

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD - WEATHER FORECASTING

**419. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:**

Bearing in mind the amount of money that has been spent on the Department of Agriculture and Food's attempt to improve weather forecasting in Western Australia, I am concerned that the budget for that program may well be cut. What is the government's intention for that funding?

**Hon KIM CHANCE replied:**

I thank Hon Murray Criddle for the question. However, the question confuses me somewhat, because I am not anticipating any cuts in the department's budget.

**Hon Murray Criddle:** I am concerned that there may be a perception, even if it is not a reality, that there will be a cut, because the forecasting in recent times has been anything but accurate.

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** That is what I thought might have been behind the question! In point of fact, the long-range forecasting that is being pioneered by the Department of Agriculture and Food, among others - we have partners in this project, in particular the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation - has been reasonably accurate. This year was regarded as a major test of the methodology. They have been pioneering that new methodology. I am certainly not losing confidence in the methodology. However, as is the case with any forecasting system, we have factors to overcome to ensure that we are basing our predictive models upon the correct scientific inputs. While I thought we were getting there, certainly this winter is challenging our assumptions. Can I say also that while the predictive modelling that we are using is different from that used by other long-term forecasters, the other long-term forecasters were basically in agreement with us about the likelihood of the south west coast winter being at least average. Indeed, those same forecasters are still saying that, even though they are using different methodology. Today is 6 June. The opportunity for those forecasts to still be correct remains live as far as I am concerned.

I assure Hon Murray Criddle that I have not lost confidence in the work that is being done. It is pioneering work and, yes, sometimes with pioneering work we do not get it all right the first time. However, it is very important work to persevere with and to try to get right. If we have not got it right at this stage, I am still keen to continue funding those operations. I believe that we can do nothing about influencing the weather at least in the intermediate or short-term outlook because the immediate future is pretty much set in place by our actions of 20 or 30 years ago. That includes the issues associated with climate change, because no matter what we do about climate change, we can influence only the long-term outlook. Although we may not be able to influence the outcome of climate immediately for agriculture, and indeed other industry sectors, it would be an enormous economic advantage to know within reasonable parameters of certainty what will be the outcome of climate. I have said before, and I believe it to this day, that if we were able to achieve that outcome, it would be the single biggest contribution that government would ever make to agriculture. That presumes that we are able to do it and it presumes that it is possible to be done at all; however, it is something that I want to keep chasing for a good while yet and I do not intend to cut funds for that research.