

WILD DOGS

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

Given the recent reports about severe dog attacks in the pastoral and adjoining agricultural land areas -

- (1) What programs are in place to combat this increasing problem?
- (2) What funding has been made available to immediately implement an adequate response to overcome further stock losses?
- (3) Who will be responsible for the management of that program?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank the member for the question and for telling me about it a little while ago.

- (1)-(3) The answer could be lengthy; I will try to shorten it as much as I can. I need to explain a little of the history of this issue. An industry review was carried out in 2004 to consider the problem of an explosion in dog numbers. It seems to be a cyclical problem that occurs about every 30 years; nonetheless, it is a serious problem. This situation is quite unlike the outbreak of dog numbers in the 1970s in that there is now a greater infusion of domestic dogs with the Australian native dog. That has created a problem of its own in that dogs are now roaming in larger packs as a result of the cross-breed dogs not having the alpha male behaviour of dingoes. The recommendations of that review committee are being implemented at both the state and local level. At the state level, the Wild Dog Management Advisory Committee was formed, and it comprises representatives from industry, community and government. It developed the Western Australian Wild Dog Management Strategy 2005, which provides for the future direction on management and research. At the local level, as the honourable member would be aware, control is carried out by landholders - this is primarily an issue for landholders - who work together through the zone control authorities who, in turn, feed into the Agriculture Protection Board. That is the landholder-state government interface. We cooperate through the dollar-for-dollar arrangements that fund the declared animal groups; that is, the state government matches landholder contributions. We have also worked on training landholders. In agricultural areas in particular the declared animal groups are working together.

We also have an integrated wild dog management program, which coordinates aerial baiting and ground baiting programs. The funds that are available break down into two different areas of regional operations. The first of these numbers are all drawn directly from the consolidated fund: regional operation, \$214 000; wild dog research, \$180 000; training programs for landholders, \$50 000; and allocations to agriculture landholder groups, \$77 000. That is a total of \$521 000. The plan for 2006-07 is to maintain the current Department of Agriculture and Food programs and to invest a further \$50 000 through the FarmBis program to assist the zone control authorities to develop sound, long-term wild dog management strategies in each of the five rangeland zones. Additional to that \$521 000 is the matched dollar-for-dollar rates that are raised through the declared plants and animals control fund and zone control authority system, which is used for the aerial baiting and for the group doggers in the pastoral zone, as opposed to the agricultural zone. Total CF allocation to wild dog management through this scheme is \$556 000. The total CF allocation for 2005-06 is \$1 067 502. The zone control authorities have indicated that similar or slightly increased levels of expenditure are planned for 2006-07.

So far all my comments have related to the direct responsibilities of landholders and the state government for privately managed land. A separate issue, of course, is dogs that are on public land. A combined submission from the Department of Agriculture and Food and the Department of Environment for additional funding in the budget for the control of declared species of publicly managed lands was successful. That was the line item that we discussed in the estimates hearing of \$16 million over the next two years. The Minister for the Environment is yet to make a determination on the way those funds are to be split. However, given the government's strong support for the budget bid by the Department of Environment, we are hopeful that a significant amount of that funding will go into dog control.

A second bait trial is being conducted for Probait, which is a sausage-style bait. If the trial testing of Probait proves successful, it will dramatically relieve the pressure on the supply of meat for large-scale baiting. One of the limitations on getting people on the ground was an absence of trained doggers. As I have said in this place previously, we have instituted the first certified training scheme for vertebrate pest species in Australia, as far as I know. Two of those schools have been run. Four new doggers recently graduated and are currently in employment. We are now starting to meet the demand that has been created to get more doggers on the ground.

