

STATE FOREST 16

Partial Revocation of Dedication — Motion

Resumed from 12 March on the following motion moved by Mr A.P. Jacob (Minister for Environment) —

That the proposal for the partial revocation of state forest 16, laid on the table of the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday, 11 March 2015, by command of His Excellency the Administrator, be carried out.

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [3.37 pm]: I rise to speak to this proposed excision from state forest 16 and I note that the proposal is for the partial revocation of state forest 16 laid on the table of the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday, 11 March 2015, by command of His Excellency the Administrator to be carried out.

The proposal is for the creation of what is perhaps commonly called an “explosives dump” in an area where the Department of Mines and Petroleum can store and contain explosive materials. Those explosive materials are currently stored in the suburb of Baldivis and we all know that the rapid urban encroachment around that area is such that it is not a sensible proposition for the storage of explosives. I understand that before this facility was located in Baldivis, it was located in Cockburn. It might not be that many years ago that the site was once in Cockburn, then it moved to Baldivis and now we are looking to move it further south. There is the opportunity to move it to an area that the member for Collie–Preston knows well. I think it is on his itinerary as he drives to this place from his electorate—he frequently passes by the area of state forest 16. It is an area that will be accessed by Johnston Road, which intersects with Old Coast Road.

Mr M.J. Cowper: It is Forrest Highway.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Is it Forrest Highway? Does it perhaps run between Forrest Highway and Old Coast Road, member for Murray–Wellington?

Mr M.J. Cowper: No, that section of Old Coast Road has now been rebadged Forrest Highway. It is about three kilometres south of the turn-off to Preston Beach. It is in the bottom end of the Waroona shire, bordering Harvey shire in McLarty State Forest.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I thank the member very much for that. I was given an excellent briefing by the department, but unfortunately its resourcing, its geographic information systems material, is not bang up to date, because Forrest Highway has been in existence for some time, but its mapping indicates that Johnston Road runs into Old Coast Road. I ask the minister to please address the issue of updating the data sets that his department relies on, otherwise important information could be misconveyed.

Concerning state forest 16, an excision of about 130 hectares of land has been covered principally by pine trees. There is no great amount of native vegetation on the site but perhaps the minister can clarify for me what percentage of the 130 hectares is covered by native vegetation. I understand that most of this area is covered by pine trees that the Forest Products Commission owned. The Forest Products Commission has had the opportunity to harvest those pine trees so that it will not lose money, but it will be given something of an offset with some other land; I will come to that in a moment. It is important to bear in mind—I have talked to the member for Collie–Preston about this—that this land could have been used for horticultural purposes. I am told that there is some viability for horticulture in that area, perhaps for carrot production or other vegetables. I imagine the sandy, loamy soil type has some horticultural production value.

Mr M.J. Cowper: No, it is actually on a ridge that is valuable for sand and limestone.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I thank the member, and I have heard that sand extraction will occur. Indeed, that is useful because it means we are making the explosives storage facility somewhat lower into the ground, so that if some catastrophe was to eventuate, I suppose that extra bunding would be useful. If it is on a ridge, then I guess we would not get into the watertable as well.

I am pleased that these sorts of factors have been properly considered by those who have been involved in what I imagine was a fairly extensive site selection process. I notice from questions raised in the other place by Hon Sally Talbot that this has been the subject of local discussion for some time. There have been public consultation opportunities, and the local member was certainly consulted about this matter as well as the Shire of Harvey, the Shire of Waroona, the Preston Beach Association and adjacent landowners. That is commendable. I would be interested to know what radius was drawn around the site to determine who was an adjacent landowner. I am finding in a number of situations in my electorate and in my portfolio area that the issue of consultation with the local community is sometimes drawn to suit those who have a particular proposal. In other words, if people do not want to consult too widely, they keep the radius quite small; but if they are prepared to consult more widely, the radius will be wider to naturally bring in more adjacent landowners. I think

extensive community consultation is important on an issue such as the location of an explosives site. It would be useful to know how many landowners were consulted.

I note, though, that in Hon Sally Talbot's questions on this issue, she asked how many people had participated in the consultation. The response given by Hon Ken Baston was that the exact number is not known. I would have thought that when a government agency does a consultation round, it would be reasonable to expect that some sort of register would be kept, and that it would have been possible for the agency to give an accurate indication of the number of people involved in the consultation. I do not think that would have been too much to ask. Hon Sally Talbot also asked what concerns were expressed. The response was that the local shire had some concern about the site access, which led to a realignment of the reserve boundary and site entrance to accommodate the shire's request. That is good from an access point of view. Naturally, though, we would want to be sure with something such as an explosives site that other issues had been considered, such as a fire management plan—which I understand has been or is in the process of being drawn up—and whether a transport plan had also been drawn up. A site such as this will be fully fenced and will have the benefit of closed-circuit television. It seems that all due caution has been taken when it comes to the protection of this facility, which is good to note.

I think this partial revocation is particularly interesting in the offset arrangement that the Forest Products Commission has achieved. The Forest Products Commission said that it was losing 130 hectares of land and wanted something in return. I understand that land has been acquired adjacent to state forest 29. This is 201 hectares of land adjoining the Greater Preston National Park. I am very interested, and I am sure the Minister for Environment is very interested, in the issue of offsets, which we know is very important. Where there is development and some degree of loss—strictly speaking in this case we could say it is not a great environmental loss if it is all about losing pine trees, but the Forest Products Commission has lost part of its asset base—an offset arrangement has been entered into. This is the purchase of some 201 hectares of land, on which it will be able to put another crop of pine trees; that is good. During the briefing, I asked the officers from the minister's department if this offset would be registered on the state's offsets register. The answer was no and I am disappointed about that because it strikes me that we have this offsets register and at the moment it is used primarily for offsets that are established under the Environmental Protection Act where there are formal assessments; that is fine. However, why would we not put other offsets on that register as well when they are entered into? In that way, when members of the Western Australian public hear that something has been destroyed but it will be offset, they can consult a single register. The centrality of the offsets register makes sense from a lot of perspectives. That centrality will be a protection to us, because it will save us from any risk of an offset being used on multiple occasions—the duplication of an offset. More importantly, it will mean that we have some transparency around what an offset is so that we can get some consistency. At the moment, somebody can say that they are offsetting by doing a like-for-like offset; sometimes people will say they are doing two-for-one. There are all sorts of ratios being established for offsetting and we need some consistency on that. Having it all on a single register would be the best way to do it.

Mr M.J. Cowper: I note that the member commented on the pine trees that are being removed.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Yes.

Mr M.J. Cowper: The member might be aware that that area is the second largest configuration of pine trees in WA. At maturity, I have seen figures saying that 500 litres per day per mature pine tree is extracted from the groundwater. Given the sensitivity of that area, the member may comment about the fact that we have lost those pine trees. I am not a big fan of them and I note from some of the member's tones that he is not either.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Is the member concerned that the groundwater table might rise because we no longer have the pine trees on that part of the —

Mr M.J. Cowper: We know what happened at the Gnangara mound where the pine plantations have contributed to the lowering of the groundwater. In my view, that area is abundant with too many pine trees. When we take into consideration the market gardeners in the south who have been stringently monitored with their extraction and compare that with the amount of water taken by each of these pine trees—as I said, 500 litres per day in the middle of summer by a mature tree—it adds up to millions of millions of litres of water per day.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Certainly, member, on the issue of groundwater use for pine trees, one has to ask the question: is that the highest economic use of that groundwater source? Perhaps the member's suggestion is that that groundwater should be made available for horticultural production in the area. That is a very valid point and one that, perhaps, in another debate, we could examine in greater detail. I think the minister might be concerned if I stray too much from the issue of the partial revocation of the state forest.

I want to say a bit more about the offsets issue, and the fact that we have the potential for an offset to be recorded on a central offsets register. That would be a very fair way to enable people to observe the nature of an offset and to see the actual standard. My hope is that eventually there would be a lifting of the standard. Therefore, any

time an urban developer or resources company said, “Right; we’re going to destroy 100 hectares of bushland here, but we will recreate something on some degraded land”, the standard required would be well established through that transparency on the register. I understand from the minister’s departmental people that that is not happening in this case, and that the deal to acquire the 200-odd hectares adjoining the Greater Preston National Park is a deal that has been done. After that, I suppose it will be on the asset register of the Forest Products Commission; it is land that it will be using presumably for pines, although, perhaps, there is potential for it to be another tree. It is possibly in the blue-gum zone. I am not sure of that, but I did hear it is a higher rainfall area and therefore will be an area that will have higher and faster yielding pine production. That is the nature of the deal that the Forest Products Commission has done, so it is quite happy. I understand the FPC feels that it is a successful arrangement that works to its advantage.

We support the revocation on the understanding that there is not a significant loss of native vegetation—it is necessary to have an explosives facility—that the provisions around the safety of the site are comprehensive, and that things such as fire-management plans and security surveillance will be developed to the highest possible standard so we can all feel safe. I note, as the member for Murray–Wellington said, that there is no risk to the Preston Beach community, which is the nearest town site, from this relocation of the explosives facility. I commend the motion to the house.

MR M.J. COWPER (Murray–Wellington) [3.54 pm]: I would like to just quickly contribute to this debate. Given that it is in the Murray–Wellington electorate, it is appropriate that I say some words. This is a good decision inasmuch as it ticks a number of boxes. It obviously deals with the problem that the Department of Mines and Petroleum had with the existing facility at Baldvis needing to be relocated. The member for Gosnells mentioned that he recalls that it was actually being constructed. Of course, I suppose that is symptomatic of an expanding metropolitan area, and the department has had to go and find someone else to establish this. I recall that before this, the facility was actually at Byford—so it is pushing out further all the time. Given notice of all the circumstances, this is a great location in the McLarty pine plantations. Interestingly, the section of Johnston Road that services the facility between Old Coast Road and halfway along Eckersley Road is pretty much under the dominion of the Shire of Waroona. However, the portion of land that this facility sits on is in the Shire of Harvey. Johnston Road is the border. The road is controlled by the Shire of Waroona and the land itself is in the Shire of Harvey.

A few years ago, I was nervously approached by the then Minister for Lands, Brendon Grylls, and Department of Mines and Petroleum staff who thought I would be some sort of ogre and non-receptive to this proposal. It was with some trepidation that they all came to see me. Given what I was told, I was able to engage my local shires, in particular the Shire of Harvey, and get some support for the notion of placing the facility there. Obviously, initially there were intriguing questions that needed answers; notwithstanding that, to the comfort of the Shire of Harvey council, it was accepted. Of course, one of the other boxes that this ticks is that although a few people may lose their employment in and around Baldvis, it means there will be additional jobs for people in my electorate. It is always a good thing when we can create some local employment.

One of the biggest issues for the south west into the future is the location of materials to build homes in the City of Bunbury in particular. I know that the Premier has commented that he wants to see Bunbury become the major regional city of Western Australia. An impediment to that is a lack of suitable building materials. Members may know that the resources that have supplied Bunbury for quite a while are being used up. The vast majority of the coast section we have talked about along the ridge, running north to south from virtually the bottom end of the Peel–Harvey estuary to the north of Bunbury at Australind, is covered in pine trees. I have spoken briefly about my concerns about the number of pine trees in that location planted there for many years under the control of the Forest Products Commission. Under that ridge is a large resource of yellow sand. This is not just yellow sand that can be used for fill; it can be used by bricklayers and the like. It is actually good quality sand. There is also a good supply of limestone. With that, we have to be very careful about where we will extract such materials. I am aware of work in that location, particularly around Lake Clifton and Preston Lake, and the sensitivities of those environments. Members might know that Lake Clifton is the home of thrombolites, which is one of the oldest known organisms in the world and are under threat. We need to be very careful when we make these decisions. I am pleased to say that this location does not appear to have any impact on the Lake Clifton system, and it is far enough away to not be a concern to Lake Preston, which is to the south.

A couple more things arose from this proposal. A number of trucks will be going in and out of Johnston Road onto Forrest Highway. Although turning left onto that highway may be problematic, turning right is downright dangerous. Money needs to be spent to ensure that that intersection will be able to cope with the number of trucks coming in and out. The other, I suppose, oversight in relation to that precinct is that about three or four months ago Main Roads put a restriction of a 10-tonne road limit on the bridge over the Harvey River on Johnston Road near Eckersley Road. All of a sudden, that created a major problem for sand and limestone haulage routes and the like going out to the agricultural region, and for building materials going back towards

South Western Highway. I have had meetings in my office and in Bunbury with the Department of Water. I must say that the new chief of the Water Corporation is on the ball, and I am impressed that he will look at fixing that section of road because of not only the truck situation, but also the number of school buses and the fire and emergency services that cannot get across that bridge as a result. Although we might think we have all the bases covered, there is always something that will jump up and cause an issue.

Overall, this is a great location. I can tell the member for Gosnells that this is totally about the removal of a pine plantation; there is no native vegetation. A comment came back to me locally from one of the Coastcare groups at Binningup, which was interested in some sort of an offset, and was concerned that trees were being knocked down. I said that I would rather pine trees were knocked over than remnant native vegetation. After considering what I had said, and after all else was considered, that group realised this was a better option than we could hope for. I am comfortable that this is going into the right position, with a few additions of some roadworks. I am very pleased that Carbone Bros, one of our local companies, has won the contract through a tender process to extract sand there. I know the owner of that business, and he has advised me that he is going to make this into a super pit; that is, it will not be exclusive to Carbone Bros. He will make it available to other sand contractors so that they can get the job done within the terms of their contracts. That will then lead to a lesser reliance on other areas, which is a very sound business practice. I fully support this measure. I think it is a good way forward, and my constituents are very comfortable with this facility.

MR A.P. JACOB (Ocean Reef — Minister for Environment) [4.02 pm] — in reply: I commend to the house this partial revocation of state forest 16. It comprises some 130 hectares, as we have heard from the member for Gosnells. I thank the member for Gosnells and the member for Murray–Wellington for their contributions. This partial state forest revocation actually results in a net gain to the state forest. With 130 hectares revoked, there is a gain of 201 hectares, which is a 35 per cent gain on what is being removed. This will be for a new home for the state explosives facility.

Questions were asked about the impact on neighbouring households. In my opening speech I outlined the eight-year process that has been followed, after which this was found to be the only site that met all the safety, environmental and logistical requirements. These sites have a requirement, generally, of a minimum one-kilometre buffer; this site has a 1.6 kilometre buffer. In addressing questions about native vegetation and environmental values, I can say that all the native vegetation on this site was removed decades ago for the planting of the pine trees in the state forest. That section of pines has also been harvested, so all we are left with now is some juvenile pines and saplings that are coming back as a result of regrowth on the site.

I refer to the comment about offsets. I have a view generally that offsets can be a very useful tool, though not the first tool that we would want to use. I do not want to go into a broader discussion about offsets generally, and I am sure that the member would agree that offsets should not be the first go-to. Avoidance and mitigation are the best options, but offsets are a useful tool in environmental approval processes. Given that this revocation does not require any negotiation of environmental values, it is really just a swap of areas into the state forest, which is more of a contractual obligation. I do not consider that this would fit the offsets register. I think that register should be maintained simply to capture those environmental values. I also think that, through the Department of Mines and Petroleum, the practical sequential land use has been very well done to ensure that those basic raw materials are available, particularly in a region that struggles for basic raw materials access, as the member for Murray–Wellington outlined. I commend the revocation to the house.

Question put and passed, and a message accordingly transmitted to the Council.

House adjourned at 4.05 pm
