

DAIRY INDUSTRY, CRISIS, MINISTERIAL INQUIRY

1058. Hon BARRY HOUSE to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

In view of the decision made in the other place to restrict the urgency and effectiveness of the proposed select committee inquiry into the dairy industry by changing the terms of reference and referring it to a standing committee, chaired by the member for Riverton - where, to my knowledge, there are very few dairy farmers or cows - rather than a select committee, I ask -

- (1) Is the minister conducting his own research into the current crisis facing the dairy industry?
- (2) Has the minister considered conducting a poll of dairy farmers to establish the depth of the crisis and point to possible remedial action?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank Hon Barry House for his question.

- (1)-(2) I think the question is based on a misconception. It is correct that the other place determined that this inquiry should be carried out by a standing committee of the Parliament rather than a select committee. It is not for me to comment on the Legislative Assembly's processes, but I imagine that had that occurred in this House, we would have made the same decision. I am aware that the Legislative Assembly is somewhat belatedly adopting the more enlightened processes that were established in this place some years before; that is, the major issues that come before the House should be dealt with by standing committees rather select committees.

I believe we are already conducting our own research. I am at an advanced stage of discussion in three or four quite different, and not entirely parallel, processes of inquiry into and action on the issues confronting the dairy industry.

A poll has not been suggested to me. As recently as yesterday, I had a meeting with the Western Australian Farmers Federation, which briefed me on a dairy farmers meeting that was recently held in Bunbury. We have analysed a course of action as a result of that meeting. However, I do not see what could be served by conducting a poll at the moment. We are quite capable of answering the questions that could be asked in a poll through the sources of advice that are available in the industry to the Government and the Opposition. Those facts are reasonably well known.

The terms of reference laid down by the other place provide a very clear direction, although they are perhaps a little narrower than I would have preferred. The problems of the industry are well known. What challenges the Government is to find the answers to the problems. As I have said, we are pursuing four or five different lines of action. The pursuit of those lines of action is quite advanced and I hope to bring some of those to conclusion quite soon.