

PEMBERTON, TIMBER INDUSTRY

Grievance

MR OMODEI (Warren-Blackwood) [9.34 am]: My grievance is to the Premier. It is more of a plea than a grievance. The Premier and I are often on opposite sides in a discussion. I do not know the reason; probably because we come from different backgrounds. My plea is about the town of Pemberton. Members will be well aware that Pemberton and Manjimup are going through a difficult time and experiencing great uncertainty. That uncertainty is eating away at the people of Pemberton like a cancer. I was at the pub last Saturday night and spoke to Kevin Roche, who has been a timber worker for many years. He grew up in the town and was a champion footballer and local identity.

Mr Dean: Cuda Roche.

Mr OMODEI: Yes. He is very concerned about his family and teenage children. He is worried about his future. It is time for the Government to make some decisions to remove the uncertainty. No job creation money has yet hit the ground in Pemberton and Manjimup. The impending decision on timber volumes is very important, whether it be about jarrah or karri. Members know Pemberton has only a karri mill. The Minister for Forestry has been talking about the Government's policy, and is considering adding another 40 000 cubic metres to the 140 000 cubic metre jarrah quota. Allowing the logging of moratorium blocks would be a step in the right direction - I know it is politically difficult. The Government may have to allow logging in some old-growth forests. I do not think the greens will come flooding back to the Liberal Party if the Labor Government makes that decision. To be quite honest, I do not think they were ever with it. Those decisions need to be made. The jarrah policy impacts on Pemberton.

I acknowledge that a political decision was made about logging old-growth forests and the timber volumes, and I am sure the management plan and contracts will fit those volumes, as they have in the past. Pemberton needs to be able to log at least 40 000 cubic metres of karri. Potential also exists for an extra 20 000 cubic metres of marri. If the owners of the mill decide to sell to a new proponent or enter into a joint venture with the pine plantation at Pemberton - which is possible - 50 000 cubic metres of pine will be produced. The town would retain a viable timber industry, which is its heart and soul. The industry creates long-term, permanent jobs that cannot be replaced by itinerant work in the tourism, grape, cauliflower or spud industries.

The assistance package for Pemberton is another issue. The previous Government allocated \$5 million for karri value-adding projects in Pemberton. I understand the Labor Party is committed to that, and the minister has responded accordingly in the other place. That needs to be reaffirmed. The director of the Great Southern Regional College of TAFE has been talking in the media this morning about technical and further education programs collapsing because of a lack of interest. That is one of the main reasons the Government needs to make a decision quickly. Small contractors are losing their jobs - 115 have gone so far - and many of those young people see no future in the timber industry. Some of those who have lost their jobs cannot afford to send their kids to TAFE. As a result, 16 and 17-year-old boys and girls are sitting at home with nothing to do and nowhere to go.

There needs to be a commitment to the enhancement of the main street in Pemberton. The South West Development Commission is considering a revamp of the town, similar to what happened in Donnybrook under the previous Government. The tourist bureaux need to be appropriately funded, maybe above and beyond the norm, with some key money. A tourism coordinator and events coordinator for those towns also need to be funded.

The Minister for Education met with our local parents and citizens association president yesterday to discuss inviting the minister to attend the tenth anniversary of the Pemberton school, which was opened by Carmen Lawrence. The school's other major project is fundraising for a new science room. The P&C has already raised half the money. The Department of Education recently removed a transportable building from the school, which I am sure was worth at least \$100 000. It would be a boon to the town and the school if that were replaced with \$60 000 for a new science room that could be used by not only the education community, but also the commercial sector for plant pathology and soil and leaf analysis. A commitment to the school indicating that the number of personnel will be retained during this transitional period would reassure the school.

A new \$1.2 million sporting complex is being built in Pemberton with funding from the local sports club and a sport and recreation grant. It will not be possible for the Pemberton community to fund the one-third local component of \$470 000. We cannot ask people who may be out of work by Christmas to raise that amount of money.

What has happened to proposals from the Inglewood Products Group? Real jobs are involved in such proposals. I refer also to the pipeline fiasco. Rather than move the pipeline at a cost of \$100 000 or more, perhaps decking

could be built across the top of it to create a tourist facility. Jobs can also be created in state forests and national parks. Huge areas of black wattle, watsonia and blackberry grow in that area. The jobs promised in the management of national parks could be created in that area.

The Pemberton and Nannup hospitals have been completed. After many years involvement in the area in local government and State Government, I have one ask; that is, that I be allowed to open those two hospitals. I will, of course, acknowledge the Government's contribution. Not only will that task benefit me, but also the hospitals will benefit the two communities.

DR GALLOP (Victoria Park - Premier) [9.41 am]: We on this side of the House appreciate the passion with which the member for Warren-Blackwood represents his electorate and shows his commitment to the people there. There is no question that, like him, the Government is deeply concerned about the future of that community. The Government decided to end the logging of old-growth forests based on the best interests of the people of Western Australia. However, a decision like that has consequences that must be properly managed. I am sure the member will acknowledge that the previous government's policy, which shifted from Regional Forest Agreement mark 1 to Regional Forest Agreement mark 2, would have created a significant problem.

Mr Omodei: That is correct.

Dr GALLOP: If his party had won the election, similar issues would have arisen because the reduction in the karri yield under his Government's policy would have had serious consequences for Pemberton.

We have ceased logging old-growth forests based on our commitment to the people and we implemented that change precisely in the way that we said we would. A consequence of that will be a reduction in the yields from our forests. On 1 June the Government announced that the indicative yield of karri sawlogs after 2003 will be 40 000 cubic metres per annum, and the current karri contracts total is 170 000 cubic metres per annum. The final figures are yet to be determined, but they will be in the forest management plan. The volumes will be influenced by the degree of early step-down in the industry, which will provide additional volumes that can be carried over to the next contract period. The member is right, whichever way we look at the situation, significant reduction in logging will occur, and that issue must be managed.

The member referred to the impact on the mill of the timber yield; broader job creating potential in the area; education and training; national parks; and the general presentation of Pemberton from a tourist's point of view. The biggest issue is the Pemberton sawmill, which is the largest karri sawmill. It is currently processing 100 000 cubic metres per annum of karri sawlogs. It also processes marri sawlogs and flitches, which I believe are part logs recovered from the Diamond mill. There is no doubt that the amount of logging would have been reduced during the term of the member for Warren-Blackwood's Government, as it will under our policy. We are committed to finding a solution to the issues facing the Pemberton mill. The member is right; we have signalled up to \$5 million for retooling and value adding at that mill. We appreciate that the mill plays an important role in that town. The Government is very keen to find a solution that will meet the new forest policy requirements and at the same time add value and create a sustainable future for the mill. These are not easy issues, as I am sure the member will acknowledge. However, the Government already has runs on the board. A solution was found to the problem at Nannup, which we discussed when we visited that town. On 12 April we announced a \$1.4 million commitment to the mill, plus a guaranteed allocation of 20 000 cubic metres of jarrah sawlogs per annum to 2013. That mill has been secured. The Pemberton issue is difficult but we have a commitment to find a solution. As the member knows, a package is being developed as part of a \$26.5 million allocation, to assist mills remaining in the industry with value adding and in attracting new industry. I can assure the member for Warren-Blackwood that Pemberton is on the list for a solution. However, it must be in the context of the reduced allocations of timber, and that will require some creative thinking. As he knows Sotico Pty Ltd, the owner of the mill, is still operating in the area and the Government is keen to explore opportunities for support of an ongoing operation.

The main street program in Pemberton would be an excellent program. Throughout Western Australia I have seen how programs like that have lifted the presentation of communities. In some of the small wheatbelt towns, the future of which was based mainly on the agriculture industry, improvements to the main street have added a new dimension, giving people an incentive to stay longer or explore tourism opportunities. I agree with the member; funding has been allocated to assist communities in that respect.

The member for Warren-Blackwood is aware of the Government's commitment to create 30 new national parks and two new conservation parks that will generate up to 13 jobs. We hope that some of the people affected in the Pemberton and Manjimup areas will be able to access some of those jobs.

I am not close to the issues of education and TAFE. However, I was very encouraged by the fact that the Minister for Education met with the P&C association in that area. I will pass on to the Minister responsible for training the concerns the member raised about some technical training issues down there.

On the broader subject of job creation, there is no doubt that the south west of Western Australia has been expanding. New industries are developing. I urge the member to rethink his attitude towards the tourism industry. The definition of those jobs as itinerant jobs underplays the significance of tourism. On Sunday I launched the food and wine industry group that is travelling to Singapore to present our wares. In fact, wineries from Pemberton will be represented at that exhibition. Many jobs in tourism are new and important. The ability of that industry to develop an export market highlights its importance. Members of the wine industry group said that the attitude of the Manjimup shire is positive and they want to work with shires in that area. They appreciate the attitude of the local government in the community wanting them to be part of the action.

The member for Warren-Blackwood should keep raising these issues and we will continue to discuss ways of improving the situation. The Pemberton mill is on our agenda and the Government will do all it can to bring about a successful resolution.

Mr Omodei: What about the new hospitals?

Dr Gallop: I ran out of time.