

CYCLONE SEROJA — DISASTER RECOVERY FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Statement

HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural) [5.15 pm]: I rise to raise a matter related to a parliamentary question that I asked this week. Before I get to the substance of the question that I asked on Tuesday, I want to refer the house to rulings made on answers that have been provided. A couple of rulings come to mind that were made during the last Parliament by President Doust, now mother of the house and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's Commonwealth Parliamentarian of the Year.

Hon Sue Ellery: There are two mothers of the house, mate.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: I think that under Erskine May's convention, the mother of the house can only be a member who is not a member of the executive government.

Hon Sue Ellery: No, you are wrong.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: I will send the member the link.

Hon Sue Ellery: Do that.

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Effectively, those rulings said that before a member contemplates raising a matter of privilege under standing order 93, certain other steps in the process first need to be exhausted. Tonight, I rise in members' statements to raise the issue associated with a question that was asked on Tuesday, but ultimately answered yesterday. Question without notice 1022 was asked of the Minister for Emergency Services. The answer was not available during question time on Tuesday, but it was ultimately provided to this house yesterday by parliamentary secretary Hon Matthew Swinbourn on behalf of the Minister for Emergency Services. The question related to cyclone Seroja disaster recovery funding. It was fairly simple and straightforward. The question started with —

I refer to the \$104.5 million disaster recovery package for communities impacted by cyclone Seroja.

I pause there. The question is clearly prefaced in that the parts that then followed related to the \$104.5 million disaster recovery package. The first part of the question asked —

What is the total amount of the \$104.5 million disaster recovery arrangements that has been spent to date?

The third part of the question—this will make sense in a moment, President—asked —

What is the total amount that has been directly dispersed to families, businesses and communities from grant applications?

The first part of the answer provided yesterday, addressed the first and third parts of the question —

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services ... and our recovery partners have done an outstanding job in supporting the recovery from Tropical Cyclone Seroja. With over \$25.42 million dispersed to date.

I pause there because that is effectively the essence of the answer that I sought, which is how much of the \$104.5 million disaster recovery package for cyclone Seroja has been spent. The answer was \$25.42 million. The second part of my question asked —

... please provide a breakdown of how this funding has been spent?

In answer to this part of the question, a table was provided. Members should remember that this was an answer that the house gave leave to have incorporated into *Hansard*, and this is one of the risks, President, of allowing this practice to take place. Nevertheless, a table was incorporated into *Hansard* and the items in that table total \$25.43 million. Keep in mind that the first part of the answer said that the amount disbursed had been \$25.42 million, and there was a list of programs. The first five programs are the recovery and resilience grants program, the primary producer recovery grant, the small business recovery grant, the cultural and heritage asset clean-up and repair grant program and the community recreational and heritage assets restoration program. As I understand it, they are all elements of the Seroja recovery funding package. We run into trouble with the next three line items that have been included in the answer to the question. The first is the Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund of some \$8 million. I am pretty certain that the \$8 million that has been disbursed from the Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund came from ordinary Australians—they may be individuals, they may be businesses, or they may be governments. The Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund was not funded by the \$104.5 million disaster recovery package. We then go on to the Premier's grant of \$3.86 million, the Western Power relief grant of \$2.99 million and the Water Corporation relief grant of \$2.75 million. All three of those lines, which account for a considerable amount of the total, I am pretty certain were not funded by the \$104.5 million disaster recovery package. The last line item in this table is the disaster recovery funding arrangements category A and B of \$4.48 million—that is, I am pretty certain, directly related to the \$104.5 million package.

I go back to where I started. I asked a very specific question, which was —

- (1) What is the total amount of the \$104.5 million disaster recovery arrangements that has been spent to date?

In the answer delivered by the parliamentary secretary on behalf of the Minister for Emergency Services, I was told that the answer was \$25.42 million. The answer goes on to provide a breakdown of that \$25.42 million.

I believe this answer is inaccurate, and I want to give an opportunity to the minister to reflect on this answer. I really do hope that if it is inaccurate, it was not done knowingly.