited the Parliament today. They were very taken with the new Chamber.

Hon PETER FOSS: So they should be.

One cannot ignore it: it is a fantastic industry. We must stop treating people in the forest industry as pariahs. I know that the minister does not do so, but not too many people will say that foresters, timber millers, loggers and furniture makers are fantastic people. They are in one of the few industries that does not destroy the environment they live in. The green movement keeps saying that they do, but they do not.

Hon Ed Dermer: That is not to mention furniture, houses and everything else for which we rely on timber.

Hon PETER FOSS: It is essential. If we do not use timber, we must use something else, which will probably be a non-renewable resource.

Hon Ed Dermer: It would have a horrific impact on the environment.

Hon Simon O'Brien: You would not want to put the industry down for a cheap political point then, would you?

Hon PETER FOSS: I have already made that point. The essence is that timber is fantastic.

Hon Ed Dermer: Absolutely.

Hon PETER FOSS: With agriculture, once the bush has been chained and planted with a crop, none of the ecosystem is left.

Hon Kim Chance: It is important if you want to eat bread.

Hon PETER FOSS: I am not saying people should not do it.

Hon Kim Chance: Agriculture does damage the environment.

Hon PETER FOSS: I am not against agriculture. It is amazing how foresters and timber millers have been turned into environmental vandals, yet they go home and the forest grows again.

The little animals, birds, insects and plants are still there. The Department of Conservation and Land Management has studied it repeatedly. One cannot walk past that fact that if a mosaic pattern is cut into the environment, one ends up with exactly the same environment as was found before cutting.

Hon Kim Chance: Sometimes one cannot go back on the road to get the logs because the trees have grown so fast.

Hon PETER FOSS: That is exactly right. It is an environmentally sensible thing to do. I have no problem getting involved with agriculture, but agriculture does not leave a lot of the environment, but nor does industry and housing, nor do doctors and lawyers, and nor do shops or roads. Most members of this Chamber did some other work before they came to Parliament. How many members can say that their workplace was unchanged environmentally after they finished with it? None of us can say that. The reality is that if we do not impose on the environment, we would have to do something else. That something else will either be getting our timber from some other place, which may or may not be milled in an environmentally sustainable fashion, or we must use some non-renewable resource. Who would like a steel bookcase instead of a jarrah one? Who would like a fine steel floor instead of a jarrah floor? Who would like a steel chest of drawers rather than a jarrah chest?

Hon Barbara Scott: Or a steel rocking horse.

Hon PETER FOSS: Indeed! Who wants to give their children small steel toys to play with? The reality is that it will not happen. There will be a revolt somewhere along the line. People will say, "I want my timber!" Strangely, many people who protest about chopping down trees like timber - they love it. Where will they get it from? Why should we grow plantations of foreign trees when we can grow Western Australian forests? Which would members rather walk through - a pine forest of planted pines or a jarrah forest? I know which I would rather walk through, and which is better for the environment. It is not the monoculture of a pine forest or even the boringness of blue gum. People would be mad to try to cultivate their own forest on private land as they would run the risk of some nosy parker next door saying, "You can't cut down that valuable old tree." People grow their own forests in America. Unfortunately, they have a poorly controlled subdivision system, so the entire country has developed into little hamlets. Professionals in the city who love trees acquire their own 10 acres to drive around on little sit-on lawnmowers. I have never seen so many motorised, sit-on lawnmowers; there must be squillions of them in America. They look at their next door neighbour's trees. That neighbour, who has lived in the country for years, decides to cut down a tree, and the city dwellers complain, "That's a beautiful tree. I look at it out of my bedroom every morning!" The neighbour responds by saying that he grew it, along with his dad.

Hon Kim Chance: There should be an eleventh commandment in America: do not covet thy neighbour's forest.

Hon PETER FOSS: That is right. It is happening. We are barmy to talk in terms of plantations. Plantations have no environmental plus, they have no native undergrowth, and they are not really places for native animals. It is ridiculous. It is a foreign growth on our lands. In Australia there is this bizarre contradiction in terms. I am sure the worm will turn and at some stage that will change. I am worried that due to this management plan, we will not have a forest in which to resume the cutting of wood, and we will not have it because much of it will have been burnt to a crisp because we have not had the money to carry out a proper burning program, we have not had the machinery to protect it from major fire, and the greens will be saying we are not allowed to burn it - not the scientific ones, but the ones who have not bothered to look at anything other than the fact that they might get occasional coughy smoke into their poor little coughy lungs because of the burning. Hon Norman Moore would probably tell us that he gets quite a bit of smoke in his electorate all year round, unlike the south of the State where firestick agriculture has ceased. It is still alive and well in the Kimberley and the Pilbara, particularly the Kimberley.

Hon Norman Moore: It is caused by lightning.

Hon PETER FOSS: I recall visiting Warburton and seeing a lady set off across the desert with her pint tin mug of water, a length of aluminium for rooting out reptiles and a box of matches. She just set out into the wild blue yonder, and I could tell exactly where she had gone because there was a trail of fire after her. She was happy to disappear way out into the middle of nowhere, but she was carrying on in the traditional way - except for the piece of aluminium used for rooting out reptiles and the box of matches, but otherwise life went on as usual. In reality, we have massively changed the way things are done in Western Australia. The unfortunate thing about it is that I am worried about the future. I am particularly worried about the damage that has been done to our industry by the doubt that has continued from the time this Government took office until this forest management plan statement was made.

The sad thing is that I do not think the doubt is fully resolved. The doubt is resolved for certain things, but people do not really know what the future will hold. There are some areas of optimism. People will be prepared to spend money in some places, and there are always innovative people. One thing I will say about the people of the timber towns down south is that they are remarkably resilient. People cannot stand doubt - and these people went through two and a half years of total suspense. I never saw their optimism flag. I have never known such a resilient group of people. I remember going to an industry workshop in Manjimup - I think the minister attended, too - at which people were saying, "What are we going to do for the future?" Others would have been beaten to death by what had happened to them, but these people got a comedian in to run the workshop and they were determined to make a future for their town. We must hand it to people who have that sort of resilience and determination. I think it went with the job. They had to be fairly determined and quick on their toes to be in the timber industry in the first instance.

They are lovely people. I attended the Timber Communities Australia conference this year. A very affecting and sad part of the conference was when representatives of various branches came forward to report. A beautiful old bloke from New South Wales came forward to speak. He had obviously been in the timber industry for about 60 years; he should have been retired. He said the next time I saw him he would probably be a waiter in a restaurant because he was going through retraining. I thought that was a bit rough for an old bloke like that. He had been a timber worker all his life and had lost his livelihood because the Government determined to lock up vast quantities of forest to meet the demands of city people who have no idea what happens in the forests.

I know we do not have the money to do it at the moment, but we owe it to the people of Western Australia to tell them what forestry is all about. We must tell people that forestry is a very positive thing. We cannot leave for too long having decisions dictated by city people who believe that forests are killed through logging. That is not the case. City people believe it is environmentally unsatisfactory to be involved in the timber industry. They are denigrating, throwing out of work and turning into pariahs, people who are good honest workers doing a job that is environmentally very satisfactory. We owe it to them to try to get that message through. I have given my commitment; I am certainly not going to jump on any bandwagon that will make the slightest concession to the fact that forestry is not a good environmental activity. I realise the tide of opinion is against logging old-growth forest but I am waiting for that tide to move. I will not do a King Canute and deny that the tide is there. This Government, more than any other, owes it to the people of the south west and to the future of this State to start redeeming the reputation that has been so unfairly tarnished by a green movement that is entirely dishonest in the approach it has taken. Unfortunately, this Government has failed to take some actions it could have taken in the meantime. As I have indicated in this House many a time, I would be happy to pass at any time any legislation that would speed up the process to enable the Government to say it would give the timber workers something. If the Government wanted to pick a figure that it believed necessary, I would be quite happy to pass the legislation. The timber is there. It is just a matter of what the Government is going to lock up. If the Government locks up too much, the rest of the timber cannot be cut sustainably. That is one of the stupid things about locking up the timber. If too much is locked up, the net result is ending up with hectares of national park that most people will not access. Most logging has been going on in places that did not even have roads. The areas are not all that accessible to people. The situation was not harming anyone. We have to try to turn that attitude around so that when the time comes there is still something to be preserved. We must be brave about burning. If we are not brave about burning, we will have the same sorts of disasters as the eastern States. I do not want to lose 42 years of our logging just because some idiot says the forests cannot be burnt. If we lose 42 years of our forests through wildfire when it could have been logged and turned into sequestered carbon furniture, boy, some answers must be given to that one!

The Government has got to put some real effort into doing things for the south west. It took far too long for the Government to commit to the sky jetty. The State Government cannot keep quarrelling with the federal Government about which is right. The State Government knows full well that the federal Government made its offer on one particular thing. Although it might think it is unfair for the federal Government not to continue, we owe it to the people of the south west to provide some good solid alternatives to timber. They need an

extraordinary amount of help. We will have to work very hard because of the impact of this decision, from which the Government has benefited. There is no doubt that this policy was a major positive for the Labor Party at the last election. However, with benefits come responsibilities. The Government owes it to the people of that area to assist them to get going. I assure members that all they really need is a bit of help. Once started, they have the capacity, initiative and amazing resilience to carry it through, but, boy, they will need some help from the Government. It should be unstinting help. I ask government members to divert their minds from all the other little priorities and to think of the people who have been very badly done by.

I commend this discussion. It has been worthwhile. I have purposely not been too critical of the Government because I am trying to arrive back at what I think is necessary for the State; that is, a bipartisan approach to forestry. We owe it to each other to resolve this issue. This must be the low point of forestry. From this day onward we must redeem forestry as a positive, ecological and beneficial industry. We should try to work back to the stage at which both the government's party and our party will stand by the forestry industry and encourage it to once again be a very important part of the economy and life of Western Australia.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Because the forest debate had its biggest impact in the area that I represent, I have followed this issue very closely. I have been quite embittered about the debate and what has happened in terms of the politics that have surrounded it. It has been unnecessary, because it will not result in better forest management at the end of the day. Like Hon Peter Foss, I dread the day on which the community will be forced to realise this situation as a result of a huge tragedy such as a wildfire through a section of the south west, the hills area of Perth, the Naturaliste strip around the back of Dunsborough and through to Margaret River, or around Denmark and Walpole. The Denmark-Walpole area is particularly vulnerable as residential development is intermingled with the forest. That is a tragedy waiting to happen. Regrettably, we will probably all witness something like that in the future. That will be a very tough lesson for the community to be forced to learn in order to come back to some sort of sensible rationale of what our forests represent and how we should deal with them in the future.

I wanted to run through the statement bit by bit. There is not time for me to do that. All I wanted to say in passing was that I wish to endorse a lot of the comments made by Hon Peter Foss. He knows the industry very well. For a member who is based in a city electorate he actually understands very well how this issue is perceived in country areas. This issue is perceived by people who live in country areas in a totally different way from the way in which it is perceived by people who live in the city. One part of the statement that raises the ire of many people is the third paragraph, which states -

This draft plan presents a significant new direction for forest management in Western Australia, as demanded by the community before the last election.

Yes, the reality is that the election results across the State reflected that and the Labor Party and the Greens (WA) benefited. However, it was certainly not demanded in most of the south west. It was an electoral issue and, in some areas, it was run in parallel with the leafy western suburbs and the hills areas of Perth as well as Margaret River and Denmark. It was not run in communities like Manjimup, Pemberton, Nannup and Bridgetown. The Government has a policy called "Protecting our old-growth forests". It would have been terrific if the Government also had a policy called "Protecting our south west communities" or "Protecting people's jobs into the future" - something that is totally important to people's livelihoods. This process and the government rhetoric says we have moved towards a sustainable level of forest management in Western Australia. That is debatable. It is sustainable but perhaps only in the eyes of environmentalists. It has to be seen to be believed whether it is sustainable in terms of its output to maintain the nine timber mills that are left in existence in the State -

Hon Peter Foss: And the furniture industry.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Yes. I went to a timber community's breakfast at which a consortium led by Ed Valom described its plans for a furniture consortium based around Manjimup - a fantastic concept and one into which they had put a lot of work. The consortium has moved that industry and its way of thinking towards those lines over the years. Now there are grave fears that the current allocation of 131 000 cubic metres will not provide the resource to allow that to happen. I hope the minister can reassure me. They are the sorts of questions to which the south west community still wants answers. I am aware of the time constraints. I will not say any more -

Hon Kim Chance: Do not worry too much about it. I intend to report progress and then ask the House for leave to continue the debate.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: Sure. I am aware that other members want to say something. It has been a very painful debate for the south west communities in terms of the uncertainties surrounding their future and the future of their kids. It has been an extremely difficult, disruptive and costly experience. At the end of the day, what for? It has happened as a result of an emotionally driven platform based on extreme politics, which is never a good recipe for sensible management of any resource or community. We will live to see the day when some sort of

balance is restored and professional forest managers are given the credibility they deserve - not derided as the axe murderers of this community. I feel extremely sorry for the way in which that profession has been treated in this whole argument. They have been dismissed, derided and ridiculed and they have not been able to win the argument because the groundswell of emotion and public opinion has washed right over them. That has been very regrettable because it will not produce the best outcome for communities in the immediate future or for the State in the long-term unless a better balance is adopted.

**Progress reported and leave granted to sit again.**

[Continued below.]