

JARRAHDAL SPORTING SHOOTERS CLUB — LEASE RENT

Grievance

MR A.J. SIMPSON (Serpentine-Jarrahdale) [9.02 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for the Environment and concerns forest leases, particularly those in the Serpentine-Jarrahdale area. One such lease is that held by the Jarrahdale Sporting Shooters Club. The lease covers a 213-hectare site, of which only 12 hectares is used by the club. The club has invested \$150 000-odd in infrastructure on the site. The site is not connected to scheme water, so the club relies on the collection of rainwater and also takes water from a small winter well. The club also generates its own power. All in all, the club maintains all firebreaks and fences for the site and maintains the site to the standard required by the Department of Environment and Conservation.

The issue I raise with the minister is that this sporting club's rent will go up by 1 000 per cent at the end of this year. It is a shame that the rent for a sporting association has to go up by 1 000 per cent. The actual area of land that the club uses is very small and its impact on the community is limited. I urge the minister to perhaps look at increasing the rent by increments, rather than going for a 1 000 per cent increase. I know that the minister will stand and say that the 200-odd members of the club will need to pay only so many dollars per week. However, I am trying to highlight a bigger picture.

Just down the road from the Jarrahdale Sporting Shooters Club is the Scout Association of Australia's Manjedal Activities Centre, which also is situated on a very large holding of land. I have no idea of the sort of lease that the Manjedal Activities Centre has or its time frame. Scattered throughout the hills are other areas that are leased for recreational use. The member for Murray recently raised the Logue Brook Dam issue, where in maintaining a water catchment area for drinking water, recreational use is being cut out. I guess it all leads back to one thing. We are very keen to make sure that people find 30 minutes for physical activities each day. They can do these activities throughout this area. This is one group that has very little impact on the community and has great support from the community.

Over the Easter weekend, a benchrest competition was held at the site with competitors from around Australia. Sixty-odd members turned up from the eastern states, and they all spent money in our state while staying in the area. As an aside, a Western Australian took out the state championship four shooting team for the seventh year in a row, so we are very good at breeding benchrest shooters here.

My grievance is based on the fact that this small group is doing a fantastic job in the community. Its members are doing their own thing. They are abiding by all the laws and are working well with the community. I am scared of one thing: that this may be the thin end of the wedge for small community groups that have forest or Department of Environment and Conservation leases, as they may face large rental increases. As I said, a 1 000 per cent increase is a huge increase. I hope that the minister will be able to reconsider that rise. This is a non-profit organisation. It is a sporting group. Perhaps the minister can look at some kind of incremental increase in the rent instead of hitting the club with a 1 000 per cent increase. A 1 000 per cent increase is a lot. The rent will rise from \$150 a year to \$1 500 a year, which is a great increase for a small organisation that has basically paid a peppercorn rent to use the facility.

I admit that the Jarrahdale Sporting Shooters Club is not everyone's cup of tea. I appreciate that. I spent Easter Monday with the club, which was the final day of shooting for the competition that was held there. The guns that these guys shoot are worth in the vicinity of \$10 000 each. These guys are very committed to their sport and take their shooting very seriously. They do what they do best. They look after the land, the community and the environment. In no way do they try to impact on others. It is one of those instances of no-one liking it in his or her backyard, but the club has done a fantastic job of working with the Jarrahdale community and the shire to make sure that it dots all the i's and crosses all the t's. The club maintains water on the site in case any fires break out in the forest. A water resource is available to the Fire and Emergency Services Authority should it need it to fight fires in the area. The club maintains the fences and the firebreaks. It goes through all those processes. I hope that the minister will help this group by perhaps giving it some kind of incremental increase in rent over the next 10 years instead of a 1 000 per cent increase in one year.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for the Environment) [9.07 am]: I thank the member for Serpentine-Jarrahdale for his grievance this morning and I acknowledge his concern for and strong representation of the Jarrahdale Sporting Shooters Club. The club's lease covers 216 hectares of state forest. I know that the club does not use all of that area, but the lease does cover that area. To give some background to this issue, in granting the lease, it was considered that a higher rental than the then scheduled fee of \$150 a year should apply. Advice was sought from the Valuer-General during the review process, who considered a range of factors, including, of course, market factors. The original assessment was a rental of around \$4 000 a year. I recognise that a fee of that nature would be absolutely prohibitive to any organisation, irrespective of whether it has 200-plus members, as does this group. That was back in 1997, so that assessment by the Valuer-General was

made some 10 years ago. It was agreed that the rental figure of \$150 would be backdated to the commencement of the lease. On that basis, the then Department of Conservation and Land Management was to review all lease rentals applying to clubs and associations. The schedule of lease rentals was reviewed and the range of rentals was determined to be from \$500 to \$1 500 a year. The new rental schedule was approved by the then Minister for the Environment in March 2006. It was subsequently determined that a fee of \$1 500 a year would apply to the lease at Jarrahdale. Similar clubs and associations would also pay higher lease rental fees under the new 2006 schedule. The member for Serpentine-Jarrahdale will be aware that in response to a question on notice I highlighted a schedule of other clubs that would be affected by that new fee schedule. I appreciate the member's keen interest in this issue. I know that the member for Serpentine-Jarrahdale works hard in his electorate and he talks to his community groups and reflects their concerns. That is why I appreciate where the member is coming from on this issue.

The Jarrahdale Sporting Shooters Club was officially notified of the fee increase in January, and the new fee does not take effect until 1 November this year. When we weigh up all these sorts of issues, it is important to look at a range of factors, such as the size of the area that is leased, the need to protect and enhance that area, if we can, and, of course, I suppose the capacity of groups and organisations to afford the fee. The member is right; I could be cynical and simply say that the fee increase, from the calculation I did last night based on the club's membership number, equates to about only \$7.50 a member a year. Some would argue that a \$7.50 a member a year increase is not astronomical to ensure that the ongoing annual lease fee is paid. Others might argue that that fee is quite cheap in terms of what is provided by the Department of Environment and Conservation and, ultimately, by the community to an organisation such as this for access to an important reserve area. I have no doubt, as the member has already highlighted, that this group has continued to act absolutely appropriately and responsibly in the area it leases. I have no reason to doubt that the club does not adhere to the requirements for firebreaks, access points and ensuring that the area is maintained and, of course, that it treads lightly on the area it leases. I respect the concern that has been raised.

My view is that although this fee obviously represents a significant increase from the club's previous lease arrangements, the new fee reflects the importance of the area for which it holds the lease and that the group is, I suppose, like many other groups, privileged to lease important reserve areas, notwithstanding my deepest respect for its ongoing maintenance and care for that leased area. Ultimately, in this case, it could be argued that the organisation effectively has exclusive use of that 200-hectare reserve because of the nature of the sport and the clear associated safety issues that I know the club adheres to absolutely, and it would need to continue to uphold that safety factor.

I appreciate the member for Serpentine-Jarrahdale bringing this issue to my attention again. I appreciate the previous questions asked and letters that he has written to me on behalf of the shooters organisation. To my knowledge, I have not received any correspondence from the club in recent times, but I need to check that. However, I am prepared to have an officer from my office speak to representatives from the group. I am happy for them to discuss the reasons behind the change and, indeed, to talk to the club about options that I may look at, given there is some concern about the extent of the increase.