

DROUGHT, GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

388. Mr R.N. SWEETMAN to the Premier:

Given the severe impact the drought is having on our farming communities this season and the concern that the State's 2002 grain income will be down by more than \$1 billion -

- (1) When will the Government agree on terms with the Commonwealth Government for an improved exceptional circumstances funding regime that will assist farmers in the long term?
- (2) Will the Government agree to provide small business assistance to non-farming rural businesses in recognition of the fact that it is not just farmers who are suffering during these difficult times?

Dr G.I. GALLOP replied:

(1)-(2) The Government is well aware of the drought and has acted on the matter.

Mr M.W. Trenorden interjected.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: The position that the Government has taken on the drought affecting rural communities was applauded by the farming representative bodies when the announcement was made in Perenjori earlier this year.

Several members interjected.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: There is a distinction between the farming bodies and active members of the Liberal and National Parties in country Western Australia. I am sure everyone in this House recognises that. We have done what we should have done on this issue.

Mr P.D. Omodei: Dr Dolittle!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: I find it very interesting that, on the one hand, we are criticised for overturning Western Australia and its laws, but, on the other hand, we are described as the Government that does nothing. The member for Warren-Blackwood should get his argument in order; he cannot have it both ways.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: I know that the Liberal Party is a bit edgy today. Were there 61 or 62 seats in the Victorian Parliament in the end?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: Listen to members opposite. We do not play politics with people who live in rural Western Australia - we deliver. We are not like the National Party. The National Party was part of the previous coalition. It was sell-out after sell-out to rural and regional consumers of electricity and on issues related to rural and regional Western Australia. However, now this State has a Labor Government that stands up for rural and regional Western Australia.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: That is a proposition I will put forward. Who might be an independent judge of whether this Government supports rural and regional Western Australia? The Lord Mayor of Perth is an independent judge. Do members know what he said? He said that this Government ignored the interests of the city of Perth and spent too much money on the regions. I think he was about right.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: We have responded to the drought situation and have dedicated resources to deal with the problem. The criteria have been developed. The applications are coming to the Department of Agriculture and they will be considered. Secondly, there are ongoing discussions between the Commonwealth -

Mr M.W. Trenorden: Discussions! Just what we need - more discussions!

The SPEAKER: Members, there are now serial interjections, which are designed to stop the Premier from answering the question. I ask members to desist from those sorts of interruptions.

Dr G.I. GALLOP: Ongoing discussions are taking place between the Commonwealth and the States about how the exceptional circumstances scheme will be administered.

Mr M.W. Trenorden: You rejected them!

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the National Party!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: The Leader of the National Party -

Mr M.W. Trenorden: Get your position right; you have rejected them!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: Ongoing discussions are taking place. Do members know what this Government will do, as in the case of all the issues that face this State? It will protect the interests of Western Australia and its taxpayers. The Liberal and National Parties have given up supporting Western Australia. Whatever the federal Government does, they follow on. We have learnt over many years that we cannot trust federal Governments, no matter what the colour of their politics. If we are to represent Western Australia properly, we must hold the federal Government to account. That is what this Government will do. We will make sure our taxpayers are protected in this process. Members opposite can continue to follow whatever the federal Government does on these issues, but we will stand up for Western Australia. We will also ensure that the needs of our farmers are properly taken into account in the allocation of our budget, and the needs of our farmers -

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the National Party!

Dr G.I. GALLOP: The basic requirement of our rural communities is to get a good return on the agricultural industry. That is what props up business in those communities. The Government has targeted that issue in this time of crisis to make sure that farmers are looked after in this time of need, so that, when times get better, they will be in a position to do what we know they do well; that is, to produce wheat efficiently and export it all over the world.