

DROUGHT - NORTHERN WHEATBELT

710. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

The minister would be well aware of the conditions in the northern wheatbelt.

- (1) Has the minister considered providing further funding for special projects in the areas that are affected by the expanded drought?
- (2) Has any consideration been given to implementing a longer-term strategy in those areas?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

Mr President -

Hon Helen Morton: Put it on notice!

Hon KIM CHANCE: Now, now!

I thank Hon Murray Criddle for his question.

- (1) Yes. The question of bringing forward projects that have been planned has been given consideration. Indeed, an attempt was made to do that, albeit not very successfully, last year. A project was identified, but it was actually too far away and, frankly, too large for it to be suitable for the purposes for which it was intended. That is, I think, the best way that we can provide assistance to people who are impacted by the drought, because not only does it enable farmers to work close to home, but also it enables farmers who have the capital equipment to utilise some of that equipment that would otherwise be idle during a drought period. I am working on that matter most particularly with my colleagues the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure and the Minister for Water Resources, because they are the ministers whose agencies are most likely to be able to provide that sort of assistance. Similarly, I will be seeking from local government authorities advice on projects in their own areas that they know are coming forward and that may be suitable for that purpose, because I believe it will help if local governments and state agencies can cooperate in these areas. There is considerable enthusiasm among my colleagues for that process to be carried through.
- (2) Is it a part of the longer term form of assistance that I have previously spoken about in relation to the state's role in drought assistance? Yes, it could be, but it is not precisely what I had in mind. What I had in mind on that occasion was more agronomic issues. We still have a great deal to learn about how to maximise cropping performance in low-rainfall events so that we can at least attempt to define some of the agronomic issues, which might provide a degree of assurance against lower rainfall. In this instance I refer, particularly, to issues such as stubble retention, but also to wide-row seeding, inter-row spraying and tramlining, on all of which work has begun, and the member would be aware of some of that work particularly in Tardun and Pindar. That is more what I had in mind, but there is absolutely no reason that the process of bringing forward public works projects cannot be a part of the longer term answer.