

KANGAROO NUMBERS

1420. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

Does the minister acknowledge that kangaroo numbers have increased to plague proportions in many parts of country Western Australia; and what does the State Government intend to do to address that problem?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank the member for the question, although I have only a secondary interest in kangaroo numbers. The question should have been put to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. However, I am prepared to offer an opinion on the extent to which kangaroo numbers have an impact on agriculture. I did not receive notice of the question about whether there are plague numbers of kangaroos. I would require specialist advice from the Department of Conservation and Land Management to answer that. I have not heard reports of plague numbers of kangaroos affecting agriculture. That does not mean that, from an environmental perspective, there are not plague numbers in particular areas.

Hon Barry House: They are doing well from an environmental perspective.

Hon KIM CHANCE: A surplus of native animals can be an environmental threat in itself. This can occur particularly in pastoral areas that have had water points provided. Previously the limited water resource was the restricting factor on the breeding rate of kangaroos and other macropods. As the honourable member is aware, kangaroo numbers are controlled by CALM through a quota system. Licensed shooters are issued with a number of tags and a quota to kill.

From my dealings with the kangaroo processing sector, I know that we are killing far fewer numbers than we are licensed to kill. We are issuing far more licences than we are delivering in carcasses. This is a matter of concern for two reasons. Firstly, we are not achieving the cull rates that the Department of Conservation and Land Management has indicated it needs; and, secondly, the kangaroo processing industry is at some risk because it is not getting the throughput it needs. Members may be interested to learn that there is a huge international demand for kangaroo meat for human consumption. This situation has existed since the outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy which has resulted in a demand for game meat, particularly venison and kangaroo.

The King River International Pty Ltd abattoir in Canning Vale is the only company in Western Australia that processes kangaroo meat for human consumption. I think it exports to 40 countries. It is having extreme difficulty acquiring sufficient kill.

I have had discussions with the Minister for the Environment and Heritage on this matter. I also wrote to her recently with a detailed proposal from Mr Barry Bell, whom the member will know very well. This time it was in his capacity as a licensed shooter rather than as an executive of the Western Australian Farmers Federation. Barry Bell put to me a range of proposals, which I have relayed to Dr Judy Edwards with my recommendation that she seriously consider Mr Bell's proposals. They relate to the way in which we review the licensing of professional shooters. Similarly, I have had discussions with full-time professional shooters, particularly those based in the Collie region, about the different licensing requirements in Western Australia and the other States. Here full-time professional shooters have a different grade of licence from part-time shooters. One of the concerns expressed by both Mr Bell and the full-time professionals is that in Western Australia we tend to issue a licence to anyone who has an approved set of credentials, regardless of whether they are full-time shooters. If they hold an appropriate firearm licence, they can have a professional kangaroo shooters licence.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I trust the leader is bringing his answer to a conclusion.

Hon KIM CHANCE: Indeed. The outcome is still not clear. I will continue my negotiations with the Minister for the Environment and Heritage to ensure that we address the situation so that more full-time shooters are in operation and we achieve a higher proportion of our quota.