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Media Release

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**Sheed calls on government to increase illegal firewood logging penalties**

Independent Member for Shepparton District Suzanna Sheed called on the Minister for Energy, Environment, Climate Change and Solar Homes Lily D’Ambrosio to increase penalties for illegal loggers and support rangers in their policing work.

In parliament this week, Ms Sheed used her question without notice to alert Minister D’Ambrosio that illegal loggers were chopping down trees in Shepparton and Mooroopna for commercial gain.

“A number of constituents who live close to the forest in Shepparton and Mooroopna have reported to me that they hear chainsaws being used at all hours of the day and night,” Ms Sheed said in parliament.

“When they check the next day, they observe evidence of trees that have been chopped down, cut up, and presumably taken for firewood.

Ms Sheed said she was not referring to people stealing firewood for their own use, but much larger organised operations.

Ms Sheed asked if the minister was reviewing current penalties for theft of firewood in Victoria’s forests to make the perpetrators reflect on the seriousness of their crime.

Minister D’Ambrosio said if there was a broader organised syndicate involved in this (illegal logging), it was something that she was “absolutely wanting to run to ground”.

Minister D’Ambrosio said her department would be initiating a review of firewood, which would include a review into the current penalties’ regime.

“We want to make sure that they are fit for purpose—absolutely,” Ms D’Ambrosio said.

“You cannot have a system where you have your compliance and you have a lot of people out there enforcing compliance activities and the like, but not actually have a penalty regime that reflects the extent of the problem.”

Ms Sheed’s question followed community concerns about large scale illegal firewood collection in the areas of Reedy Swamp, Gemmill Swamp and Loch Garry.

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