

**DROUGHT — SOUTHERN RANGELANDS**

*Motion*

**MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central)** [4.02 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the Premier to implement an immediate response to the drought crisis affecting the southern rangelands in order to mitigate the enormous toll inaction is having on animal welfare, pastoralists and regional communities.

We have been asking questions in this place about the southern rangelands and what action the state government is taking to ensure that pastoralists in our southern rangelands are getting all the assistance that they desperately need. We want to ensure that the welfare of stock is at the forefront of this state government's priorities and that our pastoralists can look after their stock, their businesses and their land. I will talk about some of the reasons and issues affecting the southern rangelands, which have been highlighted this week in an article titled "The WA farmers being left high & dry" in *The West Australian*. I will go through a lot of the statistics, the reasons that we are in a crisis and how important it is for governments to be in this space, particularly the state government, to provide the assistance that is needed. I will go through the roles and responsibility of state and federal governments and the inaction that is costing a huge amount of livestock as the drought goes on and the inaction of the government continues.

I believe that the response will be made by the Leader of the House, but this motion is directed to the Premier, who is absent from this chamber. During questioning this week, he has been absent when it comes to responsibility —

*Point of Order*

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I have a point of order.

**Mr M.P. Murray** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman):** Minister! Points of order shall be heard in silence.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Acting Speaker, I ask whether you could perhaps consider that there is a convention in this place about when members are not here. Quite often, National Party members are not here at all, yet that is not made as an issue. I understand that there has been a previous ruling on referring to other members when they are not present in this place.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** All calm down. Member, there is a convention—I recall that the Speaker spoke about that only a few days ago—that in this sort of situation, we do not raise it as a point in debate. Please continue.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I am referring to the motion that I moved, which calls on the Premier to implement an immediate response to the drought crisis in the southern rangelands. This motion is directed to the Premier, the leader of the government and the person who represents the Minister for Agriculture and Food in this house. That is why I refer to the Premier and it is disappointing that he is not here, because this motion is directed at him as the person responsible for that portfolio —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member, there is a convention and it is quite likely that the Premier is listening. Just get to the crux of the debate.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Highlighted in *The West Australian* is that WA farmers are being left high and dry. We hear a lot about the drought in New South Wales and Queensland and what those state governments and the federal government is doing for drought-affected areas for the pastoral industry and farmers over east, but we do not hear much about the plight of pastoralists in Western Australia and the southern rangelands. Perhaps that shows us how resilient our pastoralists in this state are. They do not often put up their hand and say they need help. But today, our pastoralists in the southern rangelands are putting up their hands and saying that they need help. As I said, the issue has been highlighted in *The West Australian* this week.

Last week, I travelled out to Laverton via Warburton and looked at some of the stations out there, such as Erlistoun station and Laverton station. I travelled on to Wiluna and Granite Peak to look firsthand at the devastating drought and how livestock is perishing or are too weak to be moved for destocking or agistment. That is not possible given the state of the cattle in the southern rangelands. The drought goes right the way from the Nullarbor all the way up to parts of the Pilbara, and parts of the Kimberley are also in serious drought. I am focusing today on the southern rangelands to highlight the plight of our pastoralists and the lack of rainfall. There is not a blade of grass to be seen anywhere on these pastoral stations. I was talking to the owners of Wyloo station last night. It has had only 51 millimetres of rainfall. Some members might not know that that station is in the Pilbara between North West Coastal Highway and Paraburdoo. It is probably, say, 100 kays east of the North West Coastal Highway heading towards Paraburdoo. The lowest rainfall has been around 83 millimetres since records began being kept in 1903.

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The average rainfall is just under 300 millimetres. Compared with that, 51 millimetres does not create the opportunity for anything to grow. Those 51 millimetres have fallen over a period of time, not all in one shot, which would allow some grass to grow so the cattle would have some feed.

Cheela Plains is not far from Wyloo station. This year it has had 105 millimetres of rain. Its average is 286 millimetres, so it is just under half of its average rainfall. That is what the Pilbara stations have currently.

I travelled to Granite Peak last week. I was absent from Parliament because I am a regional member. I attended the thirtieth anniversary of the Warburton Swimming Pool —

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Why is the member laughing?

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** It's a long way from Claremont.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister!

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** That is the level of debate! Do not worry. I will get to you, bag of air.

After Warburton, I headed to Granite Peak, because it gave me an opportunity to get to some places that are very far from Perth. It is expensive and time consuming to get there, but by being able to cover that off and visit those stations, I was able to highlight the plight of the southern rangelands. At the moment, Granite Peaks' rainfall figure is 103 millimetres, which occurred over a 16-day period in 19 months to date.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Is there any trend—a previous year trend?

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I do have all the trend information, but to highlight it in the chamber, I would have to go through all the stations. I would say that the trend over the last three or 10 years has been quite low. Looking at the average rainfall, some places have only 20 millimetres or 30 millimetres, but normally they get about 180, 200 or 250 millimetres. Clearly, the southern rangelands have been in drought over the last three years and are in a dire situation right now.

I am going to read out some of the emails I have received about the challenges. Before I do that, I will go back to the article in *The West Australian* that is about some of the pastoralists at the stations I visited. It states —

In a cruel weather phenomenon known as virga, pastoralists watch numbly as isolated thunderstorms drop sheets of visible water that evaporates before it hits the ground.

We saw that when we were out there. We could see it raining, but the rain was not hitting the ground. The evaporation is occurring at about 6 000 feet. It is so dry that the birds have deserted the place. One of the hardiest birds out there is the crow, but they are nowhere to be seen. In fact, a lot of those birds are dead on the ground due to lack of water or feed. That also leads to feral pests such as camels and wild horses coming to water points, destroying the fencing. Those large animals come to water points and also kick and damage the stock that is desperately trying to get feed and water.

Erlistoun station normally runs 5 000 head of cattle, but has now gone down to 2 000 head of cattle. Granite Peak station has gone down to, I think, 1 200 head of cattle. It wants to agist more cattle but is unable to because the cattle are so weak that they cannot be agisted. Even if a property down south can be found, those cattle are still unable to be transported. A station north of Newman that has run out of feed and water has been trucking thousands of cattle down south. It has had 10 cattle per load die. They were so weak that they could not make the trip.

That seems to be the common theme and is something that we as the National Party are highlighting in Parliament—that is, the need for action to get feed and, in some places, water to make sure that we look after the welfare of the animals, which this government is currently not doing.

Quite a few emails have come to me from right across the southern rangelands. An email from the Goldfields Nullarbor Rangelands Biosecurity Association states —

South of Kalgoorlie and much of the Nullarbor are in a bad way. Rainfall records are showing the driest in 140 years of records (Mundrabilla 70mm in 10 months, all in small falls). People have destocked heavily and feeding what is left. Some have been carting water for most of the year and spending money on sinking bores where ground water is available. The worst affected places want to know at what stage drought conditions are declared.

Stations around the vicinity of Kalgoorlie and much of Sandstone has received various amounts of rainfall which sees the majority travelling along ok for now.

The eastern side stations running north ... haven't seen things so bad in 20 years or more (depending on how long people have been there). They too have offloaded stock or destocked spending money on water and feed.

The ones who are hit hard Jim are truly struggling with no income for most of the year and only ongoing costs with water and feed in sight.

I assume you are getting feedback from Patrick in regards to Laverton area.

Hope this helps.

That was from Michelle Donaldson, who is the chief executive officer of the Goldfields Nullarbor Rangelands Biosecurity Association.

Lou Ward from Glen-Ayle station states that the annual rainfall is 215 millilitres a year. In 2016, it was 203.8 millimetres. In 2017, it was 376.6 millimetres. In 2018—last year—it was 234.1 millimetres. In 2019 to date, it has been 45.3 millimetres. Rainfall patterns have been quite steady, but this year they have been reduced for that station. Temperatures of 40 degrees plus over 100 days straight have added to the evaporation and, as a consequence, nothing is growing on the station. His email continues —

2. 60 Windmills water the cattle from Bores. We have been carting feed in for Sale Cattle, to get them strong enough to Transport. Two years of Drought Reduces Stock Numbers, Plus some Sales, which then again Reduces Income to a great extent. 3. Short and Long Term Weather Forecast not looking good. 4. Look straight ahead and keep on going. The Agriculture and Pastoral Industry is the MOST IMPORTANT INDUSTRY IN THE WORLD. It FEEDS people, and we need to show the rest of the WORLD, that we NEED, WANT and USE EVERY BIT OF AUSTRALIA, and KEEP IT OPENED UP.

That was Lou Ward from Glen-Ayle station outlining his situation.

If we move out to the Nullarbor, Mundrabilla station that is owned by Colin and Bree Campbell is having the driest year according to 117 years of records. The last driest year recorded 117.2 millimetres back in 1933. As I said at the start, its rainfall is now inconsequential. The rainfall for pastoralists has been non-existent right around the state over the last two to three years.

I will read out a letter from the Shire of Laverton that wrote to the Minister for Agriculture and Food. This comes off the back of my letter to the minister highlighting how local governments are also affected by the drought. In Laverton, for example, cattle and kangaroos are coming into town and eating the grass on the oval. Sometimes the oval is filled with cattle trying to get as much feed as possible because there is simply no feed out there for them. The shires are taking action to highlight to the Minister for Agriculture and Food and this government that the pastoralists need some assistance. The letter states —

Dear Minister MacTiernan

**Shire of Laverton (and greater Northern Goldfields) — Drought Relief**

I refer to recent correspondence forwarded to your office on 25 October 2019 from Vince Catania MLA, Member for North West Central (copy attached).

The Shire of Laverton writes in support of Mr Catania's letter and urges both the State and Federal Governments to seriously consider the plight of the pastoral stations in the Northern Goldfields.

As you may be aware the Bureau of Meteorology has recently painted a very bleak picture for Laverton which so far we have only received 58.4mm of rain this year, including 7.2mm in the past 4 months, which compares quite unfavourably to the 197.6mm to the same time last year.

The result is that there is very little water in the region and particularly in the lands to the east of Laverton.

The major impact is that feral camels are invading the pastoral stations for drinking water. The camels empty the water supplies, damage the water infrastructure, and thus force the cattle aside. This then results in the cattle seeking water and fresh fodder supplies in other areas such as the town of Laverton, it is not unusual to find about 40–50 head of cattle wandering around the townsite and indeed feeding on the community oval at night.

Council is receiving numerous complaints in regards to the health and hygiene issues that may arise from community members participating in activities on the oval when there is fresh manure in evidence. Whilst the Shire staff remove the manure on a regular daily basis the complaints and concerns are very relevant.

If there is some assistance the government, whether it be State or Federal, can provide in the provision of water to outlying areas, funding assistance for the pastoralists to sink bores on their eastern boundaries, or food supplies it would be very welcome and much appreciated.

Thank you for your understanding and due consideration to this urgent matter.

That was a letter from the shire president.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** What is the date on the letter that he sent? I think you said 23 —

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** It is dated 28 October.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** So two days ago.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Yes, from the Shire of Laverton. Many more letters are coming in now because new people are coming in as shire presidents and councillors and as they have their meetings, they are passing motions based on the drought issues facing the southern rangelands. Councillor Rex Weldon responded to the letter put out by the Shire of Laverton. His text states —

A very well written Letter, Our Shire President has highlighted a few issues associated with Drought, that we are encountering. It's not a Pretty sight watching Cattle deteriorate through lack of Water and Fodder, we are not only experiencing loss of feed in Paddocks. But also massive Fires wiping out Hundreds of miles of Country. Which means environmentally unstable, and inevitably wrecks the Wildlife Chain. We are in desperate need of assistance. I totally agree with the President. Cr Rex Weldon.

This drought is affecting not only the northern goldfields, but also Meekatharra and the Gascoyne. I will read out an email from Kim Cousens of Hillview station. It states —

My husband and I have a cattle station in the Meekatharra Shire. We have been feeding cattle since November last years as we have had little rain in the past 18 months.

We were lucky to get some hay from Farmers Across borders who did a run to the Murchison area in March and have been buying in feed as well.

Who is responsible for declaring a shire in drought? Then we might be able to get assistance with freighting feed to the station.

ABC online news wrote an article on Mardie station in the Pilbara titled “Drought forces 20 years of breeding out the gate at Pilbara’s Mardie Station”. It states —

**After two decades running Mardie Station, drought has forced Richard Climas to sell every last head of cattle.**

It is the first time Mr Climas has faced the heartbreaking reality of de-stocking, which he described as his “worst case scenario”.

“It’s pretty painful,” Mr Climas said.

“What every producer dreads doing is de-stocking—selling everything.

“It’s probably one of the toughest [decisions] I’ve had to make.”

...

Mr Climas’ passion over the last 20 years was developing a strong breeding program for Mardie’s 4,000 droughtmaster cattle.

“You need to be the best at what you are doing, and that’s what we aimed at—we worked our butts off to get a really good line of cattle.

“We got them into restaurants in Perth, we did everything we wanted to do with them.”

Unfortunately the drought has now forced that program to end.

I understand that the state government has walked away from the National On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate scheme.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** On what basis do you say that? We administer it on behalf of the commonwealth, so don’t mislead the house.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** The government is not administering it very well.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members! Minister, you have the right to reply.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** The federal government is stepping up its action plan for drought assistance but the state government is lacking in its response, especially in the southern rangelands.

This drought is also affecting the Schools of the Air program, which this government tried to take away a couple of years ago. Members can see the theme emerging of this government’s inaction for the pastoral areas of the state. Schools of the Air enrolments have dropped because of the effect of the drought on our pastoral industry. People

are having to work away from home to make ends meet or they are not able to have their family based at the station because the environment is not conducive to living there. That is affecting enrolments at Schools of the Air.

An email from Jim Quadrio of Granite Peak station, who is also the president of the Shire of Wiluna, states —

The criteria used for Drought Dec I believe does not present the true picture. We have had years of average rainfall that has done nothing. The other factor which has happened throughout the pastoral region is channeling whereby rainfall now is directed down channels instead of spreading out as it used to. This is something the whole pastoral region particularly WA should have a concerted funding effort through RNRN or NRM or the likes to be part of any drought proofing solution. Controlling Ferals, particularly camels as well as kangaroos is another issue that is compounding the situation. There needs to be funding schemes to support, accelerate installation of self-mustering trap yards and water. I am operating at 40% capacity because there is no easy scheme of long term capital financing. There needs to be a Fed /State solution to the kangaroo/camel issue if regeneration/drought proofing/ productivity increase is to occur.

I think Jim Quadrio spells that out quite well. There is not enough of a concerted effort between the state and federal governments to tackle regeneration and drought-proofing to increase productivity.

That is where the situation is. I could go on about all the other stations that have sent through their rainfall patterns. I refer also to Rex and Norma Ward at Melrose station; they are next door to Granite Peak. They used to have about 4 000 head of cattle. At their last muster, about three years ago, they found that they had lost more than 500 because they do not have a blade of grass left at their station. I quote Rex and Norma now from *The West Australian* of 29 October —

“I can’t shoot anything so when I find them I make them comfortable, give them a bit of shade and something to eat and then Rex has to go out there and shoot them.

That is how Norma says they deal with the situation when they come across cattle that obviously need to be put out of their misery, and that is taking its toll on that husband-and-wife team. Jim Quadrio is quoted as saying —

“It’s something you probably shouldn’t have to do but it is just a fact of life out here—the land is so vast and you can’t get around to every animal in time to save them,” ...

That is what Jim Quadrio from Granite Peak station said.

When we consider the thousands of tonnes of feed have been trucked over east over the past 12 months, we can understand why pastoralists are finding it a bit upsetting. They are finding it hard to have feed transported to places like Erlistoun station and Granite Peak.

I am concerned by this government’s response—the response from the Premier, but more importantly, the response from the Minister for Agriculture and Food. I quote again from *The West Australian* of 29 October —

Regional Development Minister Alannah MacTiernan has ruled out helping struggling pastoralists to buy feed, insisting cash contributions were a stopgap solution to the “endemic problems” facing the Southern Rangelands.

What a response from the Minister for Agriculture and Food. That really gives us confidence that the minister is looking after agriculture in this state, particularly when it comes to the welfare of animals that are being put down on a daily basis because there is no feed. The minister is quoted as saying —

“But using taxpayer dollars to help pay the running costs of a station is not how we best help,” she said.

“That is part of the farming business model, it is not really the appropriate thing for government to be spending money on because that is basically running the farming operation.

...

Government had been focused on securing access to carbon credits on pastoral land that would open a lucrative revenue stream station owners could plough back into improving their operations.

I do not know if I am missing something here, but as I said, cattle are dying on these pastoral stations in the southern rangelands, so there is a welfare issue. Sure, carbon farming might be something for the future, but it is not going to feed the cattle now. It is not going to ensure that those pastoralists are going to be able to keep some breeders to get through the next three months, and hopefully it will rain. The response from the Minister for Agriculture and Food shows that she has not been out there to see it for herself. I invite her to come out and have a look—I am sure the member for Kalgoorlie would want to do the same—to see the desperation of these pastoralists in trying to find feed for their cattle. Yet the Minister for Agriculture and Food talks about carbon farming and how it is not the government’s responsibility to assist those pastoralists and, more importantly, assist the cattle. It has become a welfare situation where the welfare of the cattle should be paramount. The article continues —

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The McGowan Government is also pushing for \$10 million in annual funding from the Commonwealth Government's \$100 million Future Drought Fund, which comes into effect next July and is designed to support farmers and communities to become resilient to the effects of drought.

I do not know, but I do not think we will have any cattle left in the southern rangelands if we wait until next July to try to utilise some assistance from the federal government. Those were the comments made by the state Minister for Agriculture and Food —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Can I ask a question? I would be interested to hear your comments on Barnaby Joyce's comments, last week I think it was, on farms that are marginal. I would just be interested in your comments on what he said because it attracted a lot of attention.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** No, can we —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Maybe you can park it and do it at the end.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** No, I will go through that, but I just want to be able to say that we have an immediate problem and that is what I am trying to address. There are other avenues. We do need to look at ways to improve the future of the southern rangelands; I do not disagree, and I do not think anyone disagrees with that, but at the moment cattle are perishing because of no feed. They cannot de-stock or agist the cattle in the southern rangelands because they are too weak to move. That is the issue, and that is what I am trying to highlight to the minister.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** How many pastoral stations you think that applies to? I have asked for advice from the department. How many pastoralists would be in that situation, where their animals are too weak to move?

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I would say in the dozens at the moment.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** In the dozens? What, 12; 24?

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** It could be something around there, if not more.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** What, 36; 48?

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Given the fact that the Premier and the Minister for Agriculture and Food said that more than 120 stations had been looked at, it will be interesting to see what the minister means by the department having visited those 120 stations, because my feedback is: Are there qualified people who are able to actually report back to government to say whether that station is in drought, and where? What stations has the government looked at? Perhaps the minister can come back to me with what the government or the Minister for Agriculture and Food has done through the department, if it says it has visited 120 stations.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** I just asked, because the advice that we are getting from —

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I look forward to the minister's contribution when he stands up.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman):** Minister!

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** These were the comments. I will go through what was said on the ABC by the Minister for Agriculture and Food —

... there's some evidence the rangelands can be brought back to a better state using such things as carbon farming; this means if the amount of vegetative matter is increased ...

It would be good if it rains, because if it does not rain they are not going to be able to do any carbon farming. That is the issue. Carbon farming is not going to solve the issue we currently have before us. This cannot wait until July next year. Matt James, a pastoralist, wants urgent government assistance. He has 54 watering points and one-third are dry. The declaration of drought is the first step by which we can help farmers access a variety of support around animal welfare. Many farmers are suffering. Animal welfare is critical, whether they are trucked away or feed is brought in. The delay in a critical decision can become a nightmare scenario for animals and the government needs to act now.

That is the common theme. That is what all pastoralists are saying in the southern rangelands. That is what the Minister for Water brought up. I asked about that and the Premier said —

The government is carting emergency water to the Shires of Lake Grace, Kent and Ravensthorpe to support livestock producers and animal welfare needs.

Perhaps I should have brought in a map of Western Australia to show the Premier and his government where the southern rangelands are, because they clearly do not take in the Shires of Lake Grace, Kent or Ravensthorpe. That was part of the answer by the Premier to highlight the state government's response to drought in the southern rangelands, but it has got nothing to do with the southern rangelands. I think the Premier is a bit mixed up when it

comes to knowing where the southern rangelands are. When I asked what action the government was taking to ensure that the welfare of the cattle in the southern rangelands is being looked at, the response from Premier was —

The pastoralists who are concerned about whether they have sufficient feed to ensure their animals' welfare should contact the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's dry season response group. We are speeding up the agistment process, whereby approved pastoralists will be able to move stock more quickly between stations, and ensure animals are safe, with adequate access to food and water.

That sounds pretty reasonable, but at the moment stock cannot be moved because they do not have feed. The response of the government is that it is not going to provide financial support to get the feed. The Premier went on to say —

If people go to the DPIRD website, they will see numerous initiatives there to provide support. I note that the minister was talking earlier about our \$10 million, or thereabouts, investment in fencing to assist with wild dogs and other invasive species.

That is all very well, yet there is still no feed for cattle. That is the situation. It is not about fencing. In fact, I saw a lot of new fencing being knocked over because camels are coming into the stations and knocking over the fencing that has just been put up. It is going to cost thousands and thousands of dollars to repair. It is quite clear that the Premier does not understand the seriousness of the situation. Both the Premier and the Minister for Agriculture and Food keep talking about asking the federal government and saying that the federal government is going to do this and that.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I do not know whether the Minister for Water attended the National Drought Summit on 26 October 2018. The website says that federal and state and territory politicians attended. It says that federal state and agriculture ministers attended that summit. Minister Littleproud said the following about the summit —

We have a clear strategy that everyone unanimously agreed with ... after our drought summit ...

He also said —

... let's hold not only the Federal Government to account but the states to account.

The unanimous agreement between the state and territory agriculture ministers was that the states look after animal welfare freight and fodder and the federal government looks after farmer welfare. That was signed off and agreed to by the Minister for Agriculture and Food of this state, Hon Alannah MacTiernan. She agreed and signed off on the drought strategy on 26 October 2018 at the drought summit. She agreed that the state looks after feed and fodder. This is a quote from the Prime Minister, Mr Morrison —

"If there is to be additional fodder and freight subsidies for those breeding herds, then that is what the state governments are directly responsible for ...

This is an agreement that was signed off by the state government and the federal government—by all state and territory agriculture ministers. It was signed off that the state is to look after feed and freight subsidies. Minister Littleproud said —

... there is an agreement that was unanimously supported by the state governments and the federal government that the responsibility of the state government is to look after animal welfare.

Can we see that happening in this state at the moment? Is the state government that signed up to the drought summit agreement to look after animal welfare doing it? The answer is no. The Premier said this on ABC radio on 29 October —

... being able to declare a drought has not been available in last 30 years; applying to the Federal Government to get packages for these pastoralists; there is a \$10 million of support used for practical things like fences and moving cattle; drought is a difficult issue particularly for those families involved in the southern rangelands; has been exacerbated by climate change and over-stocking; trying to help people to help themselves; farmers can apply for household assistance through the Fed Government;

That is a direct contradiction with what the Minister for Agriculture and Food of the state signed up to on 26 October 2018. I am glad the Minister for Water is here, because he said something when he was talking about southern grainbelts and drought assistance. Perhaps that was what the government was referring to when it talked about Lake Grace. This is an article quoting the Minister for Water. It states —

While he was not aware of any other imminent declarations, WA Water Minister, Dave Kelly said an increasing area of the state was being impacted by dry conditions.

"It's an impact of the drying climate that we're experiencing," he said.

A map adjoining the article has the caption —

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The Statistical Seasonal Forecast for the next three months has an overall prediction of a drier than normal season.

The Minister for Water said —

“We’re not sitting back waiting for [declarations] to come in.

The Minister for Agriculture and Food said —

Our government will not turn a blind eye to animal welfare ...

That was the response from the Minister for Agriculture and Food. Clearly, the Minister for Water is turning a blind eye. It is interesting as we go around state by state. I picked up what the New South Wales government has done, because it has a responsibility for animal welfare and it has a responsibility for transport and feed. The New South Wales government has put in over \$70 million in transport subsidies and \$15 million into emergency water carting. What does that mean? It means there is availability. Have a look at the language of the New South Wales government. It has a clear understanding of the plight of farmers and pastoralists when it comes to drought. Its subsidies will assist landholders to transport stock, and to provide fodder and water. It states —

The NSW Government will offer a transport subsidy of up to \$40,000 per eligible farm business. The subsidy can cover 50% of the full cost of freight and a maximum of \$5 per kilometre ... This would assist a cattle farmer in Dubbo, for example, to purchase a truck-load of hay from outside Bordertown, South Australia.

The New South Wales government is not shirking its responsibility when it comes to animal welfare. It is putting in more than \$1 billion to support and help farmers through worsening drought. I just read what New South Wales is doing, and this part of its media statement states —

The subsidies will be able to cover 50 per cent of the full cost of transporting fodder, water for stock and livestock to pasture, slaughter or sale. The NSW Government will offer transport subsidy of up to \$20,000 per farm business.

...

“As a part of emergency funding I am pleased to announce waivers on Local Land Services annual rates, fixed charges on water licences, registration costs for class one agricultural vehicles, and interest on existing Farm Innovation Fund loans,” ...

That is some of the things that the New South Wales’ state government is ploughing into drought-affected areas. It is offering \$190 million in drought transport subsidies and \$100 million to cut costs in farming fees and charges. It is waiving local land service and fixed water charges.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Minister, get up and speak when you are ready, but just let me finish, okay.

The NSW government package has \$150 million to bolster its Farm Innovation Fund and is providing funding for counselling and mental health services, critical services in regional communities including transporting water and drought-related road upgrades and repairs, and animal welfare and stock disposal. New South Wales is leading the way when it comes to drought. Obviously, it has taken seriously the drought summit that it signed up to, because it has agreed to look after its pastoralists and animal welfare by ploughing in \$1 billion.

When we hear the Minister for Agriculture and Food talk about the fact that the Western Australian government will not put money into these pastoralists because it is not what you do, we should look at some other issues that affect pastoral stations, like Noonkanbah and Yandeyarra, and the very sad case of cattle deaths that have occurred there not because of drought, but because of mismanagement or no management. The state government has come to their aid to ensure that they provide water points to get cattle watered and fed, yet those in the southern rangelands who have been managing the best that they can so that their cattle survive and to look after the land, are getting no support from the state government. How can the government on the one hand provide financial assistance to stations that have not managed their cattle, where, I think, up to 2 000 head of cattle have died, when probably more cattle have died in the southern rangelands because there is no water or feed? The government has provided financial assistance for those stations. The Minister for Agriculture and Food in an article titled “Dead cattle debt nears \$1 million” states —

The McGowan Government is seeking nearly \$1 million in costs from two Aboriginal-run stations at the centre of mass cattle death incidents, after the State’s livestock compliance unit was forced to intervene.

The state government has put \$1 million into those stations and it is trying to recoup that. It would be nice to know how it is going to recoup that money. It is important that everyone know how that taxpayers’ money will be recouped. What is the difference? There is a big difference, though, when management issues have led to cattle deaths; but there is no assistance where there are no management issues in the southern rangelands, only fodder



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issues—they cannot feed their cattle. These pastoralists are asking for financial support to get feed. I understand that there are about a thousand bales of hay in Esperance that could be carted up to the southern rangelands to make sure that stock and cattle welfare is looked after and so that these cattle can survive. Why is the government not using the same vigour as it has with the two pastoral stations mentioned in that media report, where 2 000 head of cattle perished because of mismanagement or no management? The government is saying to station owners in the southern rangelands, “No, we’re not going to help you financially because that is not our mandate”, yet it signed up to the federal government’s drought summit on 26 October 2018 and said that it would look after animal welfare and provide assistance when it comes to feed and transport. It will be interesting to see how the state government recoups that money.

It is clear that the Minister for Agriculture and Food wants to assist in one part of WA but not in other parts. The fact is that there are a thousand bales of hay in Esperance that could be transported to the southern rangelands so that no more cattle deaths need occur in the southern rangelands. That would at least help to keep a number of breeders so that the southern rangelands could keep some stock so that they would not have to start from scratch. There is an opportunity. This year, we have seen 47 road trains make the trip from Western Australia to New South Wales to deliver more than 3 000 bales of feed to drought-affected farmers over east. There have been 47 road trains—3 000 bales. We have a thousand bales in Esperance that could be used to help in drought-affected areas of Western Australia—our own state—to actually help out the people who are affected by drought.

I urge the government to look at what New South Wales has done and to provide transport subsidies so that those bales of hay in Esperance can be brought up to the southern rangelands. That is what we are asking for today. We are not talking about carbon farming and we are not talking about looking at how to droughtproof pastoral stations into the future. We are asking for an immediate response now—that is, the southern rangelands needs help to feed their cattle because the government has signed up to something that ensures cattle welfare is paramount in the state. The state government, the Minister for Agriculture and Food and the Premier are shirking their responsibility when it comes to animal welfare in the southern rangelands, something that they signed up to with the federal government.

Let me make it quite clear: we may not have to declare a drought, but our pastoralists want the government to sympathise with what is occurring and say there is a drought occurring. Other governments in New South Wales and Queensland use the word “drought.” This is a drought in Western Australia. I think we can all see that with the rainfall patterns, which I have highlighted in this house. When it comes to the southern rangelands there is clearly a drought occurring. The government does not have to declare a drought but it should acknowledge that there is a drought. The state government should acknowledge its responsibility and provide feed and transport subsidies—that is what people are asking for—over the next three months. They are not talking about receiving \$10 million in July next year, because that will not help anyone and it definitely will not help the cattle that are perishing on a day-to-day basis because they have no feed. Farmers cannot simply destock and agist because the cattle are too weak—they need feed. The government’s first step is to provide transport subsidies to get the thousand hay bales from Esperance to the southern rangelands. The government must help our pastoralists, our fellow Western Australians. We acknowledge that the drought in New South Wales and Queensland is bad and we sympathise with the farmers in those states. But let us acknowledge how bad the situation is in the southern rangelands, from the Nullarbor all the way up to the Pilbara. Those farmers need help and acknowledgement of the drought. The state government must react in a positive way and not say that the federal government has to provide financial support. It is quite clear that the state must provide subsidies for freight, transport and feed. That is what they need. I will keep harping about this issue because those pastoralists —

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** That’s the first time I’ve heard about the thousand bales of hay in Esperance. It’s taken you nearly an hour. It’s the first time I’ve heard about that.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I look forward to the Minister for Water —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr T.J. Healy):** Thank you, members. Please allow the member for North West Central to continue because he has got only a few minutes left.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** You’re a disgrace! You’re making light of something that is actually really serious.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member, please! The member for North West Central is on his feet.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** The Leader of the Nationals WA is right; the Minister for Water is laughing about this and trying to make light of the animal welfare problem in the southern rangelands. He misleads the house as the Minister for Water. He misleads every time he steps into this house because he does not respect the pastoralists in

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the southern rangelands. If he did, he would be advocating for transport subsidies so that the thousand bales of hay make it to the southern rangelands. I look forward to the government's contribution. I hope the government gets on board and helps our pastoralists, our fellow Western Australians, with the drought that is occurring in its own backyard. Let us provide the feed that is needed by pastoralists in the southern rangelands.

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe)** [5.02 pm]: I stand to provide support for the member for North West Central's motion that this house calls on the Premier to implement an immediate response to the drought crisis affecting the southern rangelands to mitigate the enormous toll that inaction is having on animal welfare, pastoralists and regional communities. Firstly, I congratulate the member for North West Central for his advocacy and the effort that he has put into communicating with his constituents. I often talk about the member for Mount Lawley's electorate, which is 5 912 times smaller than the electorate of Roe. Of course, the member for North West Central's electorate is seven times larger than mine, which makes it about 42 000 times the size of the member for Mount Lawley's electorate. When the Minister for Sport and Recreation criticises, he needs to remember how big the member for North West Central's electorate is. I am certainly very impressed with the way that he has been out there talking to station owners.

I will talk about the Premier's appalling response to the urgent situation in the southern rangelands. He stood in this place and read from a piece of paper that referred to the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's website and the water situation in my electorate of Roe, which is hundreds of kilometres from the southern rangelands. He spoke about Lake Grace, Ravensthorpe and Kent as though they are part of the southern rangelands. I assure members that they are not; they are part of the electorate of Roe. The Premier spoke about the DPIRD website, strategies for drought relief, reviewing climate outlooks, preparing forage budgets and deterring carrying capacity versus the stocking rate. Seriously, this is an urgent situation and I look forward to the Leader of the House's response. I know he has experience of this in Narrogin and other places. I look forward to hearing what he will take to cabinet and whether he will tell the Premier and the Minister for Agriculture and Food how urgent the situation is. I could not believe it when the Premier blamed farmers for overstocking. That demonstrates that he has no understanding of the damage that feral animals are doing to the rangelands. Camels, donkeys and kangaroos are coming from crown land, for which the state government has responsibility, in their thousands and this government is responsible for reducing their numbers.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Roe, do you seek to take interjections?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Not particularly, thanks, Mr Acting Speaker.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** I ask members to please not interject.

*Point of Order*

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** The member for Bassendean is acting like a drone. I want him to be quiet.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for North West Central, thank you. Member for Roe, please continue.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** In this state alone, kangaroo numbers have increased to five million, which is plague proportions. The only people who are enjoying that are the panel beaters around the south west. Even the member for Ballajura knows only too well about kangaroos. I am glad that he is in the chamber. Property developers in the member for Baldivis' electorate have spent more than \$200 000 to move a couple hundred kangaroos from a land development in Baldivis. Unfortunately, half of them died. If the same focus that went on removing kangaroos from Baldivis was put into dealing with feral animals in the southern rangelands, we would be a lot better off.

I am glad that the Minister for Water is in the chamber because I want to speak about water infrastructure and some of the things that he can do to help out. Firstly, the national on-farm emergency water infrastructure rebate scheme, which is administered by the Western Australian Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, allows for the installation of new infrastructure and the removal of silt in dams, which is good. I am pleased that that has been undertaken because the issue of silt build-up in farm dams is important. They need to be cleaned out to get fresh water. At the moment, there is no funding for roaded catchments, which would ensure optimal catchment when it does rain. I believe that the Minister for Water has written to the federal government. The minister does not want to fund the money, unlike what happened with previous water ministers and the farm water rebate scheme. The Minister for Water wrote to the federal government and told it that it should provide the funding. What about funding it half from what was the original farm water rebate scheme and get the farmers to fund the other half? That would be a win-win for everyone because we would be looking at not only desilting, but also catching water as well. Roaded catchments are a very important element. I cannot emphasise that enough.

I will talk a bit more about the feral animal situation. Earlier this year, Tom Carmody from Cascade had issues with feral camels on his Wiluna station. They were coming from crown land in their hundreds; indeed, their number is out of control. As he said, there has been a long history of mismanagement of this problem. That is one scenario. Bore water is another issue with which the Minister for Water could help out.

Camels are coming in and wrecking infrastructure and water points and causing havoc around those areas. As I said before, to be honest, I did not think the Premier responded in a responsible manner. Farmers do not want handouts. They will do everything in their power to avoid handouts. However, when some critical elements occur and their survival is threatened, they will ask for help. I think the biggest critical element here, which I think the Leader of the House needs to keep in mind when he talks in cabinet to the Minister for Agriculture and Food, is about breeding stock. Farmers want and need to keep their breeding stock so they can rebuild their livestock numbers when seasonal conditions become more positive. Probably one of the biggest concerns for me is the breeding stock. I note the comments of the member for North West Central about how the New South Wales government is apparently spending up to \$1 billion for drought assistance there. I do not think it would hurt this state government to look at spending \$50 million, \$60 million or \$70 million to do something on a much smaller scale.

I want to talk about the Minister for Agriculture and Food, who likes to refer to herself as the minister for animal welfare, as she did in her efforts to tamper with the live export trade. If she wants to call herself minister for animal welfare, she needs to have a good hard look at herself. All she is doing is trying to handball the issue to the federal government. She talked about carbon farming and regenerative agriculture. This is an animal welfare crisis that needs to be dealt with right now. As the member for North West Central pointed out, the state government is responsible for fodder, water, freight and other issues to support animal welfare and the federal government is responsible for human welfare. I do not know what part of that members opposite, the Minister for Agriculture and Food and the Premier do not understand. However, as the member for North West Central pointed out, when mismanagement of the Noonkanbah and Yandeyarra stations took place last year and earlier this year, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development people turned up in numbers. They were there all hands on deck, and spent \$1 million. I want that same approach taken to the issues faced by the stations in the southern rangelands. The issue is not through the growers' mismanagement; it is due to the drought, through no fault of their own, and this is where the state government can come to the fore.

I would like to draw attention to the fantastic job that Farmers Across Borders is doing around the Esperance area. They are carting hay and straw to needy areas around Australia and, I might add, most of the expense is from their own pocket, with some sponsorship, mainly locally from the Esperance area. I take the opportunity to thank some of the people involved, their chair Sam Starceвич; vice chair, Ross Stone; secretaries Christiane Smith and Inaya Stone; treasurer, Darren Starceвич; committee members, Gillian Inkster, Fiona and Gary Norwood, Mary Rollond, Graeme Perks, Elaine and Gavin Egan, Mick Pratt and Graham "Rocket" Harris; plus Mick Rollond, Alana Harris, Craig Inkster, Rolly Pearce, Kayla Evans, the Stone girls, the Warby cousins and the amazing volunteer truck drivers who are on call and ready to help, and our farmers who donate the feed. That has been a fantastic effort. As I have said, they took convoys of hay to the eastern states earlier this year, which I am sure many of us throughout Perth and the regional areas saw. In March, they took over 800 bales in 10 triple trailers to the Murchison. They are fundraising to subsidise fuel for loads out to the Nullarbor and are getting hay and straw donations and truck and trailer donations. This is the opportunity of the Leader of the House to talk to the Minister for Agriculture and Food and tell her about the great job Farmers Across Borders is doing. To be honest, I would be embarrassed if I were a member of the government when groups like this are helping out and doing the government's job for it.

The Leader of the House should have a look at what the New South Wales government is doing with transport subsidies. As the member for North West Central said, unfortunately, parts of Esperance were frosted quite badly earlier this year. Many hundreds of bales that have been cut—good quality feed—can be sent to the southern rangelands. What about the Leader of the House talking to cabinet about the government putting its hand in its pocket and helping Farmers Across Borders, who are doing such a great job?

I want to talk a little more about the Minister for Agriculture and Food, who I would say, has almost misled Parliament in her response to questions from Hon Colin de Grussa in the other place. He asked: what steps is the minister putting in place to help with water infrastructure on this issue?

The answer was, in part —

... and that will be about not only water. That has to be about regeneration.

The member seems to be a bit concerned about us going down the path of carbon farming.

I can assure members that regenerative and carbon farming will not help feed and water the cattle starving in the southern rangelands. The minister also said in part of her answer —

Quite clearly, a very low percentage of our farmers is applying for the federal household assistance scheme, which can add \$100 000 a year to income. I think that will go a long way to helping some of these marginal stations survive.

That is plainly untrue. I have the guidelines here for the household allowance scenario. At a maximum, that \$100 000 is paid over four years. The household allowance is the same rate as Newstart or, for those under 22, it is the same as the youth allowance, after going through financial counselling and all the usual requirements. When the minister indicates that \$100 000 a year can be added to income, she needs to be straightened out on it. It is quite disappointing that the members of the upper house have been led up the garden path. I have other quotes from the minister. A news article from 26 October by Michelle Stanley of ABC Rural states —

The WA Minister for Agriculture, Alannah MacTiernan said while three towns in the south of the state had declared water deficiency status and had been given assistance in carting water, it was unlikely to help those on vast pastoral stations like Mount Clere and Mundrabilla.

She got that right. They are hundreds of kilometres from the southern rangelands. As I said, they are in the electorate of Roe. Michelle Stanley continues —

Instead, Ms MacTiernan said the State Government would be focussing on research and development to make the state “drought resilient” through requesting \$10 million from the Federal Government’s Future Drought Fund.

“The southern rangelands, in many respects, has been going backwards since the great droughts of the 1930s,” Ms MacTiernan said.

Her comments were appalling and very disappointing when cattle are out there starving. She also said —

“We want to look at how we can do research, bringing together a cluster of those Southern Rangelands and look how we regenerate those landscapes, improve the pastures and enterprise profitability, through changing grazing practice management.

How do members think people feel when cattle out there are dying? The cattle need feed and emergency water. I find her comments hard to believe, to be quite honest; they were quite disappointing. I could go on about many other things, such as when we bought the federal Minister for Water Resources, David Littleproud, to Ravensthorpe in my electorate of Roe last year. We helped alert the Ravensthorpe shire to the water deficiency. As I have said, in another shire that is part of the Roe electorate, we had a scenario in which the WAFarmers Lake Grace–Corrigin branch had to call a meeting to deal with the water crisis. That was after the Water Cooperation has drifted in in January last year and cut off all the standpipes for people who were watering their stock, and then left the Shire of Lake Grace to notify everyone.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Don’t mislead the house.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Our members had to go there and liaise with the Lake Grace shire and try to sort things out. The Lake Grace shire had to spend over \$80 000 in the last financial year on the core business of the Water Corporation and the Department of Water.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Don’t mislead the house, member.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** This is the sort of stuff that has been going on.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** You’re making it up.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am not making it up. I was there with Minister Littleproud at the Ravensthorpe Recreation Centre. I attended that meeting. I attended the meeting with the Lake Grace–Corrigin branch of WAFarmers. I also attended the meeting with the Prime Minister’s drought envoy, Major General Stephen Day. He reports to the Prime Minister and the federal agriculture minister every week. I attended that meeting as well at the Shire of Lake Grace. I was there. I have not made it up. I have turned up on every occasion. The Minister for Water did turn up in Ravensthorpe. He got there eventually, about four months after the Water Corporation had cut off the water.

[Member’s time extended.]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** That was quite disappointing. That is the track record of the water minister in the electorate of Roe.

Let us move aside from that. In summary, it is very important to look at intervention. The minister needs to take this issue to cabinet and tell the Minister for Agriculture and Food and the Premier how important it is to help farmers and station owners in the southern rangelands. He needs to tell them about Farmers Across Borders in Esperance, which is keen to help out with fodder and transport. The minister has the opportunity to go to cabinet and make those requests, and get this government to spend some money, not on regenerative agriculture and carbon farming,

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and all the airy-fairy stuff that the minister for agriculture talks about, but to help those people on the ground right now. They have cattle that are dying from lack of water and lack of feed. This matter needs to be moved on.

**MR I.C. BLAYNEY (Geraldton)** [5.23 pm]: I also want to speak on this motion. I have gone through a few droughts. The first was in 1969 when I was seven years old. There was another drought in 1976. In 1987, there was nearly a drought. In 2006, the drought was an absolute shocker—the worst ever. I have been told that we had never had a year like that; it literally just did not rain. In 2007, we also had a very poor year. At that point, I decided to sell out, because I was worried that if I had another year like that, it probably would be the end of me. I could not do anything about it. However, it affects our financial health. Advisers in my area estimate that it takes seven years to recover financially from one year of drought. It destroys all our financial plans. It obviously has a serious effect on our children's education. It also causes stress, because children pick up the stress in a household that is affected by drought. It also affects our personal relationships. We know more these days about how issues like that can affect people's mental health.

Some parts of this state are quite safe or drought resilient. The older and more established farming areas get light rainfall years, but as a rule they do not get total failures. In the medium rainfall area that I farmed in, we have lost the heavy rainfall years. They have gone. The very wet years were probably one in 10. We now have another very light rainfall year in its place. In the lower rainfall areas, farming has become almost opportunistic. If farmers have not had summer rain, or have not had good rain by a certain date in May or early June, there is no crop. Farmers just abandon their crop at that point. Improved technologies have made the situation better, and models are available to help farmers deal with that. However, the fact is that as soon as farmers make the decision that there will not be a crop, that has massive financial implications for the next 18 months. The farmer's peak debt will not be at the end of that year. The peak debt will be the following year, just before they harvest, and suddenly they will find themselves in the situation of having double the overdraft. I am quite familiar with the effects of drought in the Murchison, because my farm adjoins the Murchison. The interesting thing about that area is that it was settled at a time of good rainfall. However, within a few years, the stocking rates had been revised down to one-seventh of the original estimates.

Some people see drought as an opportunity, not a problem, and hope to benefit from the misery of other people. I remember that I had a sheep buyer in my yards who knew roughly the going rate for sheep. He saw the terrible state the country was in, and he went to the other side of the yards and made a few phone calls, and offered me double the money that I thought he would. That made a hell of a difference, and I acknowledge Fletcher International Exports for doing that.

Today we have heard a bit about destocking. Destocking is all well and good. However, it guarantees that farmers will have no income until they restock. Drought may drive farmers to do that. However, members would understand that is a difficult decision for farmers to make, because they know that may be the finish of them financially. It may also be the finish of them financially if they do not destock. It is an incredibly hard decision to make. One of the ironies of this issue is that outsiders have come into pastoral areas and have taken stations out of production, be they mining companies buying stations to get rid of the pastoralists, or the government buying stations for conservation reasons. Rather than making it easier for the people who carry on, it makes it harder, because there is much less control of feral animals, especially dogs.

Australians often mention the federation drought. I have dug up some statistics on the federation drought. In 1891, the Australian sheep flock stood at 106 million. By 1902, it was 54 million. The sheep flock did not go through 100 million again until 1925. We had another shocking drought during World War II. We then had the millennium drought from 2001 to 2009, both on the east coast. This afternoon, I read some stuff that said that the current drought is the worst drought we have ever had in the Murray–Darling Basin.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** What is the figure now for sheep numbers?

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** It is 50 million.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** Yes. They have never recovered from the wool crash. The numbers dropped a lot then.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** By the wool crash, do you mean the end of the fixed rate?

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** Yes, when the reserve price scheme was pulled.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** It was not a crash. When I was at the union, we were happy with the reserve price scheme, because all the wool was being stored in Freo, and that gave jobs to our members, but the wool was being purchased and it was not going anywhere.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** The problem was that the reserve price scheme was no longer doing what it was intended to do, which was to justify the wool that was being sold way under market. It had morphed into a market manipulation fund.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** It was like Thailand, which set the price of rice and now has millions of tonnes of rice that it cannot sell. It was exactly the same thing.

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**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** It is worth mentioning that if the wool price scheme cost anyone a huge amount of money, it was the wool growers.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Yes. It cost farmers. There was a levy on them, and they paid the levy. My brother is a wool farmer.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** It was a huge levy.

Having been through a quite serious drought, I always considered that the federal government's drought programs are really focused on the east coast. It has always been the case. I am not belittling the current terrible situation on the east coast, but the federal government's policies have never seemed to take into account the situation in Western Australia. Our situation has been ignored.

As I said, in 2006 I had an absolute disaster. I had virtually no income. The first rule was we had to have two disasters before we got any assistance at all. They managed to send us a bus that had been converted into an office. It had a satellite dish on the roof so that a connection could be made immediately to Canberra to submit applications. The bus went to Geraldton, Northampton, Mullewa and Morawa. Anybody who went in there to ask whether they qualified was immediately told no. The whole thing was a complete waste of time, and window-dressing.

Is the Western Australian climate changing or is it just a long-term cycle? My answer to that is: does it really matter? What is becoming clear is that a thing called the Indian Ocean dipole has a lot more impact in Western Australia and on the east coast than we realised. The east coast droughts were very much thought to be purely about El Nino; however, it is becoming clear that the Indian Ocean dipole has quite a strong impact in that area. That was actually clear to us where we were farming. By watching the temperature of the water off Sumatra in April and May, we would know roughly what sort of a winter we would get. If there was a pool of cold water sitting off Sumatra, it would almost guarantee a very dry winter; whereas a pool of warm water indicated quite a good winter. That was known quite a few years ago. It is critical that the government continues to study our weather systems. That is a very important area of investment. The holy grail of studying weather systems is being able to make six or 12-month predictions. That would be the most valuable thing of all.

Household support is quite critical. My understanding is that the systems now are probably more generous than they were in the past, when we might as well have forgotten about them. I was asked whether I was interested in talking a bit about whether I had learnt anything from doing courses. To summarise: can resilience be taught? I do not think that resilience can really be taught, but people can be taught better management. My wife and I did a course over about 18 months or two years. It had three components. One was a SWOT analysis—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. A farm management consultant would share the cost of doing a SWOT analysis. From that, we developed a business plan. From about nine areas, we could choose which one we wanted to work on to improve our systems. We went through that. This was just before the 2006 drought. We did one that was run by the Australian Wool Corporation called Sheep's Back. The whole idea was that more money is made from wool by running more sheep. I started running up the sheep numbers. After the 2006 drought, I put sheep on trucks. In the end, we abandoned the whole thing. In an area with very light soils, a lot of wind and very little cover, one does not want to have many sheep because all the soil blows away.

I learnt quite a bit from the drought years. If anyone else has been through one, they will probably be a much better financial manager. It taught me to question the expenditure of every dollar and quite a few key assumptions. It taught me to bump off a few sacred cows; switch to a zero-cost basis for the beginning of planning for the next year's expenditure; defer expenditure; and to do only essential maintenance and sometimes skip a year's program maintenance. However, anybody in the pastoral zone will say that they did that quite a few years ago and they are a lot further down the track than I was after my couple of droughts.

Our pastoral zone in Western Australia is quite segregated. I know the pastoral zones inland from Geraldton a bit. They have a really good wet year probably every 30 years. I have seen one of those years. At some places in the Murchison, people could get into a small boat and go out into the middle of the lake and not see land in any direction. Some years, it is that wet. It is quite amazing; the whole country transforms. I can see how people thought that they could carry huge numbers of stock there; then of course reality bites.

When I was at Mt Augustus earlier this year, I saw the opposite. There was about as much feed on the country around Mt Augustus as there is on the carpet in this chamber! At night, as someone else said, the cattle at Leonora come in to eat the grass.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** It was Laverton.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** That was the case in the caravan park at Mt Augustus.

Above a certain line, the cyclones in the summer are critical, particularly in the Pilbara. Of course, the Kimberley relies on the northern wet season.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 30 October 2019]

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Mr Vincent Catania; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Dave Kelly

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The southern rangeland has been declining for many years. A lot of it was settled after a number of good years, with optimistic stocking assumptions. The people who have hung on are not resilient; they are super-resilient. We need to reform the rules that sit around it to make it easier for them to diversify. We can give them household support and help them to get rid of feral animals that are causing huge grief.

Fodder can be useful to get stock healthy enough to be transported. I remember buying a line of sheep from a drought-affected station in the Murchison. It was only about four hours away by truck. I am almost certain that if strict animal welfare regulations had been applied to these sheep, they would not have been allowed on that truck. Somehow, they got them onto the truck and they turned up at my farm. It took us about an hour and a half to two hours to get them off the truck and drive them 100 metres across the road. They all survived, but they cannot do too many hours on the trucks. It is the same with drought-affected cattle. If a farmer can get some fodder into them and pick up their general condition, and perhaps go through them very carefully, they would be surprised how many make it. If a farmer were trying to bring cattle from the Kimberley, for example, down to the south west of WA, that would not work. That could not be done.

I was reading a story about Mt Clere station. I knew the former owner of Mt Clere station quite well. He had terrible issues with droughts when I knew him. As his cattle were calving, he had to take the calves off the mothers and rear them by hand. I was selling him some oats and he was mixing it with powdered milk to feed the calves. In his case, it was a terrible drought. I think it had gone on for five years. He got no rain, but a big section of the Gascoyne River flowed through his property. There was rain upstream and he suddenly had a three-mile wide river through his property. He was told all his feed problems were finished; that he did not have to worry about it now because this flooding would produce a heap of feed. He was okay. Unfortunately, such outcomes are few and far between.

I remember a presentation when I was a student, which tells members how long ago it was, on the Jennings report. It was a report into the pastoral industry in Western Australia.

*Point of Order*

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I think the member for Geraldton's microphone has stopped working. I am wondering whether Hansard is recording it because it is not coming through on the speakers.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr T.J. Healy):** That would not be a point of order.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It is a point of information.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Hansard can check that for me.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** I am not known for my loud, booming voice, I am afraid!

In 1981 or 1982, we were actually privileged enough to receive a presentation from Mr Jennings about it. I can clearly remember him saying that the Kimberley is different. I saw the potential of the Kimberley at the Fossil Downs station earlier this year. Obviously, Hancock pastoral has capital and is able to transform the industry, but I think it gives us an indication of where we have to go, certainly in the Kimberley. Hancock has made huge investments in animal welfare, including shade; water; livestock handling rules; handling facilities; use of drones to check stock more regularly, despite problems with the federal government about regulating drones; installation of advanced telecommunications across their properties; emergency locator beacons for staff; and solar-powered water, and more. In its case, it would be useful for it to be able to access some water out of the Fitzroy River to help droughtproof its properties. Hancock pastoral also has the luxury of being able to shift stock between properties. It is a similar situation for someone called Bruce Cheung at Pardoo station, where he has centre pivots. Once again, he has capital but he has found getting access to water quite difficult as well.

As shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food, as I was for a while, I got quite a lot of commentary from farmers on the government's keenness to push animal welfare standards but its reluctance to face the issues of the loss of livestock on Noonkanbah and Yandeyarra. We have been told that this report would be available in April, May and July, but it still has not seen the light of day, so I want to put that on the record. The industry says to me quite regularly that it is wondering where this report has got to. If the government wants to be seen as serious on this issue, this needs to be cleared up—the number of losses, the cost of government intervention, and who is held responsible and whether they are open to prosecution. I think it is a fairly clear test case for the government and, as other people have said, the current ownership and management structure on quite a few properties is dysfunctional. I endorse the comments of Trevor Whittington, who currently leads the Western Australian Farmers Federation and is a former chief of staff for the Minister for Agriculture and Food. He managed one of these corporations at Fitzroy Crossing last year. The government needs to take a hard look at this, because it is actually an opportunity. It is not in any way wrong to reform them, put them under a different model and get them operating. I point to a recent memorandum of understanding between MG Corporation in the East Kimberley and Yeeda Pastoral

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Company, in April. They focus on producing quality beef and they are successful operators. If the government can team up successful operators with the owners of pastoral leases and people who want to work there, it can work and has the potential for a win-win situation.

My final point is slightly offline, but bear with me. I seem to remember raising this with the minister during estimates hearings.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** I said that there is obviously a need for education in this space. That is not something that we are really doing at all. I got thinking about this the other day. Some years ago, I was on a committee that did an inquiry into innovation, and although we did not actually go into the agricultural space, we put a proposal to the Speaker to go to Israel because I had an interest in agricultural research there. The staff incorporated a couple of bits into the inquiry to look at agricultural issues in Israel. As it was, the Speaker did not fund the trip, so I actually funded it myself out of my imprest account, as it was then. That was a much better system than what we have now, I might add as an aside. I came across a model of education in Israel that could, in some form, play a role here. In Israel, a reasonable number of people in their 30s and 40s are coming back to farming, having done other things, but they know very little about agriculture. They do not have any agricultural colleges anymore, but they came up with a one-year course that is taught one day a week and costs students about \$A2 000. It is delivered on site and through a number of simple modules. I thought that that was the sort of thing we could integrate into these pastoral properties where there is the potential, with better management, to be quite successful. I think that is a model that we could look at in a modified form, but we need to come up with some kind of model to fix up some of the northern pastoral industry.

That is not relevant to what we are talking about today—the drought in the southern rangelands—but having done all this homework, I have arrived at the conclusion that government is really not interested in this issue or this industry. It is obviously a much smaller industry than it was 100 years ago, but it manages a huge amount of Western Australia. For that reason, if for no other reason, we have to keep people in the pastoral areas for their management and oversight of those areas. The government needs to try a hell of a lot harder.

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Local Government)** [5.44 pm]: I am happy to respond on behalf of the government and the Minister for Agriculture and Food. I foreshadow that the Minister for Water will also seek to make a contribution to this debate tonight. We have until 7.00 pm. I welcome this debate; I think it is an important debate and a very serious one. I accept and acknowledge that the members for North West Central, Roe and Geraldton have highlighted a number of key issues affecting the southern rangelands and have essentially articulated a plea to government about the urgency of response. They have identified the focus of this issue as animal welfare because of the drought and dry conditions in that region. I understand all three members' perspectives.

I represent the Minister for Agriculture and Food in this place and I am very happy to articulate her responses, but obviously the minister's office and people from the department will also be listening closely to this debate. As I will explain, appropriate responses are being implemented and will be focused on going forward. I think it is important to reassure the Parliament that the government understands the challenging conditions facing many of our farmers and pastoralists across Western Australia. It is right to say that a lot of the focus in the national media is unbalanced because it concentrates on the eastern states. A number of Nationals WA members have highlighted that in this debate today. That is why I posed a question earlier today. I have not had a response yet, and I do not expect one during my contribution, but I would certainly be interested to hear the Nationals WA response to Barnaby Joyce, who last week commented in the national media about the situation in New South Wales and on the eastern seaboard. From my recollection, he commented on the federal government's subsidies and support schemes and made a comment that got a lot of attention, including from the federal opposition agriculture spokesperson. To summarise his comments, he spoke about farmers who had been through 10 years or more of drought and asked: when do you start to ask whether it is a viable industry for them in their particular circumstances?

I am interested in that. As members know, I am no expert on agricultural matters. I have an interest, because of my heritage, but fundamentally —

**Ms M.J. Davies** interjected.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes, and I look forward to the member's comment on that when she gets a chance to stand and speak. I get and understand the issue of urgency, and I will talk about it in a minute. I do not think we should ever discount the need for ongoing research into and debate about the changing nature of agriculture and the landscapes on which agriculture and pastoral activity continues in the future, because we all understand that there are changing weather patterns. The member for North West Central highlighted the example of recent trends of rainfall in the southern rangelands—the stark reality of such poor rainfall this year and in recent years and the obvious impact it has on the capacity of those areas to sustain livestock and livelihoods. It has an impact. I reflect



all the time on the impact it has on communities, as the member for Geraldton highlighted, and families. I am not having a go at the Nationals about this, but I always worry that sometimes in a debate such as this there is an assumption that people who do not live in the country or who live in the city do not have empathy with or understanding or concern about these matters. By and large, I think most Australians are. Indeed, we only need to look at when public campaigns are launched to support farmers and those doing it tough on the land, be that through our major supermarket chains or other ventures. Invariably, people want to help. They feel a bit helpless, because they do not know exactly what it is, so they do things such as support Woolworths or Coles with their drought or “fighting for farmers” campaigns or they donate money to community efforts, generally by farmers doing okay, to help those whose food supply is affected. I think it is important to acknowledge the efforts of Farmers Across Borders, as highlighted by the member for Rowe. It is tremendous to see a community effort by those who have some capacity to support those who are challenged and in peril. It is important for both the government and the broader community to understand what is happening. I am very happy to acknowledge the work and efforts of organisations such as Farmers Across Borders and the individuals involved. But it is, of course, still the responsibility of state government to continue to articulate that to the federal government. I note some of the very recent activity by both the state Minister for Agriculture and Food and the Minister for Water to highlight the circumstances of Western Australia.

Only last Friday, both the Minister for Agriculture and Food and the Minister for Water were in Melbourne with their counterparts. I note the comments the member for North West Central made about signing up to national action. Their role as state representatives was to highlight the impacts of drought and the sustained drying conditions that are the result of climate change, and the impact of that in our Western Australian context. I am sure the Minister for Water will make further comment on that. I am advised that the government, through the department, is continuing to monitor the dry season impacts closely, and measures are being put in place to support farmers and pastoralists in making informed decisions about their businesses, particularly about the welfare of their animals. I hear very clearly the issue about the urgency; I understand that. I assure members that I will raise matters raised in this debate in Parliament, bearing in mind that the minister’s office will be watching and listening very closely as well to the concerns members have raised so far this afternoon.

I am advised that the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development responded quickly to significant animal welfare incidents in the state’s north earlier this year. I think the member for North West Central referred to those and gave a couple of examples. The department has ramped up response efforts across the rangelands, with a focus on identification of and early intervention on stations that may have limited capacity to respond and manage risks to animal welfare.

I briefly want to talk about the concerns raised by the Shire of Laverton, which was an example given by the member for North West Central, in its letter of 28 October. The member for North West Central read that letter into *Hansard*. The letter articulated clear examples of stock in desperation of accessing any feed or any available sustenance venturing into town sites such as Laverton to get sustenance from the public amenities. Of course, that is not only disturbing for people who live in those communities, but it is a clear demonstration of the desperate situation that a number of pastoralists in that region face. I have no doubt that it is a real and urgent issue. I accept the intent of the Shire of Laverton’s letter in highlighting these concerns.

In many respects, the issues we are seeing in the southern rangelands are endemic and systemic. It was referred to by the member for Geraldton in his contribution that we are clearly experiencing a significant dry period in that part of Western Australia, but of course it is compounded by the fact that the condition of the southern rangelands has deteriorated over series of decades. What we are experiencing at this time is compounded by a trend of deterioration of the condition of those rangelands more broadly. It is true that some of the information or overall monitoring of the condition of these rangelands has not been helped, and some would say could have been exacerbated, by previous governments’ decisions to halt all monitoring of soil and land conditions across the pastoral estate. That was a decision made, and it was also referred to in an Auditor General’s report of 2017 “Management of Pastoral Lands in Western Australia”. That Auditor General’s report found that the erosion of capacity of the Department of Agriculture and Food, as it was then known, led to a number of significant outcomes, one being a reduction in the scale and scope of lease monitoring between 2009 and 2017 and another being that the Pastoral Lands Board had been unable to fulfil its mandated function to ensure individual leases are managed on an ecologically sustainable basis. These outcomes were highlighted in the Auditor General’s 2017 report “Management of Pastoral Lands in Western Australia”. The report also highlighted some other issues of concern about the ongoing monitoring of an important part of regional Western Australia, and a very large part of Western Australia, as has been highlighted by members in this place during the debate.

I am advised that the government continues to work proactively to address issues with the poor condition of the rangelands. Rainfall has continued to decline markedly, particularly during the April to October time span. Although the government has responded to the immediate dry season issues, the minister is unashamedly also focused on

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long-term solutions to build drought resilience and regenerate our lands. I do not want to get into a slanging match, but ministers need to be very careful when they start to use terms like “droughtproofing”, as has been used by previous ministers of various representations. We know that declining rainfall and the impacts of drought are major challenges that face not only our communities throughout Western Australia, but also, of course, the nation and many parts of the world. Science, mitigation and other measures will play an increasingly important role in addressing this issue. It is very dangerous for someone to declare something droughtproofed, because there is no evidence that that is the case at this time.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** It was the most irresponsible thing that has been said in this Parliament for a long time.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will go on to the issues with the declaration of drought. I take the point of the member for North West Central; essentially, he was not saying that it is all about declaring a drought and all the things that go with that. As we know, quite often the responses come much later than the declaration, but it appears that there is some confusion about the need for the state to declare a drought for farmers to access financial support. It is my understanding that in Western Australia, a drought declaration is not required for farmers to access ongoing assistance measures—it is not. It is important to look at some of the history of the issues of drought declaration and response and the processes by which responses and support are ultimately triggered.

**Mr D.T. Redman:** What is the status of the dry season advisory group, which typically governs everything and was set up in response to these occasions as they come around, giving an opportunity for a group to engage and put advice back to government?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I might take that question on notice. I might respond. I am not trying to avoid the question, but I do not want to mislead the member by not giving him the correct information. I think I will have something to say about that group a little later, if that is all right.

As was highlighted by the member for Geraldton in his articulation of some of the historical aspects of the impact of drought declarations and the processes associated with the responses to those declarations, some members will be aware that until 1989, in order for farmers to access financial support from federal or state governments, the state or territory had to first declare a geographical area in drought. That policy was abandoned in 1989 when drought support measures were separated from natural disaster support measures. In 1992, the exceptional circumstances policy was introduced nationally. Under this policy, state or territory governments were required to declare geographical areas as facing exceptional circumstances, which then opened up household payments and interest rate subsidies for farmers. In 2008, state and federal agriculture ministers agreed to cease that policy, as it did not encourage farmers to build resilience in their business and created artificial lines on maps for drought support. A series of reviews found that exceptional circumstances assistance acted ultimately as a disincentive for farmers to manage risk and adopt self-reliant strategies and that the funding process for the exceptional circumstances definition was poorly targeted, with farm businesses that were not within the specific EC-declared zones being overlooked. It was also found that that policy lever was inequitable and did not take into account the differences in farm production cycles across different regions. Of course, since that decision, drought assistance has been available to farmers on an ongoing basis if they can prove their need, and, of course, there is much debate about that.

Farmers who need assistance have access to a range of support programs. I was interested in the member for Geraldton’s comments about his experience of drought conditions during his time as a primary producer. The member for Geraldton effectively said that he did not apply because in his view it was a waste of time. The farm household allowance is an income support program for farmers experiencing financial hardship, regardless of its cause. This allowance provides fortnightly payments. I think that is the one that Barnaby Joyce was referring to in his comments.

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** It’s not \$100 000 a year.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** No. I thought, from memory, that he quoted about \$400 a fortnight, but I am not sure. I was interested when that debate was undertaken.

Farm investment loans and drought loans are also provided by the Regional Investment Corporation. There are obviously criteria under which those loans can be accessed. There is the national on-farm emergency water infrastructure rebate scheme. Again, that obviously is specifically targeted to assistance with the provision of water. There is also the rural financial counselling service, which is a statewide program that provides farmers and small rural businesses with financial counselling. There is the regional men’s health initiative, which provides community education on men’s health and wellbeing. I understand very seriously that during great hardship on the land, tragically we can see a spike in the number of suicides. That is a great tragedy. It is one of the reasons that initiatives for regional men’s health and family support counselling have become such an important part of the provision of services to families.

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I recently saw a show on the ABC—again, it was an eastern states experience, from memory—called *Struggle Street* that focused on a couple of farming families. We could see the anguish of these families watching stock die in front of them or seeing topsoil being blown away. That has an impact on people's mental health and relationships, and it also impacts local communities. I do not think any of us can underestimate that impact on people's mental health and wellbeing. I understand that the Minister for Water will make a contribution and provide further detail on some of the issues around water.

I understand that only 83 Western Australian farms have taken advantage of the farm household allowance, which I highlighted earlier. That is a very small percentage, meaning that just two per cent of that allowance is spent in Western Australia. That funding is now available to pastoralists and farmers. I am sure that when the member for North West Central visited and spoke to those pastoralists, he would have encouraged them to access that funding because it is available to them now. I hope that those people who are experiencing hardship and facing the challenges that the member articulated to this chamber tonight would be applying for that allowance if they have not already done so. I do not have any figures on how many have applied but I hope that they access that funding support. The department's website contains all the information about that.

I turn to the immediate response to the dry season conditions, which is important for me to articulate on behalf of the government. The government has a dry season response program under way. It continues to work closely with pastoralists to support seasonal management and decisions. I understand that officers from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage have visited more than 120 of the most at-risk pastoral properties across the state since July. That includes more than 20 in the southern rangelands. I would be interested to know how many of the individuals who wrote the emails that the member referred to in this debate earlier tonight were visited by the department. The visits are focused on ensuring that pastoralists are prepared for the ongoing fire season. One of the primary objectives is to assist in avoiding animal welfare issues. Although the majority of pastoralists are managing these conditions, the department is working with a small number of properties around livestock management measures, including steps to improve water provision.

I wish to refer to the comment about the availability of 1 000 bales of hay from Esperance. Obviously, that is an important issue. I think the Minister for Water said that this is the first time we have been notified of that in this place. If those opportunities are available, I am sure they could be explored. I am sure that those listening to this debate tonight will look more closely at what the member highlighted not as a solution but an action that could be followed up. I will certainly take that up with the minister and highlight that it was raised by the members for Roe and North West Central.

I will not speak for too long because I know that a couple of other members wish to speak. As I mentioned, although the majority of pastoralists are managing in the conditions, the department is working with a small number of properties around livestock management measures. They include improving water provision. Again, the Minister for Water may wish to make a comment on those specifically.

In light of the season, some stations in the southern rangelands have taken the decision to destock large numbers of cattle. I understand that up to 1 700 head are being sold off. I also acknowledge the point made by the member for North West Central about the condition of those stock and the limitations on transporting them. I take note of what the member for Geraldton highlighted from his experience when he took on some stock when he was farming. The condition of that stock can determine very much whether they are capable of being shifted or moved. Indeed, the member for North West Central argued that much of the stock that he has seen and been notified of needs urgent attention on land, with the provision of fodder a matter of urgency.

I know that the member had a go at the Minister for Agriculture and Food. I have never seen a harder working minister in my time in Parliament. Her passion for ensuring that priority is given to important matters such as this is not questioned. I can assure members that she is always raising issues pertaining to the agricultural and pastoral regions with her cabinet colleagues and the Premier. We have to admit that she has had a long history and a very good relationship with the Pastoralists and Graziers Association. They have a mutual respect. They do not always agree on stuff. In my time as environment minister from 2007 to 2008 —

**Ms M.J. Davies:** I can't tell whether you're serious or not.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** They love her. I am sorry, but they really like her.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** They are not so keen on Littleproud.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** That is true; they do not like Littleproud.

I think there is strong mutual respect.

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**Mr V.A. Catania:** No, there's disappointment in comments made by the minister for agriculture. I think it is fair to say that they are very disappointed with her not acknowledging the situation that they are in and providing the support that is needed now. That is the disappointment that they have in the minister for agriculture.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I think the member will find that the PGA respects her tenacity and capacity. Her work ethic is remarkable.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** This is the opportunity for her to now either lose respect or gain respect by helping it out.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am sure that the minister will continue to work very closely with that organisation.

I will briefly touch on the issues around feral pest management. I accept, understand and was interested in the comments made by the member for Roe about the kangaroo population and the impact that numbers have, exacerbated by drying conditions in areas such as the southern rangelands and others. With a drying climate, there is effectively competition between the stock and native fauna such as kangaroos. I personally—I am not speaking for the government—have always been intrigued by the fact that as a nation we do not do more to exploit one half of our national emblem both as a food source and indeed in others.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** You're directing your comment to us and not to the Deputy Speaker.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Goodness gracious. Now I have put myself in great strife.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** You are welcome to address the Chair.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Okay. I had some people to lunch yesterday. There was kangaroo on the menu and they all ordered it. They were from Mandurah, which is a regional city, as we know. They were very impressed, firstly, that there was kangaroo on the menu and, secondly, that it was outstanding.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** We should have camel meat next.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** There has been crocodile on the menu in the last week or so, too. The kids particularly enjoyed it. I had a couple of schools through and they thought it was wonderful. I digress and I certainly do not want to be closed down or chastised by my very good friend the member for Maylands in the chair.

I could go on to talk about a number of issues, but I do not want to take up too much time. I am trying to respond to this motion. I think I have given the member some assurances on taking the message back, and that I am happy to do that.

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** About the camels?

**Mr R.S. Love:** What about the camels in terms of being a feral pest? Who is responsible for the camels?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I am not sure. I am happy to take that on notice.

**Mr R.S. Love:** If there is X number of camels running around out there, who is responsible for them?

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Good question.

**Mr R.S. Love:** Surely, that is the biggest issue in terms of water points and impact on fences. It is not the responsibility of the pastoralists.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Yes, it is the impact on infrastructure—fences and things. I am sure we can get some information on that back to the member, but I am not going to try to answer a question I do not know the answer to.

**Mr R.S. Love:** I just don't think I will get a chance to ask it otherwise.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I will round up, if the member is happy, so we can continue the debate.

The other information provided to me highlights the real issue that Western Australia, as some members opposite highlighted, continues to not be given its appropriate share of assistance and funding, as is given to other states. Indeed, there are a number of issues impacting our agriculture, and concerns about inequity have been raised. I am sure the Minister for Water will highlight the recent example of the federal Agriculture Ministers' Forum in Melbourne last week. The government is finalising a list of priority drought initiatives to submit for federal funding and will continue to fight for appropriate and indeed timely access to that funding. Although not finalised, the list includes R&D programs to improve feed base and pasture growth, and regenerate degraded and dehydrated rangelands; additional funding for on-farm dam and catchment construction; evaluation and demonstration of the smart dam technology to reduce water loss from evaporation; and evaluation and demonstration of desalination technology for treating groundwater. The government is working to access future federal funding for those projects. I know the member seems to be concerned about our fixation with carbon farming, but, again, if we are looking to the future, the issues around that are an important consideration.

I will conclude my remarks by saying that I appreciate this debate and I think it is important that this Parliament has debates like this. I think it is important that all members of Parliament understand that farmers and pastoralists are a very important part of not only our economy, but also the psyche of the Western Australian community. Indeed, when issues are impacting on those people, they are impacting on real people, their families and ultimately the communities that they support and are part of. Those matters need to be highlighted and addressed. I can assure members that the minister's office will be listening very carefully to this debate and I am very happy to articulate a number of the concerns that have been raised. I assure members that this government, Minister for Agriculture and Food and Premier are very much concerned about the welfare of those people who work on the land, be they farmers, pastoralists, food growers, horticulturists et cetera. They are an important part of our Western Australian economy and our community. We should not forget them or leave them to struggle without support and advocacy, and I can assure members that that will not happen.

**MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren–Blackwood)** [6.24 pm]: I would like to support the private members' business motion put up by the member for North West Central. Through the member's efforts, this issue is on the parliamentary agenda and certainly on the broader community's agenda, as it appropriately should be, because of the challenges that many in his community face. I pay tribute to the member's efforts. We are having a public discussion and a debate in this chamber to get better outcomes for his community and for the challenges of the drought in Western Australia more broadly, not just in the southern rangelands.

I want to start by acknowledging those who are going through the challenge. I have been a part of it before and I will make some reference to that, particularly my experience when I was Minister for Agriculture and Food in 2010. There is nothing worse than seeing a parched landscape and very, very skinny livestock. It is particularly emotional seeing the distraught faces of people in communities impacted by drought. It is not just the financial impact on those in business, but also the broader community that has to wear and partake in those challenges. There is not much for people to look forward to. When we go to towns in drought, there is not much we can say that will fix it or help it. But we have to respond, we have to have some longer-term strategies and we have to have, as articulated by the member for North West Central, some strategies to address the immediate and very real issues that emerge.

I think there are two issues here. There is the broader long-term drought policy issue in response to the climate change challenge. I guess there is also the issue of the acute response. I want to start by talking a bit about that broader policy response, which I think is important, and then touch on the short-term issues. As the Leader of the House highlighted, there have been a number of iterations of drought policy in Western Australia, probably going back to the early 1900s. There were a number of changes through the 1970s. The 1970s was the first time that drought was recognised as part of a natural disaster response. Recovery arrangements were attached to that and, as highlighted by the Leader of the House, it was a disincentive to prepare for those inevitable challenges coming; therefore, it was reviewed. There were different drought policy responses through the 1990s, including rural adjustment schemes and drought policy payments. The first of the exceptional circumstances declarations came into play, in which an area on a map where it was thought there would be an impact was defined. Of course, just about every review that looked at that geographic approach came up with the outcome that it really does not serve the issue well, in the sense that there will be a road somewhere and someone on one side of the road will be declared and the person on the other side will not. How the hell could they reconcile that with the very blurry line of impact that drought and dry seasons have on neighbouring properties? The policy of putting lines on a map and declaring exceptional circumstances pretty much ran from the late 1990s through to 2012. In that time, farm management deposits were also put in place. It was a strategy to put away money. People would get tax incentives to put money away for the times when their income would shift, whether that was from drought or another issue impacting farm income. There have been a number of iterations of drought policy.

Unfortunately, when I was Minister for Agriculture and Food in 2010, Western Australia had one of its driest seasons since 1914. It was a terrible, terrible year. There was drought right the way down into the south west. It did not occur in only the typical dryland areas we think about; people in the irrigation districts in Manjimup, in my region, saw the bottoms of dams that they probably never thought they would see. I guess that triggered a response to the things in place at the time. Just after that, we worked very closely with the federal government—Tony Burke was Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry at the time—on having a drought pilot in Western Australia to shift the thinking away from the traditional approach of interest rate subsidies on loans. Imagine someone under significant financial stress being offered another loan, albeit with an interest rate subsidy? That does not necessarily help someone in those circumstances and there will be mixed reviews about whether that is the right or wrong setting. Certainly, in our discussions at the time, in consultation with the sector, we tried to move into another set of arrangements that would much better serve the industry. I guess Western Australia was never particularly well served by exceptional circumstance arrangements; most of it went to the east coast that had very extensive droughts and small farm arrangements. The scale of the fund just did not serve the broadacre sector in Western Australia, so Western Australia was never serviced well and we were looking to make that shift.

There were a number of components to the pilot of drought reform measures. There was the farm planning component, which provided assistance so farmers could build business skills to manage dry seasons and its impact over longer periods of time—so, a farm planning business. Building farm business grants supported farmers so they could make certain investments. In reality, it was an incentive to bring people to the table and they were really, really well received. One of the little learnings out of that was that the women in farming partnerships were massively resilient. They could clearly see the wood from the trees when they looked at the terrible circumstances they found themselves in during drought. It was the women who could say objectively, “We need to have a very close look at what we are doing to see how we can do it better.” In many cases the husband or partner would be out there getting on with business, doing the things that they did from day to day, but the women could see things a little more clearly and saw some alternative pathways forward. It is worth reading the reviews on this, because it resulted in a sizeable shift in accepted thinking among the broader agricultural community about pathways that they should go down.

There was the farm family support program that provided income support for basic household needs and focused on communities. I guess I am really talking about the mental health aspects of the broader community here. I was down in Ravensthorpe, in the member for Roe’s patch, and the feedback I got was that we needed to put some resources into a community barbecue. On the surface of it, putting taxpayers’ money into a community barbecue does not sound very exciting and sounds like a poor spend of taxpayer funds. But the feedback we got from that was in terms of mental health and the importance of bringing together people who in many cases are isolated from their peers and colleagues. There was recognition that other people faced the same challenges and a simple community barbecue made a massive difference to that community. That was the strong feedback that came back to us. It can make a massive difference sometimes when the government supports an idea that the community has come up with.

There were also the farm social support coordinators who supported a social network to meet some mental health challenges. A component of that talked about exiting the farming business and providing grants to support people who made that decision, so that if it was the right decision, and someone said, “Righto, we need to exit this; how can we do that?” support was offered for people to achieve that. It was not only financial support for a pathway through that so that there was something at the end for them to move on in life, but also a bit of counselling was provided. If someone has been in the farming game—it is like being in politics, for that matter—when they pop out the other side they need a bit of coaching to get on with life. It is not something that they can just step into and take their next steps. Those things were important to help people who wanted to transition. As difficult as that discussion is, exit strategies are part of that discussion.

As we have moved forward and the drought policy has shifted away from traditional interest rate subsidies on loans to a preparedness focus, a response and recovery focus, not just on the farming business but also the broader community, businesses need to be supported and the community needs to manage and prepare. We must also acknowledge that there will be an impact from climate change and that we face a much more variable and volatile environment. The impacts of these things are only going to increase so the broad challenge for state and national governments is a broad policy setting response.

When I started talking in 2010 about drought, I remember going to a meeting in Kulin. That was one of my toughest times as minister, but it was so important that the minister showed up and fronted the people who were impacted. At the time not only was the drought an issue, but a fair bit of commentary was running about foreign buyers coming in to buy up Western Australian farms and that we were selling our farms to overseas interests. At the end of the meeting and the discussions at the Kulin rec centre, someone came up to me and said, “Terry, where are these foreign buyers? I would like to see one. I would like someone to come and buy my farm.” I guess that cuts to the core of the situation in which people find themselves. We can rattle off political arguments pretty easily on some things, but it is so important that we have a serious discussion about policy settings in and around these things as we move forward.

Following the pilot of drought reform measures in 2010, we had some vision about where new drought settings would be. We engaged with other states at a ministerial council level to try to get settings in place at a national level. Tony Burke was massively receptive to move forward on that path, but we hit an occasion when no exceptional circumstance had been declared in an area in the nation. The whole of Australia did not have anything declared, which is a pretty rare event. If we are going to have a discussion about drought policy and shifting the dial, having the discussion when there is no drought and no impact is the right time to have it. To me, unfortunately, I think there were some changes in government then. I was a bit critical of some of my federal colleagues at the time but that was an opportunity lost. One of the things that was significant to the shift that we were chasing at that time was to have what we loosely called “food on the table money” or income support, but income support not triggered by a declaration of drought or in an exceptional circumstances declared area, but was triggered when someone simply could not sustain themselves, whether it be from a commodity price issue, from floods, drought,

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or whatever the circumstances might have been. If they could demonstrate that they had no income coming in, there was a level of direct family support, which normally could not be accessed because of normal Centrelink assets test restrictions. In that circumstance, the asset test threshold rose to \$2 million, instead of about \$750 000, which is the point at which normal Centrelink support phases out. It was \$2 million phasing off to about \$4 million. If a person's net assets were above that, they would not get support. That was a part of it. I am pretty certain that the federal Treasury looked at it and probably said that it was going to be pretty costly and did not like it. At that time there was an opportunity to have that shift. Unfortunately, it did not happen. I think it is consistently recognised at a national level that we need to move into a more preparedness focus, but it needs to happen when there is no drought. There are significant issues over east, and those issues have been described in here. They are very different circumstances in which to articulate and get good community engagement about those shifts in that environment.

The other discussion point that came up when we were in government was multi-peril crop insurance. We supported that at a commercial level and made some pretty significant investments in a bunch of weather stations and independent data collection that could be used as a tool for any commercial instruments to come in and put up insurance instruments to insure against these issues. We did a number of things at the time to support more broadly the drought agenda and to have that policy setting in place.

My point is that I highlight that this government, like all governments in Australia, need to engage in the longer term drought-response issue. It needs to articulate what the agenda is and engage with the sector. It needs to respond to what is largely agreed to at, I think, a federal level now, about some of the basics, for instance. I have seen some of the more recent documents signed by the Premier and other state leaders as we transition to that, but I just do not hear that discussion in here. We do not hear commentary from the government on what that looks like for Western Australia. We certainly do not get feedback from a level of engagement with the agricultural sector as to what that might look like. That broader issue has to be there and has to be part of every government's agenda, because it is not going away.

I want to get this over with pretty quickly, because I want to hear from the Minister for Water. I am sure others do as well. When we look at the here and now, a lot of this has been talked about. I will touch on a few things. Animal welfare, of course, is a state responsibility. We need to respond to that. Nobody wants to see poor animal welfare outcomes. There is the broader issue of the degradation of the rangelands, particularly the southern rangelands—not entirely new; nevertheless, an environmental issue in respect of the longer-term sustainability of those partial leases that needs to be part of the discussion. With agistment options for livestock that are in a crisis situation, I thought that the member for Geraldton put it neatly. In many cases, farmers are not able to shift their stock; therefore, they have to move through a couple of steps before they get to that point. Having a timely response to those things becomes important. The member for Roe talked about breeding stock—the importance for a farmer of a nucleus flock that they are able to use to build their resilience over time—being an important part of that discussion. The Leader of the House touched upon broader community support and the mental health response. Although he talked about rural financial counselling services, I did not hear mention of government responses to that or investment to support those services to engage with the broader agricultural sector. Although this motion is about the southern rangelands, we are going to have an issue in the broader agricultural sector as we go through, as this is one of the more challenging years that we have had in recent times. Thankfully, there is a level of equity out there that can sustain certainly one year, but these things need to be responded to.

I refer to Regional Men's Health. When the Nationals WA were in government, Regional Men's Health was extended out to the wheatbelt. It runs a fantastic program, again, with mental health support, going into the broader community—not only the direct businesses that are impacted, but also broader support to ensure that we are looking out for them.

I have not heard anyone talking to the banks. In 2010, I remember nearly all the rural leaders in Western Australia met with the banks once every quarter. We cannot influence what they do, but we can get a read-out from them about how deep are the issues, where are the equity levels sitting and where are the hot spots for response. If there are significant financial challenges in certain parts of the state, we need to put in resources to support that. Discussion with the banks is really, really important. Just engaging with the banks puts them on notice. I am not sure I am a good mate of the banks at the moment because of what happened in the royal commission, but we need to be talking with the banks to engage with them about the broader issues, because they will know. They know their numbers; they know where the risks sit. I have not heard anyone talk about the notion of putting the banks around the table and seeing how big these risks are, how significant the equity issues in terms of their businesses are, and therefore how resilient they are. Are they likely to be able to manage through the issues of this season, next season and the one after? Those are really important discussions.

I think where Western Australia sits in relation to eastern Australia is really important, and it has been brought up a couple of times. Eastern Australia is responding massively, with even our party colleagues over there talking about a response of over \$1 billion. We cannot be ignored in that. Western Australia cannot be ignored in that just because it is pretty hot over there; we have to be in the mix over here. The government will certainly have National Party support in articulating that commentary because if there is a response over there, that response needs to also occur here. The members for North West Central, Central Wheatbelt, Roe, Moore and Geraldton all have people in their electorates who have got through these years but face challenges, and we need to have the same response that happens on the east coast. Just because we are in WA does not mean we should not be a part of that mix.

There is another big, big message. We have not heard a lot about it in this place, and these things do not occur suddenly. I am a little bit surprised we do not have the Treasurer here as the Minister for Lands, because he has the Pastoral Lands Board sitting in his remit. The Pastoral Lands Board has responsibility to ensure that the rangelands are managed in an ecologically sustainable way. It has a very particular brief and needs to understand where its level of pastoral management is, where the issues are, when those issues arise, and respond with early intervention to issues of stock. What has its role been?

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** I would have thought the Minister for Lands would have come to the table and told us about that. I would like to hear what the role of the Pastoral Lands Board has been; and, indeed, who is responsible. He is formally responsible, as I was when I was Minister for Lands, but we also have the Minister for Agriculture and Food, who is picking up the rangelands reform, which comes under that process, and presumably appoints the members of the Pastoral Lands Board. We have not heard that. I think there is another piece here that is perhaps missing in this discussion.

In summary, I think there is a longer-term agenda here that I would certainly like to hear the government engaging in—engaging in the sector to ensure that they are walking in sync along the journey, because it is a challenging discussion. It needs to happen when times are better. I think we have certainly had some reasonable seasons in the last few years to assist in that discussion, but it is an agenda that is not going to go away. Whether we are in government or opposition, we will certainly be putting that stuff on the table. As has been highlighted by my colleagues, there is this acute response now to some very, very immediate issues, not least of which go beyond the family businesses impacted and into the broader communities that need to have our support. That is the remit of the state government. It is a response that needs to occur and occur in a timely way.

**MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Water)** [6.45 pm]: I rise in the time that the Nationals WA have left just to make a few comments on this motion.

I think everyone in this house appreciates how difficult it is for families who are struggling in drought. We can call it what we like—climate change or drought. It is appalling for someone to watch the business that they have worked hard to build, maybe all their life, dwindle into the future; to watch their stock suffer; to watch their topsoil get blown away. It is terrible. The question is what do we do about it and how should we respond.

I was not going to spend much time talking about what we have done as a government in areas in the wheatbelt that have been declared water deficient, but because the member for North West Central had a crack at the Premier because he mentioned some of the things that we have done, and the member for Roe criticised the government and me in particular for our response in the wheatbelt, I am going to address some of those issues. There are a number of shires in the wheatbelt this year that have been declared water deficient. We as a government have responded to those situations very, very quickly. They all require local governments to make an application; that is how the system works. We have responded within 48 hours to some of those applications to get the ball rolling. We have not sat on those at all.

As well as responding to water-deficient declarations that put in place water carting for stock purposes, we have also been out there improving the community water sources that are available in those shires. Just by way of comparison, in the 2018–19 and 2019–20 dry seasons, we spent \$1.1 million in the south east wheatbelt on 18 community water projects. That \$1.1 million on 18 projects in the south east wheatbelt compares with \$780 000 spent across the whole of the wheatbelt in the eight and a half years of the previous government.

*Point of Order*

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** Point of order. This is about the southern rangelands. I probably should have brought a map in to show the minister where the southern rangelands are. It is not about the wheatbelt. I really want to get a response from the minister about what the government is doing.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order but I remind the minister of the topic.



*Debate Resumed*

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I am responding to the criticism levelled at the government that it did not respond to those shires in the wheatbelt when you, Madam Deputy Speaker, were not in the chair.

In response to the water deficiency declarations, I made sure that the Water Corporation, the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development were in the one room at the same time to make sure that they provided a coordinated response, because one of the criticisms from local government was that the departments were not talking to each other. I will not take any criticism from the member for Roe or anyone else from the Nationals WA about our response to water deficient areas in the wheatbelt. It is white noise from National Party members given that the amount of money we spent in the last two years is more by order of magnitude. I do not know what the former government was doing with the community water supplies in the wheatbelt. The former government ignored it for eight and a half years.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** Can we talk about the southern rangelands?

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I am happy to move on to the issues in the rangelands. We are experiencing a significantly drying climate. It is probably not appropriate or very helpful to talk about a drought. We are in a constantly drying climate. The CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology recently did some work and produced a document titled “Adapting agriculture to climate change”. The conclusions of that work show that with a high level of confidence, we can expect average temperatures to continue to rise in all seasons in the rangelands. It also stated with a high level of confidence that more hot days and hot spells are projected and that changes to summer rainfall are possible but unclear while winter rainfall is projected to decrease in the south. An increased intensity of extreme rainfall events, basically cyclones, is also predicted with a high degree of confidence. Those are some of the conclusions that the CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology have come to. I quoted that report because it was tabled last Friday at the Australian Agriculture Ministers’ Meeting, at which all the ministers get together to talk about these issues. Far from the Western Australian government being complacent about these issues, I went to the meeting because I am concerned that the federal government does not understand the water issues in Western Australia. It just does not get it. In the area of water, the meeting was almost completely focused on the drought in New South Wales and Queensland. Normally, the meeting would be attended by Alannah MacTiernan representing Western Australia as the Minister for Agriculture and Food. I decided as the Minister for Water that I would go because I wanted to speak directly with the Minister for Agriculture, Bridget McKenzie, and the Minister for Water Resources, Drought, Rural Finance, Natural Disaster and Emergency Management, Senator Littleproud, so both Alannah and I went. The work on climate change was done by CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology and commissioned by the Victorian government. It presents a very sobering perspective. The federal ministers did not question the results and the papers were endorsed. We then moved to David Littleproud’s report on drought. He gave a very heartfelt report on the drought in New South Wales and elsewhere on the east coast. The agriculture minister and I raised the circumstances in Western Australia, those in not only the rangelands but also the wheatbelt and south west in particular. We did not get a good hearing from, in particular, Senator Littleproud. He seemed surprised that we had raised the circumstances in Western Australia. I think his comments were along the lines of “Well, we need a national response. We can’t be responding to local issues.” For him to describe WA, which is one-third of the continent, as a local circumstance was pretty disappointing. As members opposite may well know, the problem is that virtually all the federal government’s programs require the declaration of drought, which is measured on rainfall from year to year. Western Australia has a steadily declining rainfall, as members know, so we do not qualify for a lot of those programs. Far from us being complacent, both the Minister for Agriculture and Food and I went to the meeting, without fanfare, and started the conversation with Senator Littleproud in particular. I was not particularly pleased with his response. As members opposite know, both Bridget McKenzie and Senator Littleproud came to WA recently. Neither of them sought a meeting with me to discuss water issues. They did not even tell me they were coming, which was another red flag. If the federal government was interested in talking to the state government about water issues, it could at least have told me that those ministers were coming to WA and made sure that they had time to meet with me. But, no, I found out that Bridget McKenzie was here because I saw social media posts, which were done by the National Party, that said that she was touring various parts of WA. We know that the drought on the east coast is terrible. But, as members opposite have heard, serious issues are happening in WA. The agriculture minister and I are working on projects that we can put to the federal government for federal funding. The national government has talked at length about its \$100 million drought fund. My concern, Leader of the National Party, is that that money will be spent almost exclusively on the east coast. We know that \$13 billion has been spent on water issues, with more than 95 per cent of that money spent on the east coast. About two per cent has been spent in WA. Again, in their eight and a half years in government, I am not sure that the National and Liberal Parties argued the case for water infrastructure and water spending in Western Australia. When we look at those figures, \$13 billion was spent almost exclusively on the Murray–Darling basin, which is an enormous amount of money. About two per cent has been spent here in WA.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 30 October 2019]

p8628b-8653a

Mr Vincent Catania; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Dave Kelly

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*Point of Order*

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I have a point of order.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** If the member for North West Central is going to complain—again—that this is not on topic, I disagree. It is not a point of order. Is that what the member was going to call?

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I am trying to get the minister back on track to talk about the southern rangelands.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I understand that, member.

**Mr V.A. CATANIA:** I do not want to talk about anything else but what he is doing about the southern rangelands.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I have listened to most of this debate either in the chamber or in my office and you have all raised different points about your own areas. I do not think there is a problem with what the minister is saying at the moment.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** As the state government, we are intent on making sure that the federal government pays attention to Western Australia. We argued very successfully to get a fairer share of the GST from a reluctant federal government. It is our intent to put to the two National Party federal ministers and the Prime Minister that a fairer share of that water infrastructure money absolutely needs to come to WA. Thirteen billion dollars has been spent on the Murray–Darling and about two per cent—that is the figure that I have been given by the department—came to WA, which is an appalling outcome for WA.

Finally, I just want to say that we could not find a minister who is more passionate about these issues than Hon Alannah MacTiernan as Minister for Agriculture and Food. More broadly in the community, if someone wants a job to be done, the minister is a tremendous person to do it. She has not gone missing on these issues, as did the variety of previous water and agriculture ministers on the other side. She has argued passionately to rebuild the old agriculture department, the new Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. An additional \$140 million has gone into that department after the National and Liberal Parties gutted the Department of Agriculture and Food. To have people respond to these —

**Mr V.A. Catania** interjected.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** The “member for North West Claremont” needs to understand that he is completely out of touch.

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** I think the minister described the member for North West Central by the wrong seat. I wonder whether he could be corrected on it.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I did not even hear him use a seat name.

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** It was pretty clear.

**Mr V.A. Catania** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for North West Central!

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** Sorry. I got confused with his residence in Claremont and his seat, which is North West Central, so I apologise.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** You’re a tool!

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** I do not think that is an appropriate term. I think the member should withdraw that last comment.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I do not know that the word itself is unparliamentary, but I think the tone with which it was delivered was probably inappropriate.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

*House adjourned at 7.00 pm*

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