

CLIMATE CHANGE — WARREN–BLACKWOOD ELECTORATE

Grievance

MS E.J. KELSIE (Warren–Blackwood) [9.25 am]: I rise today to raise a grievance with the Minister for Environment; Climate Action concerning the impact of climate change on the great southern and south west. I thank the minister for taking my grievance.

Warren–Blackwood is a beautiful electorate, following the coast from Denmark to Margaret River, stretching from Mt Barker to Manjimup, out to Boyup Brook and up to Balingup. It covers forest and farmland and all in between. It is home to majestic karris, unique habitats and unparalleled marine environments. Sadly, this special part of the world that I am privileged to call home is increasingly under threat from the impacts of climate change. We are experiencing climate-induced drying, reduced rainfall and prolonged droughts, which impacts our bushfire risk, wetlands and biodiversity. Climate change impacts not just our precious environment and unique flora and fauna, but also our hardworking local farmers and producers.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the impacts of climate change have been exacerbated by the complete inaction of the Liberals and Nationals at the federal level and confusion when they held office at the state level. Federally, we have seen a decade of backflips on energy policy from the Liberal–National government, giving our business sector no confidence in how to proceed. We have seen opposition to the net zero emissions target. Previously, we have been an embarrassment on the world stage, with the United Nations Secretary-General describing Australia as a “hold out” for refusing to do more to cut greenhouse gas emissions. We have even been told that electric vehicles will ruin the weekend! How ridiculous. We have seen the former Barnett government send in bulldozers to destroy the ancient ecology and Aboriginal heritage of the Beeliar wetlands, support shark culls and dispute the human cause of climate change. Again, how ridiculous. We have seen the former government’s failure to plant the required levels of softwood under its own forest management plan, leaving us with the shortfall. Its inaction and confusion left our government playing catch up, as usual. The missed opportunities, misinformation and mistakes make me angry.

Western Australia is one of the best equipped places in the world to lead the future green economy. The level of past incompetence would be laughable if it were not so important. Interestingly, we have still not heard from Leader of the Liberal Party on where she stands on our historic decision to end native logging. This decision is something that is no doubt supported by her constituents in Vasse. Her lack of comment makes me wonder whether she secretly supports our stance.

Any positive change or action to reduce the impact of climate change has happened despite Liberal–National governments, not because of them. Thankfully, we now have both federal and state Labor governments that take the issue of climate change seriously. We understand that climate change is a global issue and we all need to do our part to enact change. Despite the inaction of our predecessors, as a government we have the commitment and courage to make the big changes, like ending native logging in the south west, supporting farmers to increase carbon farming and creating greener jobs and cleaner industries. We also know that it is a collaborative effort and we cannot do it alone. As a government, we support the amazing community-led initiatives and actions on the ground.

I recently hosted the Minister for Environment; Climate Action in Denmark. We held a series of important meetings with local community organisations, which, like me, are passionate about climate change and the environment. We visited local peat swamps, met with the dedicated staff at Green Skills and hosted a community meeting with stakeholders to talk about the draft forest management plan. Representatives from the Shire of Denmark, the Shire of Manjimup, the Denmark Environment Centre, Gondwana Link, the Walpole–Nornalup National Park Association, Fire and Biodiversity WA, the Wilson Inlet Catchment Committee, Nannas for Native Forests, Bio Diverse Solutions and South Coast Bushcare Services attended. I was pleased to secure this visit for my electorate and to host the many community leaders who took the time to meet the minister, show us around the peat swamps and take part in respectful two-way conversations about issues that people in my community of Denmark are very passionate about. It is because we care. We understand that climate change is real. The government hears those concerns and has a plan for the future. It is doing its part to support the global aims of reforestation, afforestation and stopping deforestation. It understands the impact this will have for future generations and the important role that WA can play.

Those opposite still do not understand this. The shadow Minister for Forestry in the other place, Hon Steve Martin, called the decision to end native logging unscientific. I suggest he familiarise himself with the range of reports, including the numerous Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports, to learn the science. Really, he could read anything relating to climate change to understand just how important reforestation, afforestation and stopping deforestation actually is. Perhaps the member for Vasse has read those documents. Perhaps she understands the overwhelming body of scientific evidence that went into making this historic decision. Perhaps she could come out and say so. After years of inaction from both the previous Liberal state government and, more so, the Liberal–National federal government, could the minister please explain why WA and the south west forests are unique in a climate

context? Can the minister also please explain the impact of climate change on the south west and what the McGowan government is doing to further climate action in Western Australia?

MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldivis — Minister for Environment) [9.31 am]: I congratulate the member for Warren–Blackwood for her impassioned questions to me. I know the grievance was directed to me, but I am pretty sure that her grievances are with others! However, I will take the grievance today and respond. I make the point that the member is a very strong advocate for her community. I had a constructive day in Denmark recently. I know how critical the issue of climate change is in the member's community. Indeed, it is the greatest challenge of our lifetime.

As the member for Warren–Blackwood rightly pointed out, the south west is a wonderfully unique place. The science shows us that climate change will adversely affect the south west. Western Australia's south west climate, characterised by warm, dry summers and cool, wet winters, is on the front line of climate change. The science tells us that there have been shifts in rainfall seasonality, with a 20 per cent decline in winter rainfall since 1970 and a slight increase in summer rainfall in the eastern parts of the south west. The science also tells us that summer heatwaves and prolonged drought periods have been more frequent in recent decades. For example, Perth has experienced a doubling in the number of days greater than 40 degrees Celsius and an increase in heatwave events by one and a half times when compared with historical figures dating back to 1910. The Bureau of Meteorology has developed national hydrological projections. The four key climate takeaways of those projections for the south west are that there will be less rain, the soil is drying, rainfall patterns are changing and climate change is a key driver. In terms of vegetation, localised sites in the northern jarrah forest with shallow soils have experienced canopy die-off associated with acute drought and heatwaves. In terms of fauna, species generally considered most vulnerable to climate change include those that have restricted and/or fragmented ranges, low genetic variation, dependence on a particular disturbance regime and reliance on a particular moisture regime or habitat. In terms of carbon, declining rainfall is expected to lead to long-term declines in the net primary productivity of forest ecosystems and, hence, the carbon-carrying capacity of sites. Wetlands are particularly vulnerable to climate change in south-western Australia through impacts on water depths and water quality, including acidification. Our environment is under siege. We must act now. That is what this government is doing.

Climate change both affects and is affected by forest health. The ability of the forests to withstand and cope with these changes will vary depending on factors such as soil type and depth, elevation and aspect, and the structure and density of vegetation. Drier and warmer conditions will interact with other pressures affecting south west forests, such as fire, disease, weeds and pest animals, although the effects of those interactions are difficult to predict. Climate-related extreme weather events, such as heatwaves, higher intensity bushfires or storms, may amplify the impact of other pressures on native species and ecosystems. A key focus of the draft *Forest management plan 2024–2033* is therefore management and climate-adaption activities to support forest health and resilience. More than 45 climate-related peer-reviewed publications are referenced in the draft plan. Avoiding deforestation, as the member wisely pointed out, and achieving reforestation is climate action. The McGowan government's decision to end native logging is a decision to further climate action, in addition to the broader environmental benefits. Building the resilience of the south west's biodiversity, including threatened species and ecological communities, is key to ensuring the survival of our forests. Such capability building will also help our forests adapt to the changing climate and withstand a range of current, emerging and future threats.

Another key focus of the draft FMP is forest management and climate-adaption activities such as ecological thinning—an active forest management climate-adaption tool undertaken to support forest health and resilience. It involves the selective removal of individual trees to improve or maintain the ecological values of a forest. Thinning aims to reduce competition between trees and supports the survival and growth of the remaining vegetation. By reducing the density of trees in parts of the south west's forests, a greater pool of resources—water, nutrients and sunlight—will become available to each of the retained trees, improving their ability to grow and deal with future changes in climate. It is more like the way that our forests develop naturally. Reducing the impact of established pressures on threatened species, such as tackling invasive pests and weeds and conserving habitat, will build the resilience of our native species and support their capacity to adapt to a changing climate.

Climate change is also increasing the likelihood and consequences of extreme bushfire events in the south west of WA. Adaption to these risks is an important aspect of the response to climate change. Eliminating the occurrence of bushfires is not possible, but adaptation and mitigation efforts, including fuel management, are proven approaches to managing the risk. In Western Australia, prescribed burning is the primary tool to manage this bushfire risk and protect communities from the devastating impacts of large, intense summer bushfires. Current and future investment in fire management is critical to the mitigation of and adaptation to climate risk. Prescribed burning will continue to be essential to manage carbon stores, and the prescription will likely need to vary to adapt to a changing climate.

But let us take a step back and look at the whole economy. The Western Australian climate policy includes actions to transition public sector agencies to net zero emissions, prepare Western Australia's electricity network for a net zero transition and develop strategies to guide emissions reductions across key sectors. This includes investment

in climate science, a WA program to fight coastal erosion, an agricultural climate resilience fund, the climate adaption strategy, a climate risk framework and a climate change risk management guide, to name but a few initiatives.

I will finish by again thanking the member for Warren–Blackwood for her commitment and engagement to her local community and her strong advocacy for environmental and climate action initiatives.