

SHIRE OF ESPERANCE — LAND CLEARING — AGRICULTURE

2183. Hon Robin Chapple to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

I refer to a proposal by the Shire of Esperance to clear land for agriculture north of the town, and I ask:

- (a) is the Minister aware of the proposal from the Shire of Esperance to allocate and clear public land for agricultural land releases north of Esperance;
- (b) is the Minister aware of a map provided to the Government by the Shire seeking five separate locations for public land allocations totalling 500,000 hectares;
- (c) can the Minister confirm that most, if not all of the land identified by the Shire, is within the Great Western Woodlands as defined in the Government's *Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation Strategy for the Great Western Woodlands*;
- (d) is the Minister aware that the Department of Regional Development is providing advice to the Shire on how to go about securing new land releases for large corporations, possibly foreign entities, in the Salmon Gums area north of Esperance;
- (e) has the Minister received advice from the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA) or the Commissioner of Soil and Land Conservation (CSLC) as to the suitability for farming of the land being proposed for agriculture:
 - (i) if yes to (e), what does the advice say;
 - (ii) if yes to (e), will the Minister release this advice, and if not, why not; and
 - (iii) if the Minister has not received advice from DAFWA or CSLC, will he be seeking such advice;
- (f) is DAFWA also providing advice to the Shire or any other proponent of this land release:
 - (i) if yes to (f), what advice has been provided; and
 - (ii) if yes to (f), will the Minister release this advice, and if not, why not;
- (g) what impact does the Minister think allocating additional large areas of land for agriculture will have on the already depressed land market in the Wheatbelt;
- (h) given the massive clearing of native vegetation that has already occurred across the south west of Western Australia and the many long term environmental and sustainability problems this has caused, what is the Government's policy on new agricultural land releases involving the clearing of large areas of native vegetation in southern Western Australia, including areas that are recognised internationally as part of a "Global Biodiversity Hotspot" and come under the Government's *Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation Strategy for the Great Western Woodlands*;
- (i) has the proposal for new large scale land clearing for agriculture, as presented to the Government by the Shire of Esperance, been referred to the Environmental Protection Authority and the Department of Parks and Wildlife for advice:
 - (i) if no to (i), when will it be referred; and
- (j) will the Government be subjecting the proposal to an open, independent and expert cost-benefit study addressing the full range of economic, social and environmental factors prior to any Government endorsement of the proposal:
 - (i) if no to (j), why not?

Hon Ken Baston replied:

- (a)–(c) Please refer to Legislative Council question on notice 2185.
- (d) Yes
- (e) No
 - (i) Not applicable
 - (ii) Not applicable
 - (iii) When suitable details of any proposal are available.
- (f) No

- (i) Not applicable
- (ii) Not applicable
- (g) Prior to a decision to release Crown land, the appropriateness of the release including its impact on other agricultural areas will be investigated and assessed.
- (h)–(j) Please refer to Legislative Council question on notice 2185.