

GRAIN INDUSTRY, ASSISTANCE INITIATIVES

339. Hon MURRAY MONTGOMERY to the minister representing the Minister for Primary Industry:

Can the minister inform the House of any new initiatives to assist the grain industry in the south east region of this State?

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE replied:

I can assure members that it is a very difficult year out there and I thank the member for some notice of the question. As all members would be aware, the late start to this year's cropping season and the warm, dry conditions have resulted in a bleak outlook for the agricultural region's crop and livestock industry.

The minister has spoken to Hon Warren Truss, the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, to keep him informed of the situation and will be meeting with him shortly to elicit support from the Federal Government. He is working closely with key sectors of the agribusiness community and his ministerial colleagues to ensure delivery of the extra needs that the rural community will be facing in the next few months.

Key government agencies with responsibilities for servicing rural communities are also working together to ensure an appropriate response. Current assistance that is available includes: Workshop and information kits for farmers on options for managing risk and financial planning; financial support for business management; reduction in crop and seed royalty payments by growers; stamp duty concessions to primary producers to assist in refinancing farm loans; access to the latest crop and seasonal condition information on CropLine; this Government has contributed towards a national feasibility study to develop a national multi-risk crop insurance scheme; support for the rural land sales liaison committee for use by farmers and financiers; increasing the network of rural financial counsellors and family support counsellors across the State; farmer access to a new start allowance under the Federal Government's Farm Help Program; development of a rural community health advisory service; and a large contribution of money and manpower to assist in locust control.

The minister has appointed a seasonal advisory committee with broad rural representation. This committee met for the first time yesterday, Monday 16 October. The committee will consider all proposals put forward by farming groups and rural organisations.

In response to what is becoming an increasingly bleak seasonal situation, it is important to note that this is only the starting point from which the Government can and will deliver relevant assistance.