

FARMBIS WESTERN AUSTRALIA

1074. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

I refer to the minister's statement today about the FarmBis program. I will leave out the political side of the question, because the important thing is that people get money for their businesses. FarmBis Western Australia has responded to an immediate need of many farmers by providing workshops that have assisted in training farmers to manage the impact of the dry season. Incredibly, the minister admitted in his statement today that he had not advanced the FarmBis program because of drought. Federal money has now been allocated to the eastern States where the drought has been the worst - in fact, at the very time when money would have been of most use to businesses in Western Australia. Will the minister now advertise the program in an endeavour to claw back the funds for this worthwhile initiative?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I am happy to respond to that question, but it contained a fault in that it implied I admitting something. I assure the member that I have admitted nothing. Let us be absolutely certain about what happened here. I would have thought that having cleared up this matter in May, the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry would not have raised this issue again in knowledge of the facts but without acknowledging those facts; that is, he knew the truth, but he refused to state the truth. The fact is that FarmBis is a demand-driven program. Money comes out of FarmBis when people call for the services of FarmBis. We have had three years of drought. Farmers have been concerned about trying to keep alive, not about self-education.

Hon Murray Criddle: What about those in the eastern States?

Hon KIM CHANCE: I do not know the expenditure level in the eastern States. I am aware the program needed topping up, but I suggest that the initial base there may have been very low. I do not know why the eastern States farmers have been able to take up FarmBis. I assure the member that nothing has changed in Western Australia in terms of FarmBis since Hon Murray Criddle was in government. All the parameters are the same, but the demand has not been there because we have had a drought. I do not know how many times I must state that. However, for the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to make the cheap point - that is, kicking Western Australian farmers affected by drought - ignores the actions of his Government. What did the Commonwealth Government do with the FarmBis program in 2001? It withdrew \$41 million.