

CLOUD SEEDING - RAIN ENHANCEMENT

**Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:**

Given the call by local community members in the northern agricultural region for research to be undertaken in Geraldton on cloud seeding and rain enhancement using silver iodide and other methods, will the government make a commitment to fund this local research?

**Hon KIM CHANCE replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of this question. Cloud seeding was undertaken in the northern agricultural area in 1977-78 in response to drought conditions. Very few clouds suitable for seeding were encountered during that period. When suitable clouds were present, they were already producing rain. This exercise was not an experiment and no conclusions could be reached as to the success or otherwise. Subsequent to this exercise, a study of cloud conditions in the northern area was undertaken by Murdoch University. That study concluded that there were occasions when clouds suitable for seeding existed. These clouds were more prevalent during good seasons than during drought periods. Droughts in the northern agricultural region are the result of major shifts in the weather patterns approaching Western Australia. During drought periods the rain-bearing systems move south and the northern agricultural region misses out on clouds and, therefore, rain. Cloud seeding is practised routinely in some areas of the world, including the west coast of Tasmania. Silver iodide is the normal seeding agent, and it requires certain cloud types to be effective. Past experience and analysis indicate that these cloud types are not prevalent in the northern areas during drought. Unless we can be shown that there have been significant advances in cloud seeding technology during drought periods, the government would be most reluctant to fund further studies.

I will very briefly add to that answer. There is a reference in the answer to cloud seeding in western Tasmania, and I know that that has been going on for a long time - possibly a decade. Western Tasmania is essentially not an agricultural area, but a very important catchment area, because virtually all of Tasmania's electricity is generated by the water caught in the dams in what is normally a high and very reliable rainfall area. Notwithstanding the cloud seeding, which has been going on for some years, water levels in western Tasmanian dams last summer fell to what was possibly their lowest level ever. I think the Great Lakes were down to between 11 and 17 per cent of their usual capacity.

**Hon Murray Criddle:** That has happened before.

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** Yes, but it indicates that if the weather cycles do not bring rain, and the clouds are not there, no amount of cloud seeding will create rainfall. I will leave that aside, because that is about the technology, and I am not an expert on the technology. It also indicates to me that, even if we were able to seed clouds, there are reasons for which we would not seed clouds.

**Hon Murray Criddle:** That is why we want research done.

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** Yes. I am concerned because it is possible that we could seed clouds that come over Perth - clearly seedable clouds pass over Perth almost every year. If our cloud seeding caused very high rainfall between the coast and, say, Brookton, would the rain that would normally have fallen at Kulin from that weather system still fall, or would we have wrung out the available moisture between here and Brookton?

**Hon Murray Criddle:** You are asking the questions that I want the research to answer.

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** That is fair enough. That is something that we might be able to learn from the 10-year history of Tasmania's cloud seeding. How far in does the rain go? If we were able to interfere, would we interfere? Could we not, by interfering, face litigation from the Brookton farmer who was flooded out and the Kulin farmer who did not get any rain?