

SOUTH WEST FORESTS — RAINFALL

**848. Hon LYNN MacLAREN to the minister representing the Minister for Forestry:**

- (1) Has the minister or his department been advised of recent research from the Centre for Water Research at the University of Western Australia, which provides conclusive evidence that extensive logging, which saw 50 per cent of the south west's native forests cleared in the 1960s to 1980s, caused a 16 per cent reduction in rainfall?
- (2) Will the Forest Products Commission now consider "rainfall" as a product of forests?
- (3) How much reforestation occurs in Western Australia near agricultural lands?
- (4) Will the government urgently prioritise reforestation?

**Hon KEN BASTON replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(3) Yes. The research proposes that permanent land clearing has resulted in a reduction in rainfall, in particular, the clearing on the Swan coastal plain for agriculture and urban development. This is not related to native forest harvesting, where every hectare is regenerated. The effect of reduced rainfall is well documented, with forest stream flow now a fraction of the pre-1975 levels, and is clearly identified as an issue in the proposed forest management plan 2014–2023. Extensive reforestation has occurred over the past 20 years, growing threefold from almost 130 000 hectares in 1997 to 413 000 hectares in 2011. Western Australia's achievement in expanded plantations has led the nation over this period.
- (4) The government will not be placing an urgent priority on further reforestation based on this research.