

SOUTH WEST — VEGETATION HEALTH

1997. Mr C.J. Tallentire to the Minister for Environment:

With regard to the Conservation Commission, I ask:

- (a) are climatic changes in the South West of Western Australia contributing to deteriorating woodland and forest health;
- (b) has there been an unprecedented, climate-driven forest collapses in Western Australia in the past thirty years, and if so, does the proposed Forest Management Plan 2014–2023 address this loss of forest;
- (c) is it correct that groundwater levels have fallen up to 11 meters in some forested areas;
- (d) what is the average decline in groundwater levels in South West forests;
- (e) to what extent have soil water reserves dried out and are they likely to continue to do so;
- (f) what are the implications of this decline in soil water reserves; and
- (g) is this increasing insect infestations and fungal diseases and if yes what steps has the Commission taken to improve this situation?

Mr A.P. Jacob replied:

- (a)–(b) Vegetation health is affected by a wide range of factors. Declines in health have been observed in a variety of native forest and woodland species at some sites and these declines may, at least partially, be the result of the observed changes in climate. However, the extent of these declines solely due to changes in climate, is currently unknown.

Planning for climate change is factored into a number of management activities outlined in the Forest Management Plan 2014–2023.

- (c)–(f) There has been an observed decline in groundwater levels, with levels now deeper than five metres in some areas of the south–west. From 1975 to 2009 a decline in the groundwater level of over 11 metres was recorded at one site in the Swan Region of the department of Parks and Wildlife. It is possible this trend may continue with further expected declines in rainfall over parts of the south–west.

The decline in groundwater levels may contribute to changes in the health and/or composition of native vegetation.

- (g) Impacts will vary according to the species and local circumstances. An overall goal of the Forest Management Plan 2014–2023 is to sustain the health, vitality and productive capacity of ecosystems. The plan proposed a renewed focus to prioritise research and management efforts for pests and diseases in line with the approach adopted for weeds, and to monitor and report on the health of forest ecosystems.