

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT 1986 AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
(CLEARING OF NATIVE VEGETATION) REGULATIONS 2004 —
REVIEW OF CLEARING PROVISIONS**

Statement by Minister for the Environment

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for the Environment) [12.09 pm]: We in Western Australia are fortunate to be blessed with a magnificent natural environment that is extremely rich in biodiversity. Western Australia has about 11 500 plant species, or almost five per cent of all plant species worldwide. In the south west of WA, a remarkable 79 per cent of our plant species occur nowhere else in the world. Past development of areas for agriculture and other infrastructure has significantly reduced native vegetation cover in WA. Loss of biodiversity, salinisation of land and inland waters, altered water regimes, soil erosion, eutrophication and increased greenhouse gas emissions are all direct consequences of clearing native vegetation; and it is not just the environment that suffers—our economy and our way of life are also at risk. We all know that Western Australia's economy is booming, but it is important to strike a balance between conserving the environment and social needs and the economy now and into the future.

The state government will appoint a four-person independent panel to carry out a three-month review of the clearing provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1986 and the Environmental Protection (Clearing of Native Vegetation) Regulations 2004. This review will respond to the recommendations of the Auditor General's report of September last year. It will also address the concerns of industry and local government about red tape and lengthy processes. Members will be aware of the clearing provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1986, which came into force in 2004, under which clearing of native vegetation is an offence unless a permit is granted or an exemption applies. This system is in place to protect native vegetation from inappropriate clearing and to prevent damage to the environment. The clearing controls have been in place for nearly four years. In a time of very significant growth, it is appropriate to undertake a review to see the improvements that we can make to ensure the legislation achieves our objectives. I am confident that the outcome of this review will be the best possible legislation to protect the state's native vegetation for both present and future generations, while also continuing to support those vital developments that give our economy its life and strength. This review is yet another way in which the Carpenter government is acting now for the future to ensure that the best and most efficient legislation is in place to protect our vital natural resources, while also supporting the further development of our strong economy.