

**Question on Notice
No. 1376
Asked on 1 November 2006**

QUESTION:

MR FINN asked the Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism (Ms Nelson-Carr)—

What is the Government doing to protect our forest reserves?

ANSWER:

An election commitment of the Government is the gradual phase out of native forest harvesting from native State Forests. These lands will transfer to the protected area estate to create a world class conservation reserve system and a commercially viable and sustainable timber industry. This Government is working in partnership with Timber Queensland and the conservation sector to deliver these outcomes.

Firstly, as part of the South East Queensland Forests Agreement and Wet Tropics Forest Transfer process this Government has already transferred more than 570,000 hectares of former State Forests to national parks and other protected area categories. An additional 316,000 hectares will be added to the protected area estate in these regions over the coming 12 months.

The Wet Tropics of north Queensland and the State's south-east region are two of the most biologically diverse areas in Australia. The Queensland Government recognises the community's wish that significant and irreplaceable landscapes and ecosystems in these regions are preserved, and has embarked upon a major program to ensure that future generations will be able to use, enjoy and benefit from our native forests.

A further 375,000 hectares of State Forests will be transferred by 2024 in the South East Queensland Bioregion. These lands will progressively transfer to the protected area estate following a final harvest which is undertaken in accordance with a code of practice for native forest timber production. This is a key element in a system for implementing ecologically sustainable forest management across the Queensland native State forest estate.

The code ensures protection of forest values through the management of key values such as regional ecosystems, endangered, vulnerable and rare species, native title and cultural heritage.

The Government has also committed to protecting one million hectares of forests in Western Queensland, in a region known as the Western Hardwoods. Negotiations between the Government, Timber Queensland and conservation interests are continuing to work towards this outcome and this process is being led by the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure.

This Government is contributing significant funding to on-ground forest protection activities. A total of \$10 million will be expended by the Environmental Protection Agency in 2006/07 to manage pests and fire on parks and forests across the State. Of these funds, \$4.5 million will be expended on pest management and \$5.5 million will be expended on fire management.

These initiatives complement other Government programs to protect forests and other vegetation across the State. Most notably the introduction of the *Vegetation Management Act 1994*, which has significantly ended broad scale land clearing, the most significant cause of biodiversity loss across Queensland.