

WHEATBELT DECLARED ANIMALS GROUP AND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, IMPASSE

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

The latest *Countryman* states -

MEMBERS of the eastern Wheatbelt Declared Animals Group (DAG) are refusing to indemnify the Department of Agriculture against public liability claims.

This has created a further impasse between local shires, farmer groups and government departments over wild dog control strategies.

Has the minister done anything to resolve that impasse?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank Hon Murray Criddle for his question and for advising me just prior to question time that he would be asking it.

It seems as though the writer of the article has somewhat misunderstood the facts. Declared animal groups are partnership groups established between local farmers and pastoralists with other groups including the State Government and, in some instances, local government. I understand that those groups have an issue about obtaining public liability policy cover for their doggers. Obviously, the kind of work that doggers do requires public liability insurance. In this day and age, that can be difficult to obtain and it may come at a very high cost.

This issue was first raised with me in discussion with pastoralists at Leinster Downs station a couple of months ago, and the Government has offered to look at the question to determine whether it could be a part of the solution. We have been very active in dealing with this question. We have looked at three alternatives. They include the use of the new community insurance fund initiative by the Gallop Labor Government, an option through RiskCover and cover through the Department of Agriculture's own liability policy.

The community insurance fund is available for non-profit groups that are required to be incorporated. Indeed, I think all declared animal groups are unincorporated and, generally, do not have a great deal of interest in becoming incorporated. However, I note that some local governments are partners in declared animal groups and have chosen to include their doggers under the local government authority's own public liability policy. I am aware that is the case with declared animal groups in both the Shires of Esperance and Ravensthorpe. The RiskCover option requires further development and we are working on that possibility. The inclusion of the doggers under the Department of Agriculture's own public liability policy does not appear to be an option at this stage, because it is a policy for Department of Agriculture employees only, although doggers could be brought under that scheme were the declared animal group to choose to make them employees of the Department of Agriculture. Another possibility, which I have not yet mentioned, is that the Department of Agriculture could arrange for general public cover in a group sense for each of the declared animal groups.

I think we are not too far away from a resolution of this matter. However, given that the matter was raised with me only a couple of months ago and the Government took the initiative to resolve the question, I feel sure that we will find an answer. It is an important question. Unincorporated groups and small businesses run into difficulties when they seek to obtain public liability cover, as it is getting increasingly expensive and increasingly hard to get. We do not want this matter to disable declared animal groups. We are focused on finding a solution and I am confident that we will.