

**FOODBANK GERALDTON**

*Statement*

**HON MATT BENSON-LIDHOLM (Agricultural)** [5.20 pm]: It was my pleasure to visit the Foodbank Geraldton again last week and to catch up with the manager, Mrs Pat Hodges, and the many volunteers who tirelessly give their time to ensure that members of the community who are disadvantaged for whatever reason are supported with an extensive range of food, drinks and personal effects. Many thousands of people in Western Australia are in need of, and rely on, supplementary food from community organisations. Foodbank distributes to more than 600 of these types of organisations. Sadly, over 4 000 people in Western Australia die each year whose deaths are attributed to poor diets, and 10 per cent of Western Australians die up to 20 years earlier than they should. Foodbank is a very important resource for Geraldton and the wider area of the Mid West and Gascoyne regions. Pat Hodges is to be commended for her work at Foodbank. She has served with the organisation for eight years; two as a volunteer and six as the manager. She has put together and manages a big team of volunteers. She manages, trains and supervises people who are serving their community service obligations and have been placed into her care by the Department of Justice, and others who have been placed at Foodbank by Centrelink as part of the work-for-the-dole scheme. Foodbank Geraldton provides food for hostels, agencies, community organisations, families and individuals. It also works closely with local police units to provide community assistance in times of crisis and receives support from many local organisations and businesses, which is appreciated enormously. I also point out that Mr Shane Hill, a former member for Geraldton, is the patron of Foodbank Geraldton and also makes a great contribution.

Foodbank Geraldton distributes more than 30 000 meals a month in the Geraldton, Mid West and Murchison areas, and there is pressure to deliver more. In addition, Foodbank Geraldton runs many community breakfast programs, particularly the phenomenally successful school breakfast program. That program started with just 11 schools in 2001; today the organisation feeds breakfast to 37 000 children in 370 schools each week. The program is supposed to expand when it receives additional funding from other areas of government, especially the Department of Education. Everyone involved hopes that the Minister for Education can deliver \$780 000 in funding. An interesting fact is that Foodbank Geraldton produced 1 000 Christmas hampers last year and was able to fill every hamper for the first time in seven years due to the generosity and support of the Geraldton community. With the help of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority, Foodbank Geraldton also donated much needed food supplies to the flood-affected Pia Wadjarri community, which is located 200 kilometres east of Mullewa, after heavy rains caused flooding and cut off access to the town earlier this year. Pat Hodges said that Foodbank had the capability to get supplies to other remote communities that are in crisis.

In conclusion, I congratulate Pat Hodges and all her staff for their outstanding contribution to very many disadvantaged people, schoolchildren and community organisations in the City of Geraldton—Greenough, the Mid West region and beyond. Without Foodbank Geraldton and the many organisations and individuals who support it, it is hard to imagine how many people would indeed survive in that particular part of the world. I take my hat off to all involved in the service and wish the organisation well in its future expansion planning.