

MUCHEA SALEYARDS

790. Hon NIGEL HALLETT to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

- (1) Can the minister provide the specific date that the Muchea saleyards are due to be completed?
- (2) Can the minister provide the revised updated final costs of the project?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1)-(2) The government has a legislative responsibility for the Midland saleyards and will be responsible for the replacement facilities at Muchea. At this time, the priority is for funding to support relocation to Muchea and potentially all available funds will be needed for this. The state government does not have a responsibility for other livestock saleyards businesses operating within Western Australia. As members are no doubt aware, the sheep saleyards at Katanning have been run for a very long time as a profitable business by the Shire of Katanning. The shire has responsibility for the financial operation of the business, including decisions over the years on the allocation of any operating surpluses or depreciation allowances. Past and future investment decisions remain the responsibility of the saleyards owners, wherever they happen to be. I am, however, sympathetic to the issues that are faced by regional saleyards operators, including the need to improve their infrastructure. What I have told the Shire of Katanning very clearly, and what I know it will understand very well, is that should funds be available following the Midland saleyards relocation, I intend to put a view to cabinet on how Katanning and other regional saleyards may be supported in the future. There is no prospect of making any commitment of funds. I never have made any commitment of funds, to Katanning or anywhere else, unless on the basis that we have financial certainty about the shift to Muchea. I must say that I was deeply disturbed to see this afternoon a media release from the member for Wagin in which he alleges that I have broken a promise to assist in the funding of the relocation of the Katanning saleyards. No such promise has ever been made by me or anybody in the government. I find it quite amazing that the member for Wagin would make that allegation without once raising the matter with me. The member for Wagin knows perfectly well that he has only to make a telephone call or speak to me at any time, but he has not once raised the matter with me.

What I think is not understood and needs to be understood very clearly is that of all the saleyards in Australia, only two are owned and operated by state and territory governments. They are Midland saleyards, which are due to be replaced at Muchea, and Katherine saleyards in the Northern Territory, which are used, I think, once or twice a year. All other saleyards in Australia are owned, constructed, operated and funded by local government, stock agents or, increasingly, the private sector. The Western Australian government, under Geoff Gallop, looked closely at the possibility of privatising the Midland saleyards in their move to Muchea. It did not do that because it formed the view that the yard fees would be too high. The public will continue the ownership in the long-term interests of the Western Australian livestock industry. Now the member for Wagin is saying that we should also take over the ownership of the Katanning saleyards. I tell the member for Wagin and everybody else that our current law prevents us from doing that. Has the member never looked at the legislative enactment for the Western Australian Meat Industry Authority? It states that the authority cannot own other saleyards and that its commitment is to Midland. I would have to change legislation for that to be done. I have indicated to the Shire of Katanning and the Shire of Plantagenet, which has behaved itself much better, that I am happy to look at this question. When we have resolved the matter, I will go back to cabinet and, if necessary, seek legislative reform. Before the Shire of Katanning starts bridge burning, it had better be very careful that it informs the local member of what the facts actually are.