

SKELETON WEED COMMITTEE

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

I refer to yesterday's ministerial statement in which the minister suggested that a skeleton weed committee be formed, mostly of grain growers, to provide strong industry input into planning the revised program and reviewing the operations.

- (1) Will the committee control the funds raised in the skeleton weed eradication trust fund?
- (2) What control methods does the minister envisage in -
 - (a) badly infested areas;
 - (b) lightly infested areas; and
 - (c) skeleton weed-free areas?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank Hon Murray Criddle for giving me brief notice of this question; however, that notice was helpful.

- (1) Until legislation is changed, the concept of a grower-controlled body having actual rather than de facto financial control over the distribution of funds raises a number of complex legal issues. As I indicated in my statement yesterday, grain growers will form the majority of the new skeleton weed committee, which will provide strong input into planning the new process. This in itself will provide farmers with greater ownership of operational matters.
- (2) Operational control methods will be a matter for the skeleton weed committee, the Agriculture Protection Board and the local control committees. However, as the question seeks only my vision of the three scenarios, I expect the following actions -
 - (a) In heavily infested areas I expect there to be control and suppression of skeleton weed in the cropping phase, close attention to new satellite outbreaks and the eradication of new infestations. Control and eradication will be consistent with the weed's continuing status as a declared plant. It is in this classification that I would expect the development of new chemicals or chemical mixes to be most beneficial. However, what is important in the heavily infested areas is that we - to use a phrase - try to put a fence around those infestations and control their further spread.
 - (b) Eradication will continue to be the main focus of the program in lightly infested areas. I anticipate that the ongoing development of automatic detection technology may be of the highest value in these areas. This is simply a vision statement and not necessarily the decision that will be arrived at.
 - (c) I hope that in skeleton weed-free areas the refocus program will encourage a much higher level of farmer surveillance of their properties. There is no doubt that cost-effective and total eradication technology can be implemented if new infestations are reported early and dealt with thoroughly. It is in this area in particular that the Government probably has the most work to do. Areas which are deemed to be free from infestation need to be the ones in which farmers have the highest priority to protect what is, after all, their own asset. The Government will be ready to provide total elimination measures whenever skeleton weed finds are reported in areas that were previously thought to be skeleton weed free.