

FLY CONTROL — DUNG BEETLE

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

My question is about the fly control program. Has any action been taken by the Department of Agriculture and Food to assess the redistribution of the current abundance of dung beetles—*Copris hispanus* and *Bubas bison*—in the south west; and, if not, why not?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank Hon Nigel Hallett for raising this very serious question, as there is an intensely irritating problem with bush flies in the south west region in particular, as well as throughout the entire south west land division. The dung beetle program has been a partial answer to the bush fly problem, but we remain challenged. When one considers the enormous investment in the tourism industry alone in the south west, the bush fly is a serious economic threat to tourism. I cannot imagine wanting to pay the kind of prices that are demanded by tourism operators in the south west if when I went out to play a game of golf or just for a walk down the street, I was continually chasing off bush flies. It is a serious question.

Hon Paul Llewellyn: What would happen to the great Australian salute? If we lost that, what would happen to our international reputation?

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! I invite Hon Paul Llewellyn to engage in the adjournment debate, provided I am not in the chair!

Hon KIM CHANCE: I am glad the President said that, because I was going to respond by telling my story about the bodyline test series. Leave our flies alone!

The answer, however, is no. When the dung beetle program was discontinued in 1996, it was decided that the outcomes set for the various elements of the program were satisfactorily achieved. The spring active beetles—*Copris hispanus* and *Bubas bison*—initially established at one or two sites in the south west, were later released onto other sites in the major dairy areas. Those species have now had some 20 years to redistribute naturally, and it is my understanding that they have done that quite successfully. I am further advised that the dung beetle takes a while to build up in numbers, and that in the late spring-early summer period there are an insufficient number of dung beetles to get on top of the breeding medium for the bush flies.

One particular entomologist has speculated that there are more cool weather active species of dung beetles available in South Africa in particular—other entomologists disagree. I am happy to continue to engage in that debate, but the advice from entomologists in my department is that they do not agree with the view that there is any species of late spring and early summer active dung beetle that could effectively give better control of bush flies. Indeed, the counterargument is that the introduction of yet another species of dung beetle would simply compete with the existing established population. The information about the South African species that were used is that they perform better in high rainfall environments with relatively high stocking rates of cattle. I remain open about the solution, but at this stage I have taken the advice of the departmental entomologist.