

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE

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

- (1) How many farmers have taken up the state's drought assistance package?
- (2) What other state responses are proposed?
- (3) Will the state fund infrastructure projects, such as the east Ogilvie Road and Tenindewa Road, bearing in mind that from a local government point of view they have been very successful in employing local truck drivers etc?
- (4) Will the government consider including small businesses in its drought assistance package?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank Hon Murray Criddle for some notice of this question.

- (1) At this stage not many farmers have taken up the state's drought assistance package. I have not received precise figures, but there have been a number of inquiries. Traditionally there is a lag time between when people make inquiries and when they take up the offer. I cannot provide the member with the exact number. If Hon Murray Criddle asked this question tomorrow, I might be able to provide more accurate figures. I know that a low number have taken up the offer. I have just received a note that 12 out of the 14 applications received have been approved, and one is still being considered.
- (2) Yesterday the Chairman of the Dry Seasons Advisory Committee, Dexter Davies, put forward a recommendation, which I have approved, to add a further three shires to the 12, I think, that are already subject to the dry seasons assistance scheme.
- (3)-(4) The road issue flows into the question of small businesses, because it allows us to make work available to small businesses. The most effective way we can help communities - I refer to farmers as part of a community - is by bringing forward public works, such as road construction, although the issue is not confined to roads. That will enable contractors and farmers, whose machinery would otherwise be sitting idle, to carry out works of that nature. Some local government and, I think, federal government projects have been brought forward, although in quite small components. The state government has brought forward a \$4 million road project, which is one of the feeder roads into Indian Ocean Drive. That \$4 million will contribute in a major way to creating economic endeavour in the area and will get money moving around. It was one of the decisions that cabinet made when it first decided to provide funding for the dry seasons response. So far we have been able to bring forward \$4 million worth of roadworks. I would like to be able to do a lot more.

Hon Murray Criddle: I ask the minister to look into the two roads that I mentioned.

Hon KIM CHANCE: I would be happy to do that. I will discuss that with the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure in the hope that contracts have not already been let. The member understands that the matter is in the hands of the Commissioner of Main Roads. He must advise whether those works are subject to this kind of arrangement and whether the contracts have already been let. This is something that the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure took up eagerly and enthusiastically. Indeed, once I had discussed this issue with the minister, and after the cabinet decision, she met with the Commissioner of Main Roads the next day to progress the issue. I am hoping that other ministers will pick up that initiative, because it is a very good one.