

GOLDFIELDS MEDICAL FUND

Statement by Member for Eyre

MR BOWLER (Eyre) [12.58 pm]: I draw the attention of the House to a great goldfields institution, the Goldfields Medical Fund, or, as it has more recently become known, GMF Health. Members may not be aware that the fund, which has been going for 50 years, is now facing extinction. I hope that does not happen. Before the Howard Government changed the rules for private medical health cover, the fund had between 9 000 and 10 000 members. In the year or so following that change, its membership went from about 10 000 to 35 000. It was a huge increase, and in percentage terms it was the biggest increase in Australia. The trouble is that the expansion occurred at a time when the fund was being mismanaged, and its reserves were greatly depleted. An emergency rescue package was put in place by the local board. At the same time, the federal Government's watchdog appointed an administrator. That administrator, Peter Hedge, has been there for six months. I estimate that he has consumed between a quarter and half a million dollars in funds, which has gone straight out of the pockets of fund members to Canberra. I put the federal Government on notice that I believe that the fund can stand on its own. It does not need to be placed into another fund or be taken over. If the federal minister goes down that path, the people of the goldfields will be very upset and will take to the streets of the goldfields and revolt.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm