

NARROGIN INTEGRATED MALLEE BIOMASS PLANT

**370. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Energy:**

Can the minister inform the house on the future of the Narrogin integrated mallee processing plant?

**Mr F.M. LOGAN replied:**

I thank the member for Collie-Wellington for his commitment to and support for the power industry. The establishment of the Narrogin integrated mallee biomass plant - that is what it is - was originally designed as a short-term research and development project by Western Power, and is now under the control of Verve Energy, with four primary objectives. These objectives are, firstly, to produce renewable electricity; secondly, to produce eucalyptus oil; thirdly, to produce charcoal; and fourthly, to activate carbon from that charcoal. The energy input is from mallee eucalyptus trees.

**Mr P.D. Omodei:** It was in the news last week.

**Mr F.M. LOGAN:** It was, and I remind the Leader of the Opposition about it because it is such a good story. I want to ensure that we get the story out into the community and that it remains at the forefront of people's minds. It is a great story. I acknowledge the member for Wagin's support and encouragement for this plant, because it is in Narrogin, the heart of his electorate.

The plant's most important breakthrough is the creation of activated carbon. That plant has been worked on for a number of years. A problem was encountered in ensuring that all four components of this research development plant worked together. The only way to commercialise the plant was to get all four components working together. It experienced a problem with the production of activated carbon. I advise those members who are questioning what we do with activated carbon that the best way to filtrate liquid is to use carbon. Activated carbon is currently priced at about \$2 000 a tonne, so if more of it can be made, that price underlines the economic potential of the plant. The plant has a number of world firsts. It is the world's first plant to be able to transform a woody mass into a gas, which generates electricity through a turbine. It is the world's first fluidised bed technology that can transform charcoal into activated carbon. It is fantastic home-grown technology. If Verve Energy successfully seeks partners to take the technology to a commercial level, we will be able to have distributed electricity generation in the wheatbelt by building five-megawatt power stations across the wheatbelt, fed by mallee oil trees. The technology addresses the issue of salinity, it creates a further income stream for farmers, and it creates clean, renewable energy for the wheatbelt of Western Australia. Who needs nuclear energy?