

LOCUST CONTROL MEASURES, MERREDIN

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

While I was driving around the Merredin electorate the other day, I could not help but notice the enormous number of locusts on the roads in some areas.

Hon Ken Travers: They were members of the Liberal Party.

Hon M.J. CRIDDLE: Hon Ken Travers should be aware that locusts are a very serious problem in Western Australia. They have a habit of laying eggs one year, which result in a huge problem the following year. Is the minister satisfied with the control measures, and is he satisfied that they will be effective next year?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank Hon Murray Criddle for a very serious question. The methodology used in the locust campaign over the past two years has been extremely successful. Just the other night it won the public sector management award for the outstanding achievement of the year. Notwithstanding the extensive spraying program, which this year occurred over approximately 140 000 hectares, locusts will always be a problem. Some locusts inevitably go on the wing, as they are doing now, late in the season. However, it is too late for the locusts to cause crop or pasture damage because crops and pastures have dried off.

Some public amenity issues arise, such as blocked radiators from time to time and some very splattered windscreens, which I have experienced over the past few weeks. When they get into the grain samples they create a problem. The cost to farmers of controlling the outbreaks that are outside the priority control areas, which are controlled by the Department of Agriculture, is extremely high. Typically, the department controls outbreak areas in which locust numbers are as high as 2 000 per square metre. If we multiply 2 000 by 10 000 square metres per hectare by 140 000 hectares, it will give members some idea of the massive scale of the issue.

Hon Peter Foss: I think we had to provide an extra \$10 million the year before last.

Hon KIM CHANCE: Indeed. A lot of the chemical, for example, was carried over into this year as well, because there was surplus chemical. Compared with last year's outbreak, the control program covers about a quarter of the area, I understand. The program was carried out on the same parameters as last year's program. I believe it has been effective. However, the onset of summer rain raises some difficulties, particularly if that summer rain is to continue. It is likely that there will be a carryover into next year from eggs laid now, just as last year there was a carryover that led to the current infestation.

It is a serious problem. However, I take members back a decade to 1990 when there was no control of the type that we have now, and swarms of pre-flight locusts went through the wheatbelt and caused massive damage. The indication of the success of the program used last year and this year is that that did not happen, other than in localised areas where the concentrations were heavy. That was the case in the Shires of Mukinbudin and Mount Marshall particularly. However, they were pretty much knocked on the head. It is a good program, but obviously some issues need refining. This year we refined issues that were shown to be a problem last year. Principally, the spraying was slightly earlier.