

WHEAT EXPORT

1200. Hon RICK MAZZA to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

I refer to the 22 November *Countryman* article, “Argentina grain study serves up key advice”, that reports that wheat exports from Argentina could double in the next decade.

- (1) With increasing wheat production in countries such as Argentina, Russia and Ukraine, what is the government doing to help assist our farmers increase their yields and market their product in this advancing global market?
- (2) Is the government monitoring the grain industry in Argentina; and, if so, how; and, if not, why not?
- (3) Does the minister agree that more intelligence is needed into the specific characteristics of Australian wheat being sought in its main markets?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:

- (1)–(3) I thank the member for the question, and I can see from his pile of questions today that he has been closely reading *Countryman*. The member would be aware, no doubt, because I know he has been present at many presentations that I have given, and I am sure he has read the media release that I put out on 2 May some six months ago, in which I very expressly talk about the risk to WA wheat farmers, not only from the Black Sea, which is generally talked about, but also from Argentina. We have been very mindful of that. Indeed at that time, in this same media release, I outlined the additional \$24 million that we were putting into the budget for grains research. In part, that was a recognition of that competitive pressure that our farmers were facing. We absolutely know about it and we are on the case.

The Australian Export Grain Innovation Centre, an absolutely fantastic outfit, is working very closely on this issue. It has identified what we need to do to improve our product to move up the value chain in Asia, and new demand that is merging in Asia, particularly in the cake and biscuit area as food choices change in Asia. I will use this opportunity to say—I am glad the member has raised it—that WA is overwhelmingly an export industry in our grains; the eastern states are not. We are fighting a constant battle with the Grains Research and Development Corporation to ensure that enough money is being spent in Western Australia on these sorts of issues that are mostly relevant to our farmers. I am deeply concerned to learn that this very professional outfit, AEGIC, might indeed be under some sort of threat from GRDC funding. I am hoping it is not, but I hope that we can get unity across this chamber to make sure that that outfit, which is absolutely focused on these issues, will continue that very excellent work.