

DESIGN FOR COMFORT LABORATORY PROJECT — FUNDING

4853. Mr M.P. Murray to the Minister for Agriculture and Food

In relation to the Design for Comfort Laboratory, a joint research project between the Department of Agriculture and Food and Curtin University, and given that rumours abounded in September 2010 that funding would be cut to the project, I ask:

- (a) has funding past 30 June 2011 been finalised to keep this innovative program operational; and
 - (i) if not, why not;
- (b) has the Minister recently meet with wool growers, designers and retailers involved in the project;
- (c) does the Minister recognise the significant relationship which has developed between growers of Western Australia superfine wool and design teams that help produce world class fabrics; and
- (d) is the Minister aware that the wool and fashion industry are adamant that this program continues?

Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:

- (a) The final research project funded by the Sheep Cooperative Research Centre (Sheep CRC) is scheduled for completion by 30 June 2011 and all commitments to this project will be met. Discussions with all partners in the Design for Comfort Laboratory project, including AWI, an industry funded body, have confirmed they do not view further investment as a priority.

The Department of Agriculture and Food (the department) believes the Garment Laboratory can become a private business enterprise based on connecting farmers with commercial opportunities, and laboratory testing on a fee-for-service basis. Confidential discussions have been held with interested parties, and the department is preparing to call for Expressions of Interest from the private sector to take over responsibility for the plant, equipment and/or staff in 2011/12. The department is confident new commercial arrangements will be in place before 30 June 2011.

- (b) The Minister met formally with representatives of WAFarmers on 11 November 2010 and the future of the Garment Laboratory was one of the topics addressed. The Minister has responded to letters from other industry bodies on the same topic.
- (c) The Minister recognises linkages that have developed along the supply chain during the project, and the Minister is confident that these linkages can continue should the Garment Laboratory operate commercially.
- (d) The Minister is aware some sections of the wool and fashion industries would like the Garment Laboratory to continue operating. However, neither the wool industry nor the fashion industry have indicated any serious interest in partnering with the State Government to fund the Garment Laboratory beyond June 2011. Some individual business parties have expressed interest and the department has pursued commercialisation as a way of ensuring industry still has access to the work the Garment Laboratory does without direct investment from the State Government.