ECOLOGICAL THINNING

996. Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS to the minister representing the Minister for Environment:

It is an old question, lodged in June. It is number 554. Apologies; it has taken me a while to get to it. There has been too much fun stuff to do! I refer to a Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions explanatory note on ecological thinning that states "mechanical fuel reduction thinning at the stand or patch scale could only be considered ecological thinning if it is undertaken consistent within a broader landscape objective of maintaining biodiversity conservation values".

(1) What are the department's scientific reasons for taking this position?

(2) Will this position, if adopted by the government, reduce the amount of "ecological thinnings" available from the remaining timber harvest in this state following the government's closure of most of the native hardwood timber industry?

(3) What will the impact of this position be on the amount of ecological thinnings?

The PRESIDENT: I note that the question seems to be seeking an inordinate amount of information.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:

I assure the President that it is a succinct answer.

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for some notice of the question—lots of notice, in fact, given it was from 13 June. This information was obviously current as at 13 June 2022.

(1) To date, mechanical fuel reduction trials of intensive thinning practices have been undertaken to reduce fuel loads and mitigate bushfire risk. These operations prioritised the removal of almost all potentially flammable vegetation in the vertical and ground layers. Ecological thinning prescriptions are likely to incorporate greater retention of mid-storey species, legacy habitat elements and coarse woody debris to ensure landscape-scale biodiversity conservation outcomes are achieved.

(2)–(3) The nature, location and extent of ecological thinning to be undertaken will be determined through the process to develop the next forest management plan for 2024–2033.