

HEALTH SERVICES, AGRICULTURAL AREAS

243. Mr AINSWORTH to the Minister for Health:

On 28 June, the National Party raised a matter of public interest in this House that related to the drought disaster in agricultural Western Australia, including the resulting strain that would be placed on country health services.

- (1) Will the minister inform the House whether he has instructed the Health Department to investigate the need for increased health services in drought-affected areas since that MPI six weeks ago?
- (2) If so, what action has been taken?
- (3) If not, will the minister commit to the House that he will instruct his department to carry out an investigation and report back to the House?

Mr KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(3) Yes, I have discussed this matter with the Health Department. However, because concern has been raised about the problem of suicide, our discussions have mainly been about counselling. In my discussions with George Lipton from Mental Health Service, and with people in other health services, I have been assured that, wherever possible, specific needs for counselling will be met. Thankfully, the little grey man brought the big grey clouds with him, and we may have moved away from this issue since that time. This issue is a concern, and I thank the member for Roe for raising it. The Health Department is well aware of the issues and pressures affecting people in drought-affected areas, and I believe that it is on top of those problems. As I have said, I am making every attempt to visit the drought-affected areas to ensure that I am on top of those issues. It is a matter not only of getting specific resources to those regional areas, but of tweaking the resources that are already there. I will take up this matter again at my normal weekly meeting with the Acting Commissioner of Health, and I am confident that he will reassure me that those things are being carried out.