

## AGRICULTURE, SEASONAL CONDITIONS

### *Statement by Minister for Primary Industry*

**MR HOUSE** (Stirling - Minister for Primary Industry) [9.04 am]: The late start to this year's cropping season and the warm, dry conditions during August and September have resulted in a bleak outlook for the agricultural region's crop and livestock industries. The situation throughout the State is highly variable, with the south coast and the eastern portions of the northern and central wheatbelt being most seriously affected. Agriculture Western Australia's yield predictions for this year are for a major loss in grain production and reduced pasture growth across a large portion of the State. This represents a significant loss in income for producers and a serious impact on our economy.

Both crop and pasture conditions have deteriorated rapidly in the past few weeks and without effective rain soon, the situation will be significantly worse. For some farmers on the south coast, and the lakes district particularly, the current adverse seasonal conditions have resulted in increased financial pressure caused by crop losses in the past two years. In addition, the prospect of a locust plague in the agricultural region continues to be a threat. These adverse conditions and the subsequent decline in farm income will impact on all Western Australians, not just our farmers. There will be a flow-on decline in economic activity felt largely by the small business and service sectors in our rural communities. There will be an increased demand for health, education, family services and welfare support.

I am working closely with key sectors of the agribusiness community and my ministerial colleagues to deliver these extra needs. I have personally spoken to, and will shortly be meeting with, the federal Minister for Agriculture, Mr Warren Truss, to keep him informed of the situation and to elicit support from the Federal Government. Key government agencies with responsibility for servicing rural communities are also working together to ensure an appropriate response. Current assistance includes -

- Workshops and information kits for farmers on options for managing risk and financial planning;
- financial support for business management;
- reduction in crop and seed royalty payments by growers;
- stamp duty concessions to primary producers to assist in refinancing farm loans;
- access to the latest crop and seasonal information on Cropline;
- a contribution by this government towards a national feasibility study to develop a national multi-risk crop insurance scheme;
- support for the rural land sales liaison committee for use by farmers and financiers;
- increasing the network of rural financial counsellors and family support counsellors across the State;
- farmer access to a Newstart allowance under the Federal Government's farm help program;
- development of a rural community health advisory service by health agencies; and
- a large contribution of money and manpower by the State Government to assist in locust control.

I have appointed a seasonal advisory committee, with broad rural representation, which will meet on Monday 16 October. This committee will consider all proposals put forward by farming groups and other rural organisations. I want it to be clear that, in response to what is becoming an increasingly bleak seasonal situation, this is only the starting point from which we can and will deliver relevant assistance. Every request will be given full consideration by the advisory committee so that appropriate advice can be given to the State and Federal Governments.