

SHEEP INDUSTRY

**668. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Premier:**

I refer to grave concerns within our sheep-farming sector, which is grappling with a loss of confidence and a dramatic fall in sheep prices, an example of which is young wethers falling from \$150 a head this time last year to just \$5 for similar stock now, as well as the inability to find markets due to federal Labor's impending live export ban.

- (1) Does the Premier acknowledge that his failure to successfully lobby his federal colleagues has caused this lack of confidence?
- (2) Does the Premier have any idea of the potential crisis that is looming, with rapidly declining sheep prices and limited markets in which to sell sheep?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

- (1)–(2) The member seems to be conflating two completely unrelated issues. One is the issue of the price of sheep, and I will come to that shortly. The other is to do with a federal government inquiry into the potential for a ban on live sheep exports, which may or may not come into being in 2027 or 2028. There are no restrictions on the export of live sheep, other than those that we introduced on the welfare of those animals. It is wrong to say that this is somehow impacted by a government decision that has not been made and will not be implemented for another four years.

The other issue the member raised was the price of sheep, which of course is completely decoupled, delinked and unattached from the confidence of farmers. That is a ludicrous suggestion. This is called a function of the market. I obviously appreciate the difficult situation that our sheep producers are in. Over the last 18 months, there has been a decline in the strong prices that we had seen nationally for lamb in recent years. This decline started well before the reason for the crisis of confidence that the member referred to—that is, the federal government's announcement on live sheep exports. Resources for farmers for the 2023 season are available on the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development website. We also have the best Minister for Agriculture and Food since the last one, who is always available to speak with farmers, hear about their concerns and work with the industry by continuing to monitor and support it.

I draw the attention of the chamber to the fluctuations in the price of sheep over the last few years. In 2016, the price was 201¢ a kilo. It then went up to 419¢ a kilo in 2018, and it is now down to 241¢ a kilo in 2023. We understand that there will continue to be fluctuations in the price, and we understand that that will continue to have an impact on farmers. Regardless of any other issues out there, there will be fluctuations in the price. That is called the market. We also know that our farming community is resilient and has diversified industries that allow farmers to rely on other livestock or crops to sustain their businesses. That is the way it has always been. They should have confidence in our Minister for Agriculture and Food, who will stand by them, work with them and assist them where appropriate to ride out any of these disruptions or fluctuations in the market.