

PRESCRIBED BURNING PROGRAM — LAYMAN BALLAN BS120

3015. Hon Giz Watson to the minister representing the Minister for Environment

In relation to the Layman Ballan BS120 prescribed burn, I ask —

- (1) What is the total area of Wiltshire-Butler and Blackwood River National Parks?
- (2) Was the prescribed burn planned to be conducted within these two national parks?
- (3) How many hectares of each park, and how many hectares in total were planned to be burnt?
- (4) How many hectares of each park have been burnt to date?
- (5) How many hectares were burnt in each of the other forest blocks, into which the prescribed burn escaped?
- (6) How many hectares in total have been burnt to date?
- (7) Do Wiltshire-Butler and Blackwood River National Parks have management plans?
- (8) What are the requirements of the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984*, in relation to activities such as a large prescribed burn in a national park, without a management plan?
- (9) Were these requirements complied with?
- (10) If no to (9), why not?
- (11) Has the success criterion of burning between 60 percent and 80 percent of the riparian and forest areas of *Agonis flexuosa* been achieved?
- (12) If no to (11), how much of —
 - (a) the riparian areas; and
 - (b) the forest areas of *Agonis flexuosa* have been burnt?
- (13) Has the success criterion of at least 70 percent of the burn treatment area being burnt been achieved?
- (14) If no to (13), what percentage has been burnt?
- (15) Has the success criterion of no more than 30 percent of the total forested area being fully crown scorched been achieved?
- (16) If no to (15), what percentage has been crown scorched?
- (17) Was the primary purpose and objective of the burn biodiversity management met, namely to protect, maintain and enhance specific components of the local biodiversity, including Balston's pygmy perch, Western mud minnow and Western ringtail possum habitat, also to protect, maintain and enhance priority flora within and adjacent to the burn area?
- (18) How was it intended that the burn protect fish?
- (19) Was this objective achieved?
- (20) How was the burn intended to protect the endangered Western ringtail possum habitat, when the burn prescription required that between 60 percent and 80 percent of forest areas of *Agonis flexuosa* (the prime habitat of the species), was to be burnt?
- (21) Was the requirement for the protection of Declared Rare Flora *Daviesia elongata*, in the event of an escape there be no machine disturbance, complied with?
- (22) If no to (21), in what respects?
- (23) In relation to the seven species of Priority Flora found in the area of the planned burn, *Acacia tayloriana* (P4), *Astroloma* sp. Nannup (P4), *Chordiflex gracilior* (P3), *Hybanthus volubilis* (P2), *Leptinella drummondii* (P2), *Darwinia* sp (P1) and *Eucalyptus relictica* (P2), is their response to fire known?
- (24) What percentage of the populations of each of these species have been burnt?
- (25) Was the Department of Environment and Conservation aware, that the planned burn had been referred to the Environmental Protection Authority for assessment, under section 38 of the *Environmental Protection Act* as a proposal, likely if implemented to have a significant effect on the environment?
- (26) If yes to (25), why did it proceed with the burn?
- (27) What was the estimated cost of the planned burn?

(28) What is the cost to date?

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY replied:

The Government supports prescribed burning as a key strategy to protect the community and environment from the impact of bushfires. The purpose of the Layman burn was strategic protection of the nearby Jalbarragup and Darradup rural housing estates, farming properties and biodiversity management. There is always some risk of an escape from prescribed burns. The Layman burn proved to be difficult due to the dry conditions and more intense fire behaviour than expected, resulting in a 2,500 hectare escape.

(1)-(2) 11,645 hectares and 20,477 hectares respectively. The prescribed burn was planned to include parts of both national parks.

(3) A total of 9,772 hectares (7,055 hectares in Wiltshire-Butler National Park and 2,717 hectares in Blackwood River National Park) were planned to be burnt.

(4) 8,302 hectares in Wiltshire-Butler National Park and 2,717 hectares in Blackwood River National Park.

(5) 1,266 hectares in Rosa and Butler forest blocks.

(6) 12,272 hectares.

(7) The two national parks do not have specific Conservation and Land Management Act 1984 (CALM Act) management plans, however the Forest Management Plan 2004-2013 is applicable to these parks.

(8) The prescribed burning is in accordance with Section 33(3)(b)(ii) of the CALM Act as the planned fire management is consistent with the 'compatible operations' provisions of Section 33A(2) of the Act.

(9) Yes.

(10) Not applicable.

(11)-(12) Preliminary aerial observations have shown that parts of the riparian zone habitat have burnt at varying intensities and unburnt pockets remain along the Blackwood River. Satellite imagery of the burn has been requested and should assist in providing more detailed information.

(13) Yes.

(14) Not applicable.

(15) No.

(16) It is estimated from aerial observation that the total full crown scorch over the burn area is approximately 70%.

(17) It is too early to assess the impact of the burn on these species. Monitoring will be undertaken over the next year to assess the fish populations and water quality in a number of tributaries of the Blackwood River and the response of priority flora to the fire. Aerial observations have indicated that there has been a range of fire intensities in the riparian habitat along the Blackwood River and its tributaries.

(18) The burn was intended to provide protection to fish habitat by the planned burning of part of the riparian zone habitat at lower intensities than would occur during a high intensity summer bushfire. Such a bushfire would have severe impacts on the summer refuge habitat for fish by reducing riparian vegetation which maintains shade and water temperature, and increasing sedimentation into these areas from the following winter rainfall.

(19) It is too early to assess whether this objective has been achieved.

(20) The burn was intended to provide protection to western ringtail possum habitat by the planned burning of the *Agonis flexuosa* at lower intensities than would occur during a high intensity summer bushfire. The prescribed burn conditions were intended to minimise impact upon potential western ringtail possum habitat and food source while reducing flammable forest fuels.

(21) Yes.

(22) Not applicable.

(23) There is no documented information available on fire response of *Acacia tayloriana*. Other *Acacia* species are known to regenerate following mild fire via resprouting or regeneration from the soil seed bank.

Astroloma sp. Nannup is a known disturbance responsive species. It is known to respond to physical soil disturbance, with large populations found on road shoulders and under powerline clearings. Its response to fire has not been documented but it is thought to resprout under mild fire conditions and regenerate from seed.

Chordifex gracilior has an unknown response to fire. Another species of priority flora in the same genus, *Chordifex isomorphus*, is known to regenerate from seed following a fire event.

Hybanthus volubilis has an unknown response to fire. Monitoring to test the post-fire response of this species has recently commenced. Other species of *Hybanthus* are known to regenerate from seed following a fire event.

Leptinella drummondii has an unknown response to fire.

Darwinia sp Whicher Range has an unknown response to fire.

Mature *Eucalyptus relictus* trees are known to survive mild fire but may die as a result of hot fire.

- (24) Full assessments of the impact of the burn upon the species have not yet been completed, however the following information is available.

Monitoring of populations of *Darwinia* sp Whicher Range was conducted prior to the burn and permanent plots were set up to determine the species response to fire. It has been confirmed that one population was burnt, consisting of approximately 100 plants.

A population of *Eucalyptus relictus* was monitored prior to the burn and will be monitored post fire to document its response to fire.

- (25) DEC received a referral notice from the Office of the Environmental Protection Authority dated 25 October 2010. The burn commenced on 16 October and concluded on 20 October.
- (26) The referral notice was received after the burn was completed.
- (27) DEC does not individually cost planned burns.
- (28) The Layman burn has cost approximately \$300,000.