

LOCUST PLAGUE, EFFECT ON PRIMARY PRODUCTION

321. Hon CHRISTINE SHARP to the minister representing the Minister for Primary Industry:

Given the estimated loss of \$200m to primary producers in this State from the impending locusts plague, I ask -

- (1) How many extra staff have been or will be employed to work specifically on the locust plague?
- (2) If none, why not?

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE replied:

- (1) The estimate of \$200m to which the member referred was made by AgWest as an indication of the potential impact of locusts if no coordinated response to the outbreak were implemented. AgWest established a locust task force on 26 June 2000 to prepare and implement a response plan to address the predicted locust outbreak. The implementation of this plan primarily uses the expertise of AgWest staff. Over 500 AgWest staff have been specifically trained in procedures associated with monitoring, communication and coordination of targeted control work. In view of the redeployment of trained officers, no extra staff have been employed.
- (2) AgWest considers the redeployment of current staff to be the most effective and efficient means of managing the range of responsibilities associated with the locust outbreak. Redeployment of existing staff, rather than employment of additional staff, has also enabled the direction of more funding to insecticide supply and application of direct benefit to land-holders. AgWest staff are working directly with over 3 000 land-holders in affected areas to ensure effective monitoring of locust hatchings and densities and to target control operations. In addition, AgWest has distributed 30 000 copies of a land-holder information package that sets out the detail of the Government's program, and provides advice to land-holders to support their own control programs.