

**OLD-GROWTH TUART FOREST - SHEARWATER, BUNBURY**

*Urgency Motion*

**THE PRESIDENT** (Hon George Cash): This morning I received the following letter -

Dear Mr President

At today's sitting it is my intention to move under SO 72 that the House at its rising adjourn until 9am on 25 December for the purpose of discussing the urgent need to protect all the old-growth Tuart forest at Shearwater, Bunbury and to incorporate the whole stand as a reserve under the draft Greater Bunbury Region Scheme which is to be released shortly.

Yours sincerely,

Hon Dr Christine Sharp  
Member Legislative Council  
South West Region.

The member will require the support of four members in order to move the motion.

[At least four members rose in their places.]

**HON CHRISTINE SHARP** (South West) [4.12 pm]: I move -

That the House at its rising adjourn until 9.00 am on 25 December.

It must be a rare event that between the lodging of an urgency motion in the morning and the opening of the afternoon sitting and the debate on that motion that a ministerial announcement is made that delivers the requirement of the urgency motion. We are witnesses to such a rare and exceptional circumstance. It is a positive beginning to the sitting week that we are able to do this after the sadness of the condolence motion.

I note the ministerial statement that was made in the Legislative Assembly earlier today, the copy of which I have is labelled a draft. I assume that because it has been made in the Assembly that it is a firm indication of the Government's commitment. The statement begins -

The State Government has agreed that the whole of the Shearwater tuart forest in the City of Bunbury should be conserved.

This is extremely good news for the conservation of the tuart forest and for the City of Bunbury. I will continue to talk on this matter despite the minister's statement because it is worthy of the attention of the House. The conservation status of the tuarts is in a parlous state. I asked a question in this place in December 1998 about the conservation status of the tuart forest and was told in response to question on notice 722 that some 23 500 hectares of tuart forest remain. I believe that includes much of the land between Bunbury and Mandurah, which is parkland cleared agricultural land; therefore, not all of that land is intact forest. According to the minister's answer, of that 23 500 hectares, only 9 300 hectares are in current or proposed conservation reserves - that is, until this announcement.

I also asked the minister at that time if he knew what the extent of the tuart forest was originally when white settlement began in this State. The minister replied that there was no reliable estimate of the pre-1750 area of tuart forest. However, that well-known expert on the State's native trees, Irene Cunningham, estimated that the original extent of the *Eucalyptus gomphocephala* was 130 000 hectares. We know that the tuart forest stretched along a strip about five or seven kilometres wide along the coast from the Sabina River north of Busselton through to the Moore River. If we accept that estimate of about 130 000 hectares, when one takes away the wetland vegetation that would replace it in those damper sites and compares it with the 9 300 hectares that are proposed to be included in reserves, that leaves the conservation status of the tuart at roughly 7 per cent of its original distribution. Seven per cent is a low figure for recognised conservation standards. If one simply uses the standards of the Regional Forest Agreement, for example, which followed national standards for conservation objectives for all major vegetation types, the conservation objective as a minimum is 10 per cent of the distribution as at 1750. At less than 7 per cent, we cannot afford to lose any tuart forest.

This section of tuart forest to the south of the City of Bunbury offers an exciting possibility for the City of Bunbury to develop a remarkable public open space and regional reserve. It is probably offering the City of Bunbury the opportunity, through the Preston River to ocean reserve, to conserve the most intact vegetation transection across the Swan coastal plain which remains and which still has available the opportunity for reservation. We have a unique opportunity here at the south of the city to create a conservation reserve which is of great conservation significance but which also will be an amazing recreational resource for the City of Bunbury. That reserve can go from the Indian Ocean up the extremely steep dunes which occur to the south of

the beach reserve and which are known as the Maidens. I am told that that is due to the perfect conical shape of the two major sand dune forms which are seen from the ocean and which resemble a part of a maiden's anatomy. They offer a spectacular, panoramic view of the entire City of Bunbury, the Indian Ocean and the dunes right across the plain to the Preston River.

It is a spectacular location. The area includes the tuart forest that has been the subject of much controversy in the City of Bunbury over recent months. The forest contains healthy old-growth tuart, and that is an important point to remember. Members who use the Old Coast Road will know that a lot of the tuart between Mandurah and Bunbury is in poor health and there is great concern about the deaths of the tuarts in the Lake Clifton region. The reason for the decline and death of the trees is not known. I understand from answers to other questions that I have asked in this place that the Department of Conservation and Land Management is undertaking considerable research to try to determine the reasons for the decline of the tuarts north of the City of Bunbury. Despite some weed infestation in the understorey, the tuarts south of the City of Bunbury are extremely healthy, as is the Western Australian peppermint that grows with the tuarts. It is a beautiful part of the forest. The area of land containing the tuarts can now extend to the flood plain and the Preston River and provide a corridor of natural vegetation that is intact.

Those involved in the south west environment centre and others in the City of Bunbury who have been pressing for the preservation of this area under the greater Bunbury region scheme and who had been told for several years by the minister that the proposal would be dealt with under the region scheme process were alarmed to learn that the Minister for Planning had written to the City of Bunbury directing it to develop 21 hectares of the tuart forest in the region, thus pre-empting the greater Bunbury region scheme process. My motion states that the documentation of the draft greater Bunbury region scheme is due for release in a few days. I believe that the launch of the scheme is scheduled for this Friday. It was alarming to learn in July that the minister had said there was no point in waiting for the scheme, that the land was important for Homeswest's development plans and that, as a consequence, the tuarts would be removed.

Under that ministerial statement, 20 hectares were to be preserved, but 21 hectares were to be removed so that low-cost housing could be built. The proposal would have a serious, long-term effect on the sustainability of the reserve, as it would take the width at the narrowest point of the reserve - where the tuarts are - to a mere 130 metres. That is so narrow that it is difficult to imagine that the trees could remain intact over generations, as we hoped they would.

It was an amazing and marvellous surprise to learn, as I planned to speak on this motion this afternoon, that the minister in the other place representing Homeswest had made an announcement that the 21 hectares will not now be removed. Now only one last link needs to be put in place, in addition to the Maidens Reserve, the land at Dalyellup and the Shearwater land, and that is the 10 hectares at Usher, which is owned by the City of Bunbury. The entire reserve proposal will then be secured and the Preston to ocean reserve can be established.

I take this opportunity to congratulate those involved with the south west environment centre on their hard work and dedication in bringing this matter to the attention of the community of Bunbury, their elected representatives in Parliament, the Ministers for Planning and Water Resources and the candidates who seek to represent Bunbury after the forthcoming election. The people at the south west environment centre have done an amazing job. In particular, Dr Bernard Bischoff, a well-known biologist from Bunbury, has for many years dedicated himself to capturing the collective imagination of the community of Bunbury about the potential of the reserve. Dr Bischoff had the foresight to realise that Bunbury had an opportunity similar to the opportunity that existed in Perth in 1872 when Kings Park was dedicated. At that time the dedication of Kings Park was considered to be excessive and unnecessary. Generations later, we recognise the foresight and wisdom of that decision. I am sure that, many years hence, the people of Bunbury and those who visit it will recognise the wisdom of this decision.

**HON M.J. CRIDDLE** (Agricultural - Minister for Transport) [4.26 pm]: For several years negotiations on the tuart forest have taken place. The remaining 21 hectares was the main issue. The Government agreed that all the Shearwater tuart forest in the City of Bunbury should be preserved. The Government has listened to the views of the public and the local member, Ian Osborne, who has strongly put the case for preservation. The Ministry of Housing will endeavour to purchase alternative land and will develop the old Bunbury hospital site. It will also make spot purchases to cater for those waiting for public housing. The City of Bunbury has indicated that it will work closely with the Ministry of Housing to find alternative options to develop public housing in the area. The Government's decision means that the remaining 21 hectares of tuart forest will be added to the 20 hectares at Shearwater, the 100 hectares at Dalyellup and the 40 hectares at the Maidens Reserve, which have already been identified for regional open space. That 181 hectares, in addition to the land on the coast already set aside by the City of Bunbury, will give the region an area larger than Kings Park which will be made up of

significant tuart forest. For generations to come that asset will be enjoyed by all who visit the picturesque south west region of the State.

The management committee, chaired by Bill Scott, has been appointed by the Minister for Housing and will continue to prepare a management plan for the forest that will now include the extra 21 hectares. This has been possible through the hard work of the local member, Ian Osborne, who has worked tirelessly to find a balance between the needs of conservation and the need for affordable housing in the fast-growing Bunbury region.

The Dalyellup beach estate, a Ministry of Housing joint venture to the south of Shearwater, is ahead of schedule. The blocks are selling well and this has provided extra funding to allow the Ministry of Housing to pursue other options. Development can now proceed with the remaining cleared area of Shearwater, which I understand is currently a farming area. It must be realised that, by forgoing this land, the Government cannot forgo its commitment to provide a variety of affordable and quality public housing across the State. I think it is a good outcome for the community. The Minister for Planning will not finalise the local government town planning scheme amendment that was to be put in place. The draft region scheme will be issued this Friday and the issues raised here will emerge during the comment period for the scheme proposal. This has been a good outcome for the people of Bunbury.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.