

NORTHERN EMU BARRIER FENCE

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

I have three questions on notice to the parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure but I understand none of the answers is available. I ask the Minister for Agriculture to assure me that he will follow up the issue of the northern emu barrier fence. I have received communication today indicating that up to 500 emus are present on some farms. They are attacking the crops and the issue needs immediate attention. The minister knows I have been involved with this issue before.

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank the member for this question. I have followed up the matter. My most recent advice is that there has been only one breach by a large number of birds. However, the situation may have been superseded by events over the past few days. One breach allowed an estimated 600 birds to cross the emu-proof fence. The breach occurred as a result of the birds being startled by an unauthorised vehicle. Other breaches may have occurred. I have received regular reports before and since my meeting with the northern barrier fence committee in Mullewa. As recently as this morning, I met with representatives from the southern barrier fence committee. It seems apparent that there is also pressure on that fence as birds are moving in from the Lake Johnston area. As the member would be aware, the southern barrier fence terminates at a property near the Oldfield River. There are issues of concern. At its next meeting in a few days, the Agriculture Protection Board will discuss a proposition to erect an open trap system to contain birds in that area. My office will communicate with the Agriculture Protection Board through the Department of Agriculture about the issues raised by the southern barrier fence committee. I remain committed to ensuring that the northern barrier fence is able to provide adequate protection. Obviously, there are budget limitations. The issues discussed at Mullewa relate to a long-term fix. The representatives at the meeting believe that the only way the fence can withstand the pressures - which occur in cycles of varying severity - is through the establishment of a 14-line ring lock fence. That is an issue on which the APB is yet to agree. It has established a high standard of fencing; however, it is less than a 14-line ring lock fence.

The best I can do at present is to assure the member that there are regular patrols and repairs of the northern barrier fence. We will find some way of keeping the birds moving so that they do not congregate in large numbers at problem points. The southern barrier fence requires a combination of closed traps and open traps, and possibly contracts to destroy birds as they are collected in closed traps. That is the issue I will discuss with the APB. The problems with the southern barrier fence are different as there is a lower number of birds. Approximately a third of the number of birds will attack the southern barrier fence.

Hon Murray Criddle: There are about 11 000 birds.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! This is not a debate.

Hon KIM CHANCE: We are trying to keep on top of the problem although we have limited funds. Representatives of the Western Australian Farmers Federation accompanied the southern barrier fence committee today in looking for long-term solutions to what is a very distressing and expensive problem for farmers affected by bird incursions through or around the fence.