

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY AGRICULTURE — WATER FOR FOOD PROGRAM

643. Mr V.A. CATANIA to the Minister for Water

Work is starting this week on aerial electromagnetic imaging in the Gascoyne as part of the Water for Food project. Will the minister please provide some information on what this project entails?

Ms M.J. DAVIES replied:

I thank the member for the question and for his interest in the opportunities for irrigated agriculture, particularly, in the Gascoyne. This project comes under the Water for Food project, which is a \$40 million investment under the umbrella of Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture, a \$300 million investment in agriculture in this state. Water for Food comprises 11 projects, one of which is this middle Gascoyne project. As members will know, the Gascoyne is a really important part of the horticultural precinct for the state. Every year Carnarvon produces around 70 per cent of Perth's fruit and vegies, so it is very important. As a consequence, in this term of government, the state has recognised that and made some significant investments in that area. We have seen investments in the flood levees, in upgrades to pipelines and in the Gascoyne food bowl initiative on which \$25 million was spent to expand irrigated agriculture in the Gascoyne. This project is about investing funds further outside the current precinct. We are investigating the scale and quality of the alluvial aquifers between Rocky Pool and the Kennedy Ranges. We will spend \$2.6 million on this project. It started this week. We have started conducting aerial magnetic surveys, and they will record the data on the geology of the area, the depth and the quality of the groundwater.

Members might also be interested that in recent weeks another milestone has been achieved under the Water for Food banner. A newly installed centre-pivot irrigator is part of a big milestone project at Mowanjum. I am excited about the partnership we have there with the Mowanjum Aboriginal Corporation and the trial we are running to look at a stand-and-feed graze model. We are engaging widely with pastoralists and Aboriginal organisations across the north. We think it will go a long way to creating some of the opportunities we need in this state to diversify our economy. Currently 50 000 hectares are under irrigated agriculture. Based on evidence from the Department of Agriculture and Food there is the possibility that up to 10 million hectares could be put under irrigation. From our perspective, this state government is making big inroads into creating a diversified economy on the back of agriculture and some exciting things are happening in the Water for Food space.