

NATIVE FOREST — LOGGING — TRANSITION PACKAGE

15. Ms E.J. KELSBBIE to the Minister for Forestry:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's efforts to tackle climate change, including the decision to protect our native forests.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how this government is supporting native forestry workers transition towards the end of native forest logging in the south west?
- (2) Can the minister update the house on work underway to finalise the \$50 million just transition plan?

Mr D.J. KELLY replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question and the advocacy that she has engaged in on behalf of her constituents on this issue.

Before I answer the question, I briefly acknowledge the work that has been done by employees of the Forest Products Commission and the Water Corporation on the fires we have seen in the wheatbelt and the south west. In particular, Water Corporation staff ensured that water supplies were maintained. Their work has been absolutely outstanding, and I want to acknowledge the contribution they have made.

In respect of our decision to stop native logging when the current forest management plan finishes at the end of 2023, we have worked hard to ensure that those affected workers will have a just transition to new opportunities. The resource post-2023 will simply not be there because of the impacts of climate change. We understand that that is difficult for a number of the employees in that industry. We have worked hard to put together a package that gives those workers a future. Last week, we announced that we have reached agreement with the Australian Workers' Union on a package that will give new opportunities to those staff. In particular, any worker who voluntarily leaves an affected employer in the native logging industry will receive a \$10 000 payment. They will also have access to other retraining programs. We know that there are other job opportunities currently in the south west. If a worker wants certainty and they want to accept another job in a new industry, they can get a \$10 000 payment to assist them in that transition.

Workers who are made redundant, should any of the mills close, will receive a payment of \$30 000 plus \$1 000 for each year of service up to 15 years' service. They are substantial payments that will enable those workers to move on to new opportunities. In addition to those cash payments, there is a reskilling, retraining and new employment support program, which includes up to \$25 000 towards training at TAFE or an approved provider and up to \$500 to assist workers to seek other employment; that might be through preparing résumés or accepting help through the job matching service that we are putting in place. Up to \$5 000 is available to workers who need to purchase new personal protective equipment, tools or work attire if they want to move out of the native forest industry. That package is comprehensive.

As I said, we have reached agreement with the Australian Workers' Union, which I thank for the way it has dealt with this issue. Obviously, it was not happy with our original decision to end native logging, which is perfectly within its rights. But having expressed that view, it has sat down and constructively worked with us to get a good deal for affected staff. I thank the AWU and its staff for the effort that they have put in to help us put together this package. This package applies to any worker who has left the industry from 8 September 2021, so it applies to people who have already decided to seek new opportunities. Those workers can still seek some assistance.

In respect of the business package, we put a proposal out to affected businesses and that package is still open for public comment at the request of Forest Industries Federation WA until the end of February. We urge those businesses to work constructively with us to put together the final package as there is work to be done. We are currently putting together a working group to formulate the broader community package and the package to attract new industries to the south west. The worker package, the business package and the community package will come together to finally make up the \$50 million Just Transition package.

We are working hard. I thank all the public servants who have been involved to date, and I thank the AWU for its contribution. I thank the local governments that have been working constructively with us and I thank those businesses that have already constructively participated to put those packages together.

The SPEAKER: The member for Vasse with the last question.