

LANDCARE FACILITATORS AND COORDINATORS, FUNDING

36. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

My question relates to Landcare facilitators and coordinators funded by the Natural Heritage Trust, and applications which are to be made by tomorrow to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry - Australia. Funds will run out in the next six weeks. Has the minister's department made those applications?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

Hon Murray Criddle has asked a very important question, which I can answer only in general terms. I am not sure whether I can answer the specific question on whether the applications have been made.

The Government has been attempting for more than a year to get the Commonwealth to finalise its position on National Heritage Trust funding. The Commonwealth has deferred finalising its position during that entire time. Members will be aware that the NHT is an entirely commonwealth-funded project; it has no state funding component. It has been very clear to the Government, in its negotiations with the Commonwealth, that the program will be cut back very severely. It has reached the stage where it became apparent, even to the Commonwealth, that it would not be able to reach the position at which it could roll over the old NHT program, which is almost complete, into the program we now call NHT2, within a reasonable time. In May this year in Hobart, the Commonwealth advised that, in acknowledgment of the fact that its program would not be up and running, it would negotiate interim provisions for the reappointment of some 650 Landcare coordinators Australia-wide. Until very recently - almost until this day - we have not been able to determine from the Commonwealth how many of those positions in Western Australia it would fund.

Hon Murray Criddle: I suggest that the minister obtain a copy of the document I am showing, which is a public document stating that applications should be in by tomorrow.

Hon KIM CHANCE: We may already have those applications in. My last advice on the position of the NHT from the Commonwealth was earlier this week, at which point there was no resolution from the Commonwealth about the number of positions that were to be funded in Western Australia. If the Commonwealth has, during this week, resolved that situation and has given Western Australia until tomorrow to get the applications, I am sure the applications will go in. The Government of Western Australia has not held up this matter. We have been ready; it is only a matter of providing a list of the NHT Landcare coordinators employed under the original NHT program. We have not been able to get from the Commonwealth any certainty about the positions it was intending to fund.