

NATIONAL RURAL ADVISORY COUNCIL, REPORT ON AREAS DECLARED EXCEPTIONAL

100. Hon JON FORD to the Minister for Agriculture:

I refer to the federal Government's refusal to help farmers in drought-hit areas by rejecting the application to extend the area declared under exceptional circumstances.

- (1) Does the minister have a copy of the report of the National Rural Advisory Council?
- (2) Does the NRAC report lend any credence to the notion that the application to extend the area declared under exceptional circumstances was an ambit claim as suggested by some members of the Opposition?
- (3) Will the minister table a copy of the NRAC report to enable Western Australian farmers to make their own judgment?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question..

- (1)-(3) Yesterday, I finally received an official copy of the report of the National Rural Advisory Council. The date on that report is 30 April 2001. It arrived here from Canberra yesterday. However, late last Friday afternoon I received a facsimile of the report from Senator Winston Crane. The delay in receiving this report has been in line with my experience of the total lack of cooperation from my federal government counterpart throughout most of the exceptional circumstances process.

My reading of the conclusions of the NRAC report does not give any substance whatsoever to the suggestion that our application to extend the declared exceptional circumstances area was an ambit claim; rather, it appears that the NRAC recognised that the greater area had been affected by a rare and severe event in the 2000 drought, but disputed whether other seasonally adverse conditions, such as the 1999 and 1998 frosts, were rare and severe on a regional basis. Nowhere in the NRAC report does it say that the Western Australian EC2 application was an ambit claim as was espoused by the Opposition and, in particular, by the member for Merredin when commenting on his constituents in the shire of Narembeen, which is within the electorate of Merredin.

Hon M.J. Criddle: So the criteria are wrong, are they?

Hon KIM CHANCE: Let us get to the criteria. I will table a copy of the NRAC report. It is very important that members read that report.

Hon M.J. Criddle interjected.

Hon KIM CHANCE: I am sorry; I cannot quite hear the member.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The Leader of the House will not invite supplementary questions of his own volition.

Hon KIM CHANCE: What a shame! Many farmers will justifiably feel extreme disappointment at National Party members - both federal and state - and dissatisfaction with the report's conclusion.

Hon M.J. Criddle: That's rubbish.

Hon KIM CHANCE: It seems that the conclusion of the report is not, in large part, supported by much of the report's substance. The National Rural Advisory Council has relied on a narrow interpretation of the rarity and severity of the 1998 frost event. Effectively, the NRAC and the federal minister have decided that the 1998 frost was not rare or unusual -

Hon M.J. Criddle: You should stop playing politics with farmers.

Hon Ken Travers: What about your senate candidate?

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon KIM CHANCE: I will go through that again because it is important for members to understand. The NRAC and the federal minister have decided that the 1998 frost event was not rare or unusual, but that the 1999 frost event was rare and unusual. That is what it comes down to. Hon Murray Criddle's National Party colleagues have accused the Western Australian Government of making an ambit claim. His National Party colleague the federal minister has acted in a biased manner against farmers in this State. Hon Murray Criddle knows that.

Hon M.J. Criddle: I know the criteria well.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon KIM CHANCE: I now table the paper.

[See paper No 362.]