

ROAD TRAIN PERMITS, AGRICULTURAL AREAS

312. Hon M.J. CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

During my travels throughout the agricultural regions, I have picked up on a number of issues concerning road trains not being allowed to travel in certain areas. The issue of the Jarrahdale Road freight adds about 10 per cent to the cost of freighting produce to the port. There was to be a trial involving travel to Esperance, which would have saved \$200 000. A number of road projects in agricultural areas will apparently not go ahead.

I refer to the Government's announcement of the \$3.85 million extension of the State's adverse seasonal conditions package for drought-affected people.

- (1) When will this be available?
- (2) How many applications have been received?
- (3) How many people have received assistance?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank the member for the question. I am just having a little trouble relating the first half of the question to the second half.

Hon M.J. Criddle: The point is that the Government has come up with those extra costs for the freight and also for other penalties on country producers.

Hon KIM CHANCE: Yes.

- (1)-(3) The history of this package goes back to the former Government's creation of a state assistance package of \$10.66 million, plus an additional \$1 million from the Office of Water Regulation. Essentially, it was to assist farmers over the interim period, until such time as more permanent arrangements could be put in place in conjunction with the Commonwealth. Under the old scheme, the package included an allocation of \$3.75 million for livestock management support. Those funds were allocated to cover applicants up until today, 31 July 2001. Unfortunately, those funds ran out in early May. An additional \$1.28 million was paid in to top up that fund, although more was needed from other departmental sources to meet the demand on the original fund. The current package, which was announced recently, extends the scheme until 31 August. It is proposed that further funds will be drawn down to meet demand from that.

To extend the assistance measures, state funds to the extent of \$4.6 million will be used. I know that the figure of \$3.85 million has been used widely. That amount of \$3.85 million is for a continuation of assistance measures for agistment, stock feed, feedlot construction and infrastructure, and securing water sources. A further \$750 000 will be paid in additional support measures under the package. They include family and financial counselling, business exit advice, farm business advice and skills development. The package, therefore, increases to \$4.6 million. It is intended that that additional \$4.6 million will be paid under criteria slightly different from those used for the original scheme that terminates today. However, essentially, the only change is that applicants under the current scheme will be able to bring the impact of the 2001 season into the criteria, because the criteria that terminate today allowed for only the 1998, 1999 and 2000 years to be used as qualifications. Therefore, although the current scheme is only an extension of the scheme that terminates today, the qualifying criteria go out one year.

The sum of money has been increased slightly from \$5 000 per applicant to \$6 000 per applicant. It is available to anybody in the State who meets the criteria. People do not have to be in the exceptional circumstances area.

Hon M.J. Criddle: Can they reapply?

Hon KIM CHANCE: Reapplications are accepted. However, when a farmer has already drawn down the full \$5 000, he can reapply only to take it up to \$6 000. The real intent was to make that scheme available to those farmers who had not previously been able to submit an application. They were principally those farmers in the northern agricultural area. Due to the Prime Minister's recent announcement, the Government is hopeful that the commonwealth-state exceptional circumstances provisions will now be able to pick up where this scheme left off, although the Government has not discounted the possibility that it may need to seek more funds to fill the gap between the start of the commonwealth-state scheme and the termination of the existing state scheme.