

EMERGENCY FIREFIGHTING ASSISTANCE, SOUTH WEST

**691. Mr OMODEI to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage:**

I refer to the minister's answer to a question I put to her last week about the serious fire risk posed by the unprecedented litter levels, record dry conditions and diminished firefighting capacity in our State's south west.

- (1) Will the minister admit that the ability of the Department of Conservation and Land Management to call on heavy plant equipment and manpower has been significantly diminished as a result of Labor's decision to gut the timber industry in the south west?
- (2) In view of the diminished level of emergency assistance available in the State's south west, what measures has the Government put in place to protect the people and property in and around that region?

**Dr EDWARDS replied:**

- (1)-(2) I am glad the member for Warren-Blackwood has asked this question because fire is an important issue. We have had a dry winter preceded by a dry summer, so this issue worries people in the community. However, he obviously did not hear what I said last week. CALM is taking this matter seriously. Staff are in the south west to respond to the fire issue. We have made sure that staff remain in the region. I have raised with CALM the issue of access to equipment that might be needed. I have been assured that the equipment is there and that CALM is talking to people.

Mr Omodei: I can tell you it is not.

Dr EDWARDS: I will follow up on that point to make sure that it is available. A system of prescribed burning has also been put in place to try to be ahead of the event by taking some preventive measures. We have recently also released new spotter planes.

Mr Omodei: Spotter planes have been used for the past 30 years.

Dr EDWARDS: These are new spotter planes. People are in the towers to watch for the beginning of any fires. In addition, CALM has undertaken an internal review of the way in which it manages fire. It has worked through the reasons for burning, how CALM burns, and how it is protecting communities in those areas. All people who live in Western Australia are concerned, at some stage, about the fire risk they face. The Government is taking this matter seriously and is looking at it further. A symposium on fire control will be held in April and the issue will be looked at again. Following that, a public review of the whole issue will be conducted. This is a serious issue. The Government is looking at it. I will follow up on the comments of the member for Warren-Blackwood about access to heavy equipment.