

WINERIES - CROP LOSSES FROM SMOKE CONTAMINATION

82. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

- (1) Is the minister aware of complaints made by wineries in the south west about significant crop losses, and even court proceedings, regarding smoke-tainted grapes that have resulted from the Department of Conservation and Land Management's controlled burns in areas adjoining vineyards?
- (2) Is the minister satisfied with the level of consultation between CALM, adjacent wineries and wine industry associations, which might have otherwise avoided such conflict?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

- (1) I thank Hon Barry House for the question. I am aware of crop damage and losses in the value of the wine arising from smoke contamination issues resulting from prescribed burns. I am aware also of an extensive process of consultation. The question of whether the problem is severe is problematic because there seem to be two views about the scale of the problem. I am aware, from reports in the media and, to a more limited extent, advice from my department, that there are two views about the severity of the damage. However, there is no doubt that in some cases the damage has been quite severe.

Hon Barry House: A research project is either currently under way or is about to take place.

Hon KIM CHANCE: Yes. I have been told that in the most serious of cases when a vintage is smoke contaminated, it is definitely damaged goods. It does not take an expert to pick up the flavour of the smoke. This is a matter of concern to the wine industry.

- (2) I have heard two lines of advice on the consultation process. The first is that it is working okay but it could be better, and the second is that it is not working at all well. I am seeking advice from the department to try to clarify that issue. CALM certainly tries very hard to time its burnings and ensure that the climatic factors at the time of the burning do not cause damage. Everyone would agree that CALM is trying to do the right thing. The difficulty occurs when weather conditions change after the burn has been lit. We have seen that occur in the city also. CALM works on weather forecasts that predict wind conditions of a particular strength, and CALM counts on the wind blowing in a certain direction. However, the wind does not always blow as expected and therefore smoke appears in places where it was not anticipated. That is one of the problems facing CALM. We can work through this issue. It is a serious problem in my estimation for those people who are affected by it. I would like to better understand whether the damage can be contained and how widespread it is. On neither of those points am I absolutely clear, I am afraid, but I am working through this issue, trying to understand it a bit better.