

RAMELIUS RESOURCES — GREENFINCH PROJECT — *EREMOPHILA RESINOSA*

Statement

HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural) [6.20 pm]: One of the joys of being a member of Parliament is that we learn new things all the time. Recently, I learnt something new—that is, how to pronounce resinous *eremophila*.

Several members interjected.

Hon JIM CHOWN: I thank members very much. Quite frankly, I have also found out about the threshold for rare and endangered species. It is a question I have asked a number of people. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list criteria, it is 2 500 individual mature plants. An essential part of the red list criteria is an observed continuing decline in that population with no subpopulation estimated to contain more than 250 individual mature plants. I do not know what a subpopulation is, but let us take that as read.

This particular plant, which is a fairly innocuous bush that grows in four locations throughout the wheatbelt, especially on the Westonia town common, has caused job losses for 100 families, and as the mine wishes to expand, has the potential to cause another 250 job losses. An application was made to Minister for Mines and Petroleum but it was not upheld and went to the Minister for Environment. The decision was under appeal and the Appeals Convener visited the site. The Greenfinch project's request to open a pit with a footprint of about 40 hectares—initially it was 62—was also declined, and that is why these jobs are in jeopardy.

Let us take it as said that 2 500 plants do not exist, but the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions has tagged 1 400-plus plants and they are doing very well. More than that, the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority, which is part of the government's platform, stated that some of the sites visited in 2011 included plantings of 600 *Eremophila*, with over 600 local bare rooted eucalyptus. The sites the authority established now have over 4 000 *Eremophila* plants and present survival rates, including those in experiments on how to translocate these plants, are about 80 per cent. Although the *Eremophila* is classed as endangered, it has done pretty well through the intervention of mankind to ensure that it does not disappear altogether. In fact, if people go to the Edna May mine, they will see that Ramelius Resources and the previous owners have translocated, replanted or grown from seed thousands of these plants. The company also has a revegetation program over about five kilometres. The oldest revegetation area is eight years old. Areas that are at least 12 months to two years old are 100 metres wide. They have replicated the woodlands and the plant species, including *Eremophila*, are growing in the same proportions as they would in the woodlands.

I am concerned that a new application is being submitted for a mine with a smaller footprint adjacent to the current open-cut facility at the Greenfinch project's Edna May mine. The reason for that, members, is that the Edna May goldmine has gone underground. The original open-cut mine is no longer operational. There is a processing plant there that will process three million tonnes of ore per annum to extract the gold. The underground system will not bring up that sort of tonnage. The footprint of this proposal, which I think will come to the Minister for Mines later this week, will be 20 hectares or less and will exclude the three remaining *Eremophila* at the site that would have been removed in the original application. The smaller footprint also allows a larger pathway for flora and fauna as it moves backwards and forwards from the east to the west. If this application is approved—I encourage the government to approve it—it will help to restore the 100 jobs, plus another 280 jobs in other mines that Ramelius Resources has purchased in Southern Cross and Narembeen. The Southern Cross mine is the Marda Dam mine and the Narembeen mine is the Tampia goldmine. The Narembeen mine employs 180 employees and the Southern Cross mine employs 80. They will transport ore from those two mines to the processing plant situated at the Edna May mine.

This open-pit facility is expected to have a life of 18 months to two years, which may not be a long time but it will act as a buffer to keep the processing plant operational so that Ramelius can get organised for the other two mines, which are 200 and 135 kilometres from the processing plant, to ensure that people are employed and that they get the tonnage to the processing plant for gold extraction. In fact, this open pit will be essential to their business plan and to remaining operational.

I have spoken to the Minister for Environment, Hon Stephen Dawson, and we have discussed this and I am looking forward to his response. However, I felt compelled to put on the record that these plants, while considered to be endangered, are doing very well in other areas and will do extremely well under the remit of the Westonia shire and, of course, Ramelius Resources. Just as a matter of interest, this mine has been operating in the Westonia area for well over 100 years. In fact, my family worked it for four years in the 1970s and we did pretty well out of it. The common itself is managed by the shire. Its environmental officers regularly monitor both the flora and fauna in the reserve and it has records and certainly reports on how healthy it is. May I say that I am very impressed with what they do up there. I will admit that the woodlands are impressive and appear very healthy under the administration of the shire and Ramelius Resources.

I do not have much more to say about it, but members need to understand that 37 per cent of people employed are locals. If this mine closes, it will have a very deleterious effect on not only the Shire of Westonia and the small

town there, but also the larger towns of Merredin and Southern Cross. There will be a knock-on effect that will impact the economic viability of these towns, especially when an established mine has been operational to some degree for over 100 years. I can assure the minister that Ramelius Resources is doing its absolute best to ensure that the *Eremophila resinosa* is not only looked after in its native state, but also growing in other areas in the thousands because of the due diligence of the shire and its environmental officers. I look forward to the minister's response; I hope he will give one.