

INFINITREE PLANTATION PROGRAM

**774. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Premier:**

Can the Premier tell us how the new Infinitree program will benefit the State, and will the salinity and water quality benefits of that program attract matching funding under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality?

**Dr G.I. GALLOP replied:**

I thank the member for his question.

Last Friday, I was delighted to launch the Infinitree plantation program at the property of Harvey and Mary Gillam near Tenterden in the south west. I acknowledge that the member for Wagin was there; I think he was the only one present from the Legislative Assembly. Infinitree is an exciting new program developed by the Forest Products Commission to encourage the expansion of the plantation timber industry in Western Australia. As well as meeting its election commitment to end logging in old-growth forests, the Government is supporting the rapid and successful development of alternative sources of timber and associated regional employment and business opportunities from plantation forestry.

Since the election in February 2001, we have already seen the opening of a plantation chip mill in Albany, the signing of an agreement for a laminated veneer lumber facility in Neerabup north of Perth, and a groundbreaking ceremony for a new plantation timber chip mill in Bunbury. Other companies also plan to develop chip mills in the south west, and I recently had the pleasure of opening the latest stage of Wespine's sawmill in Dardanup. As the member for Collie is well aware, tree farming provides multiple benefits - plantations can help to combat soil erosion, protect biodiversity, reduce the greenhouse effect and, most importantly, help manage water quality and salinity issues. The Infinitree program is an ambitious new plan to implement large-scale commercial tree farming on cleared agricultural land. It is the first government-based plantation program of its kind to offer farmers a commercial package that also improves the sustainability of their farms. The Government will spend \$21 million over the next four years to implement the program - providing direction and investment to rebuild sustainable land use in cleared agricultural regions of the State. As we all know, salinity is one of the greatest environmental threats to Western Australia, with 1.8 million hectares - that is, 10 per cent - of the State's farmland affected by salt. The Government is not prepared to accept the prospect of this area tripling in size if nothing is done. The Government of Western Australia is spending more than \$40 million each year to combat salinity in this State.

*Point of Order*

Mr J.L. BRADSHAW: I thought the House had already heard ministerial statements for today.

The SPEAKER: It is not a ministerial statement. It is an answer to a question. The Premier is referring to his notes.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Warren-Blackwood to order for the first time.

*Questions without Notice Resumed*

Dr G.I. GALLOP: It is in stark contrast to the Commonwealth's approach of promising future funding and delivering nothing. The Commonwealth's claims that funding delays are caused by the States look very thin when we consider that massive commonwealth underspending has occurred in Natural Heritage Trust 1, Natural Heritage Trust 2 and the salinity action plan. The State Government is creating new jobs and opportunities for Western Australians and tackling the problems of water quality, salinity and wind erosion in the State's agricultural areas. The State is getting no support from the Commonwealth.

It is very difficult to understand why the Commonwealth will not approve funds from the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality to match the State's funding for Infinitree. I call on the Commonwealth - as I have done for many months - to stop making excuses, to sign the bilateral agreement, and to get the money flowing in Western Australia. I call on the Prime Minister to sign the bilateral agreement for \$31 million worth of projects already agreed upon by the State and the Commonwealth. We can then get on with the agreed projects and start to negotiate projects, such as the recovery project for Wellington Dam, Infinitree and other possible regional projects in Western Australia. It is most disappointing that when the State of Western Australia goes into bat for Western Australia with the Commonwealth, it does not get support from the Liberal and National Parties in this State. It does not get support from members opposite. This Government is working for regional and rural Western Australia. The Commonwealth has done nothing for Western Australia and this Government will hold it to account, just as it will hold to account the Liberal and National Party members of this Parliament who do John Howard's bidding in Western Australia.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I call to order the members for Nedlands and Vasse.