TUART TREES SOUTH OF MANDURAH, DECLINE AND DEATH, IMPACT OF BAUXITE MINING

1448. Hon Jim Scott to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development representing the Minister for the Environment

In relation to the decline and death of tuart trees south of Mandurah -

(1) Has the impact of -

(a) air pollution; and
(b) water pollution,

from bauxite mining and refining operations been investigated as possible causes?

(2) If yes, who carried out the investigation and when was it done?

(3) What were the findings and will the Minister table a copy of any report(s)?

Hon TOM STEPHENS replied:

The Minister for the Environment provided the following response:

(1) (a)-(b) No. The main causes for the recent increased decline and chronic insect infestation in tuart at Yalgorup are the interactions of a hierarchy of factors including reduced winter rainfall, hydrological and salinity factors, altered fire regimes, changes in nutrient supply and in the ecological balance between insect wood borers and their predators, competition with understorey species, land clearing and roadworks.

While air quality from industrial air pollution has been reported by Chilcott (1992) to be implicated in the local decline of tuart health at Kwinana, air quality from bauxite refining at Pinjarra and Wagerup is unlikely to be a significant factor. The impact of water pollution from bauxite mining and refining is not a factor in the decline of tuart health at Yalgorup.

Collaborative research aimed at investigating the cause of tuart decline at Yalgorup is now underway through a $285,000 three year Australian Research Council Linkage Grant program. Research projects include eco-hydrology, eco-physiology, fire, understorey competition, entomology and pathology investigations. Research partners are the Department of Conservation and Land Management, Murdoch University, Edith Cowan University, Alcoa World Alumina (Australia) Pty Ltd and the City of Mandurah.

(2)-(3) Not applicable.