

LIVE EXPORT — FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POLICY — MEAT INDUSTRY CONFIDENCE

747. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Premier:

Before I ask my question, I acknowledge Steven Bolt, a director of the Livestock Collective, who is in the gallery.

I refer to recent calls by the Nationals WA and the Liberal Party for crisis talks between the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and sheep producers, buyers and processors about the loss of confidence and falling sheep prices due to Labor's looming live export ban. Given the recent reports of producers giving up —

The SPEAKER: Sorry, I am taking a point of order.

Point of Order

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I draw your attention, Madam Speaker, to standing order 77(1), which, in part, states that a question shall not contain an opinion. The member has just included an opinion about the price of lamb, and that would seem to be directly contrary to the standing orders.

The SPEAKER: I will give the member for Roe the opportunity to ask the question. That standing order is correct. There have probably been numerous questions over a period of years that have contained opinions. The member is right in saying that that is in our standing orders. I have shown leniency, as have some former Speakers. I will listen very intently to the rest of the question but, at this stage, I am going to allow it on this occasion.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Given the recent reports of producers giving away up to 600 sheep and pens of sheep at the saleyards being of no commercial value, I ask —

- (1) Will the Premier instruct the Minister for Agriculture and Food to front up and hold talks with producers, rather than passing them off to the DPIRD website?
- (2) What does the Premier say to those in the industry, such as Mr Bolt, who are bitterly disappointed with the lack of support and leadership shown by him and his agriculture minister?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question. I acknowledge all our primary producers in Western Australia, who, from time to time, do it tough because of the nature of the industry they work in and the climate, which is rapidly changing and impacts on their businesses. I appreciate that it is a difficult time for our sheep producers. The WA market price for sheep peaked in 2019 and 2021 due to demand over east as a result of the devastating droughts. Since then, there has been a decline across Australia from the strong prices seen for lamb in recent years. The most recent price drop occurred due to Victorian sheep producers rapidly destocking as a result of the El Nino weather prediction for the east coast and the potential for drought. I read just yesterday an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* about the impact of the drop in sheep prices in New South Wales. I observe that neither Victoria nor New South Wales undertake any live sheep exports—that is almost solely done from Western Australia.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr R.H. COOK: The poor seasonal conditions, particularly in the north and north east wheatbelt, have further impacted farmers. Despite this, live sheep export numbers from Western Australia in 2022–23 were considerably higher than in the previous two years. DPIRD continues to work closely with all sectors of the rural community and is focusing on distributing information to industry, with a primary focus on mental health, land condition and animal welfare. DPIRD recently stood-up its dry season taskforce and is engaging with the Water Corporation to ensure that it plans for the drier-than-average, long-term forecasts ahead. The Minister for Agriculture and Food and DPIRD recently met with key industry leaders to help prepare for emerging issues facing the state's agriculture and livestock sectors.

A range of issues impact our primary industries at all times. What we need is an agriculture minister who is engaged, working with the industry and making sure that we utilise the services of our department to support that industry as we move forward, and that is exactly what we are doing.