NATIVE FOREST — ECOLOGICAL THINNING

Statement by Minister for Forestry

HON JACKIE JARVIS (South West — Minister for Forestry) [10.02 am]: I rise today to provide an overview of ecological thinning as it relates to native forests in Western Australia. As members may remember, the subject of ecological thinning was raised during debate in the last sitting week and I undertook to provide the chamber with an explanation of ecological thinning. Put simply, ecological thinning refers to the process of selectively removing some trees and vegetation from an ecosystem to improve its overall health and the ecological resilience of a forest. This technique is used to promote the growth and regeneration of the remaining trees and understorey vegetation. In the Western Australian context, ecological thinning will ensure more resilient, healthy forests. The practice supports biodiversity and, importantly, helps to mitigate the impacts of climate change and the decrease in annual rainfall in the south west of the state over the past few decades. Ecological thinning allows more sunlight, moisture and nutrients to reach the remaining trees and understorey vegetation, which can stimulate growth and regeneration and also improve the habitat for native wildlife.

Although focused on achieving forest health outcomes, the process of ecological thinning can also provide a timber resource for use by industry. A timber industry that is focused on log production, with logging targets based on an annual allowable tonnage, is no longer environmentally, socially or economically viable in Western Australia's unique native forests. That is why the McGowan government announced the decision to cease the logging of our native forests at the end of this year. A new 10-year forest management plan will take effect from January 2024 and will be focused on identifying forest coupes requiring ecological thinning for forest health by area, rather than dictating the maximum amount of timber available to be harvested.

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions produced a fact sheet that is available on the department's website. I seek leave to table that fact sheet.

[See paper 2049.]

Hon JACKIE JARVIS: As stated in the fact sheet —

> Ecological thinning is an active forest management and climate adaptation tool undertaken to support forest health and resilience. It involves the selective removal of individual trees to improve or maintain the ecological values in a forest. Thinning aims to reduce competition between trees and supports the survival and growth of the remaining vegetation.

The Forest Products Commission and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, in conjunction with industry, have conducted trials of ecological thinning by selectively removing trees and understorey vegetation and monitoring the effects of thinning on forest structure, biodiversity and fuel loads using different machinery and operation types.

The *Forest management plan 2014–2023* explicitly acknowledged thinning as a key management tool to maintain the ecological health and resilience of Western Australia's native forests. This current forest management plan, approved by the government of the day, outlined guidelines and principles for implementing thinning, including the need for science-based and adaptive forest management approaches, but was primarily focused on log volume to industry rather than forest health outcomes. From 2024, native timber from ecological thinning for forest health and approved mine site clearing will be made available for our timber industries. That is to say that native timber from Western Australian forests will be made available only from activities that support forest health, rather than on log volumes. The future of our native timber industry will be different, but our timber industry does have a future at a scale and on a basis that is sustainable and focused on the broader outcome of a healthier forest for future generations.