

NATIONAL DROUGHT SUMMIT

987. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:

I refer to last year's National Drought Summit, attended by the Premier and the Minister for Agriculture and Food, whereby it was agreed that it was the responsibility of state governments to look after fodder and animal welfare assistance for water-deprived farmers. Why has the Premier and his ministers turned their backs on drought-ravaged southern rangelands pastoralists in desperate need of feed and water for their stock?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for her question. I realise that the Leader of the Nationals WA cares deeply about our farming communities. Obviously, as I outlined yesterday, we have taken a lot of initiatives. I will not read them all out, but one initiative I indicated yesterday is that we are providing emergency water to a range of shires around Western Australia.

Mr V.A. Catania: That is in the wheatbelt. Do you know what the difference is?

Mr M. McGOWAN: I said "a range of shires" around Western Australia.

The SPEAKER: Listen, members; you might learn.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I realise that as the member lives in the "Shire of Nedlands", he might not understand that. Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! Member for North West Central, you cannot interject and get upset when someone interjects back. You have to take it.

Mr M. McGOWAN: If you interject with nastiness, you invite a response.

We have also spent \$1.1 million at 18 sites to refurbish and develop new water supplies, improving dams, catchments and storage of off-stream strategic emergency livestock water supplies in affected areas. Because the department has been visiting numerous pastoralists and farmers who have been impacted, we are also assisting with the agistment process, whereby pastoralists are able to move stock more quickly between stations to ensure animals are safe, with adequate access to food and water. The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's dry season response group will ensure animal welfare. If farmers contact the DPIRD dry season response group, they can receive some assistance.

As I said yesterday, it is not easy to solve the problem of drought. I think the commonwealth government would probably admit that in the eastern states, it is not an easy problem to solve. It has been developing for a long time, because the condition of the southern rangelands has been deteriorating now for many years. There has been overgrazing and there needs to be some recognition of that. Pastoralists understand that there are bad seasons, and they understand that there are often bad seasons. Admittedly, it is very bad for some of them now, but the government is supporting people out there as best we can.