

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

## Question on notice

Tuesday, 18 November 2014

2185. Hon Robin Chapple to the Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Regional Development.

I refer to a proposal by the Shire of Esperance to clear land for agriculture north of the town, and I ask:

- (a) is the Minister aware of a proposal from the Shire of Esperance for the allocation and clearing of public land for agricultural land releases north of Esperance;
- (b) is the Minister aware of a map provided to the Government by the Shire showing five separate locations for new agricultural land releases totalling 500,000 hectares;
- (c) can the Minister confirm that most, if not all the land identified by the Shire, is within the Great Western Woodlands as defined in the Government's *Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation Strategy Great Western Woodlands*;
- (d) is the Minister aware that the Department of Regional Development is providing advice to the Shire on how to go about securing new land releases in the north Esperance region:
  - (i) if yes to (d), what does the advice say; and
  - (ii) if yes to (d), will the Minister release this advice, and if not, why not;
- (e) given the massive clearing of native vegetation that has already occurred across the south west of Western Australia and the many long term environmental and sustainability problems this has caused, what is the Government's policy on new agricultural land releases involving clearing of large areas of native vegetation in southern Western Australia, including areas that are recognised internationally as part of a "Global Biodiversity Hotspot" and come under the Government's *Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation Strategy Great Western Woodlands*;
- (f) is the Minister aware that some of the owners of land immediately adjacent to areas proposed for allocation by the Shire of Esperance, have received ex-gratia payments through his department due to that land's unsuitability for agriculture:
  - (i) can the Minister confirm how much money has been paid out for this reason;
- (g) does the Minister accept that Government has an obligation to ensure any land allocations for agricultural purposes are viable for that use and, that if they are subsequently shown to be unviable then Government carries an obligation to compensate landholders;
- (h) has the proposal for new large scale land clearing for agriculture as presented to the Government by the Shire of Esperance been referred to the Environmental Protection Authority and the Department of Parks and Wildlife for advice:
  - (i) if no to (h), when will it be referred; and
  - (i) will the Government be subjecting the proposal to an open, independent and expert cost-benefit study addressing the full range of economic, social and environmental factors prior to any Government endorsement of the proposal:
  - (i) if no to (i), why not?

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**Answer**

- (a) The State Government is aware the proposal is contained in the Shire of Esperance's (Shire) Draft Esperance Region Economic Development Strategy (Strategy), which is yet to go through a public consultation phase before being finalised.
- (b) Yes

- (c) These areas were presented by the Shire as a hypothetical situation as part of the draft Strategy. Until a proper pre-feasibility study and appropriate due diligence is carried out, no locations have been locked in or supported by the State Government.
- (d) Yes
  - (i) The Department of Regional Development (DRD) met with the Shire in late July 2014. DRD provided advice to the Shire regarding the importance of thoroughly scoping the proposal through pre-feasibility and due diligence assessment, also understanding matters such as environmental impact, native title and cultural heritage before proceeding further and requesting any assistance or funding through the State Government. DRD also advised that local leadership and support for this proposal from traditional owners and the broader community would be essential if the proposal was to proceed.
  - (ii) DRD followed up the July 2014 meeting with an email in August 2014 reiterating the above advice. DRD has had no further contact from the Shire on the proposal since that time. Prior to a decision to release Crown land, the feasibility and appropriateness of a proposal and the benefit that may be achieved by release must be first investigated and assessed, including meeting any requirements under relevant legislation, such as planning and environmental laws, that might apply.
- (e) The Department of Lands has advised that one lessee received an 'Act of Grace' payment from the State in 2001 due to issues associated with salinity.
  - (i) The 'Act of Grace' payment was \$500 000.
- (f) Yes
- (g) No
  - (i) Please refer to part (i)
- (h) Should the Shire Council formally endorse the proposal and include it in its final strategy, the Shire would need to formally submit it for government consideration. If submitted to government the relevant agencies involved would then undertake the normal assessment and due diligence processes required and provide this advice to the relevant Ministers and Cabinet for consideration on whether to endorse and provide support for such a proposal.

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**  
**Question on notice**

**Tuesday, 18 November 2014**

2184. Hon Robin Chapple to the Minister for Mental Health representing the Minister for Environment.

I refer to a proposal by the Shire of Esperance to clear land for agriculture north of the town, and I ask:

- (a) is the Minister aware of a proposal from the Shire of Esperance for the allocation and clearing of public land for agricultural land releases north of Esperance;
- (b) is the Minister aware of a map provided to the Government by the Shire showing five separate locations for new agricultural land releases totalling 500,000 hectares;
- (c) can the Minister confirm that most, if not all the land identified by the Shire, is within the Great Western Woodlands as defined in the Government's *Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation Strategy Great Western Woodlands*;
- (d) has the Minister received advice from the Department of Environment as to the potential environmental impacts of the proposed clearing:
  - (i) if yes to (d), what does the advice say;
  - (ii) if yes to (d), will the Minister release this advice, and if not, why not; and
  - (iii) if the Minister has not received advice from his department, will he be seeking such advice;
- (e) given the massive clearing of native vegetation that has already occurred across the south west of Western Australia and the many long term environmental and sustainability problems this has caused, what is the Minister's position on new agricultural land releases involving clearing of large areas of native vegetation in southern Western Australia, including areas that are recognised internationally as part of a "Global Biodiversity Hotspot" and come under the Government's *Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation Strategy Great Western Woodlands*;
- (f) has the proposal for new large scale land clearing for agriculture as presented to the government by the Shire of Esperance been referred to the Environmental Protection Authority and the Department of Parks and Wildlife for advice:
  - (i) if no to (f), when will it be referred; and
  - (g) will the Government be subjecting the proposal to an open, independent and expert cost-benefit study addressing the full range of economic, social and environmental factors prior to any Government endorsement of the proposal:
    - (i) if no to (g), why not?

**Answer**

- (a)-(c) Please refer to Legislative Council question on notice 2185.
- (d) No
- (i)-(ii) Not applicable
- (iii) In the event that the Environmental Protection Authority receives a referral under Part IV of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* (the Act) or the Department of Environment Regulation receives an application to clear native vegetation under Part V of the Act in relation to a proposal of this type, I will request advice from the respective agency.

(e)-(g) Please refer to Legislative Council question on notice 2185.



**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**  
**Question on notice**

**Tuesday, 18 November 2014**

2183. Hon Robin Chapple to the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

I refer to a proposal by the Shire of Esperance to clear land for agriculture north of the town, and I ask:

- (a) is the Minister aware of the proposal from the Shire of Esperance to allocate and clear public land for agricultural land releases north of Esperance;
- (b) is the Minister aware of a map provided to the Government by the Shire seeking five separate locations for public land allocations totalling 500,000 hectares;
- (c) can the Minister confirm that most, if not all of the land identified by the Shire, is within the Great Western Woodlands as defined in the Government's *Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation Strategy for the Great Western Woodlands*;
- (d) is the Minister aware that the Department of Regional Development is providing advice to the Shire on how to go about securing new land releases for large corporations, possibly foreign entities, in the Salmon Gums area north of Esperance;
- (e) has the Minister received advice from the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA) or the Commissioner of Soil and Land Conservation (CSLC) as to the suitability for farming of the land being proposed for agriculture:
  - (i) if yes to (e), what does the advice say;
  - (ii) if yes to (e), will the Minister release this advice, and if not, why not; and
  - (iii) if the Minister has not received advice from DAFWA or CSLC, will he be seeking such advice;
- (f) is DAFWA also providing advice to the Shire or any other proponent of this land release:
  - (i) if yes to (f), what advice has been provided; and
  - (ii) if yes to (f), will the Minister release this advice, and if not, why not;
- (g) what impact does the Minister think allocating additional large areas of land for agriculture will have on the already depressed land market in the Wheatbelt;
- (h) given the massive clearing of native vegetation that has already occurred across the south west of Western Australia and the many long term environmental and sustainability problems this has caused, what is the Government's policy on new agricultural land releases involving the clearing of large areas of native vegetation in southern Western Australia, including areas that are recognised internationally as part of a "Global Biodiversity Hotspot" and come under the Government's *Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation Strategy for the Great Western Woodlands*;
- (i) has the proposal for new large scale land clearing for agriculture, as presented to the Government by the Shire of Esperance, been referred to the Environmental Protection Authority and the Department of Parks and Wildlife for advice:
  - (i) if no to (i), when will it be referred; and
  - (j) will the Government be subjecting the proposal to an open, independent and expert cost-benefit study addressing the full range of economic, social and environmental factors prior to any Government endorsement of the proposal:
    - (i) if no to (j), why not?

**Answer**

(a)-(c) Please refer to Legislative Council question on notice 2185.

(d) Yes

(e) No

(i) Not applicable

(ii) Not applicable

(iii) When suitable details of any proposal are available.

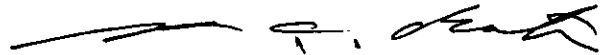
(f) No

(i) Not applicable

(ii) Not applicable

(g) Prior to a decision to release Crown land, the appropriateness of the release including its impact on other agricultural areas will be investigated and assessed.

(h)-(j) Please refer to Legislative Council question on notice 2185.



**MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FOOD**

Tuesday, 18 November 2014

2186. Hon Robin Chapple to the Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Lands.

I refer to a proposal by the Shire of Esperance to clear land for agriculture north of the town, and I ask:

- (a) is the Minister aware of a proposal from the Shire of Esperance for the allocation and clearing of public land for agricultural land releases north of Esperance;
- (b) is the Minister aware of a map provided to the Government by the Shire showing five separate locations for new agricultural land releases totalling 500,000 hectares;
- (c) can the Minister confirm that most if not all the land identified by the Shire is within the Great Western Woodlands as defined in the Government's *Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation Strategy Great Western Woodlands*;
- (d) is the Minister aware that the Department of Regional Development is providing advice to the Shire on how to go about securing new land releases in the north Esperance region:
  - (i) if yes to (d), what does the advice say; and
  - (ii) if yes to (d), will the Minister release this advice, and if not, why not;
- (e) given the massive clearing of native vegetation that has already occurred across the south west of Western Australia and the many long term environmental and sustainability problems this has caused, what is the Government's policy on new agricultural land releases involving clearing of large areas of native vegetation in southern Western Australia, including areas that are recognised internationally as part of a "Global Biodiversity Hotspot" and come under the Government's *Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation Strategy Great Western Woodlands*;
- (f) is the Minister aware that some of the owners of land immediately adjacent to areas proposed for allocation by the Shire of Esperance have received ex-gratia payments through his department due to that land's unsuitability for agriculture:
  - (i) can the Minister confirm how much money has been paid out for this reason;
- (g) does the Minister accept that Government has an obligation to ensure any land allocations for agricultural purposes are viable for that use and, that if they are subsequently shown to be unviable then Government carries an obligation to compensate landholders;
- (h) has the proposal for new large scale land clearing for agriculture as presented to the Government by the Shire of Esperance been referred to the Environmental Protection Authority and the Department of Parks and Wildlife for advice:
  - (i) if no to (h), when will it be referred; and
  - (i) will the Government be subjecting the proposal to an open, independent and expert cost-benefit study addressing the full range of economic, social and environmental factors prior to any Government endorsement of the proposal:
  - (i) if no to (i), why not?

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**Answer**

(a) – (i) Please refer to Legislative Council question on notice 2185