

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

*Thirty-fifth Report — “Inquiry into the Sandalwood Industry in Western Australia” — Tabling*

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan)** [3.09 pm]: I am directed to present the thirty-fifth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, entitled “Inquiry into the Sandalwood Industry in Western Australia”.

[See paper 1432.]

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** The previous Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs commenced its inquiry into the sandalwood industry during the thirty-eighth Parliament, based on a petition lodged in 2012. This committee resolved to continue the inquiry in mid-2013 and this report represents the culmination of the work and evidence of both committees.

The native sandalwood industry in this state faces many challenges, ranging from unsustainable harvesting to the threat of theft from opportunistic criminals. The committee heard evidence from researchers and government departments that the current rate of harvest will wipe out wild trees if no action is taken to urgently reduce the quantity of wood available for harvest. Current penalties for illegally harvesting sandalwood are grossly inadequate and have led to the situation in which thieves are prepared to risk a maximum fine of \$4 000 for taking sandalwood under the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950 because illegal sandalwood can fetch up to \$7 000 a tonne on the black market. This inquiry has shone a spotlight on illegal sandalwood pulling and in the past 18 months joint WA Police and the Department of Parks and Wildlife operations have charged several individuals with stealing and recovered more than \$2.6 million of stolen wood. Whilst the black market can never be stopped, it should not be allowed to become established in this state as a right or something that people are comfortable doing.

The committee also found that government over-regulation has created a complex and inconsistent licensing regime that should be simplified and strengthened through legislative reform. Government tenders are due for renewal in June this year and the committee has investigated the process and found that it is confusing and overly bureaucratic. This causes frustration amongst potential tenderers and can lead to important sustainability measures being overlooked in these contracts.

The committee has made a number of important findings and recommendations in this report to benefit both industry and stakeholders, but to also ensure that the long-term sustainability of sandalwood is protected. There is important work being done in Western Australia to establish plantations and synthetic oil as alternatives to the wild product, but there is still much more that can be done to protect this important floral asset, beginning with an urgent review of the penalties for illegally harvesting sandalwood.

I commend the report to the house.