

WATER FOR FOOD PROGRAM — SOUTH WEST

250. Mr G.M. CASTRILLI to the Minister for Water:

I understand that there has been overwhelming support for the Water for Food project taking shape in the state's lower south west. Can the minister please provide members an update on how this project is progressing?

Ms M.J. DAVIES replied:

I thank the member for the question. It is little over a year since we first announced the southern forests project, as part of Water for Food, as one of the 11 projects that we are rolling out under the royalties for regions-funded initiative. In that year with this project group we have been working steadily with growers and we went through a process of asking for letters of intent, essentially asking growers in that region whether they would be interested in investing themselves into an integrated irrigation scheme. That letter of intent process has now been completed. We received 68 submissions which represented 92 properties that wanted to be serviced by this integrated scheme. Growers have told us that they require a volume of over 10 gegalitres of water. That is 50 per cent more than what we anticipated when we started this project. There is an overwhelming sense of confidence from those growers that they are looking to expand and capitalise on the opportunities they see as part of irrigated agriculture and what it offers to that part of the state.

The Department of Water is now working on a business case to deliver a scheme that will meet the requirement of that number of potential subscribers. We have had support from Tasmanian Irrigation and farmers who have been involved in the schemes that have been rolled out in Tasmania. Tasmanian Irrigation has successfully gone through this process on a number of different occasions, so it has a great deal of experience in working with growers with the state and federal government to ensure that they deliver a project that meets the needs of those growers and the state. I would like to put on record my thanks to Tasmanian Irrigation for lending that valuable assistance in developing this project. The feedback I have had from the growers is that they have been very appreciative of the time from that organisation as well.

The scheme is in its early stages and is expected to deliver water via 100 kilometres worth of pipeline, supported by four pump stations. It is very early days. The key to this is the reliability of the supply of water for growers, because that is bankability for them and their business, and we are working to 95 per cent reliability. It translates into a reliable business plan and that means more jobs, better employment opportunities and they can invest themselves more. This is the outcome that we seek.

Growers in the Manjimup and Pemberton area provide 60 per cent of the region's production through horticulture on only five per cent of that region's land mass. They are extraordinarily efficient and very productive. The key limiter in expanding their opportunities down there is the variability of their water supply; they are at capacity, and that is why this project is very important. We will continue to work over the next six to seven months to ensure that we have a scheme that will deliver on the requirements that the growers have put on the table, bearing in mind that that letter of intent process asks them to put their own money on the table. That is \$12 million of growers' money on the table to be matched by the federal and state governments, when we have the business case finalised. They are backing themselves and the flow-on impact of expanding the horticultural footprint in that part of the state has enormous benefits in terms of economic diversification and continuing to create jobs and employment.

I spoke about Water for Food at the biennial Northern Australia Food Futures Conference in Darwin. There is extraordinary interest in the state's plan around expanding irrigated agriculture. I have spoken in this place before about the projects we have in the north. The projects in the south are now rolling out and we are starting to see some real promise. Diversification of this state's economy is the key to ensure that we have more jobs and more employment. This project has taken a major step to deliver on that for the people of Manjimup and Pemberton and I will leave on that note with the words of a Tasmanian farmer, who has been through this process himself, saying that irrigated agriculture is not just about growing food, it is about growing regional communities. That was Richard Gardner and his experience from Tasmania is something that we would like to replicate here in Western Australia.