

STARLING ERADICATION PROGRAM, ESPERANCE

1515. Mr M.P. Murray to the Minister for Agriculture and Food

In reference to biosecurity programs across the State which have been affected by cuts in this year's budget, I ask the Minister about the Starling Surveillance and Eradication Program run through the Esperance Office of the Department of Environment and Conservation:

- (a) how many full time equivalent staff were employed in 2007–2008 on the Starling Eradication Program in Esperance;
- (b) how many full time equivalent staff are currently employed in the Esperance Office on the Starling Eradication Program at this time; and
- (c) can the Minister give assurances that the funding cuts to the Starling Program will ensure the continued surveillance and monitoring of the pest?

Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:

The baseline biosecurity budget has increased from \$27.4 million to \$28.6 million from 2008-09 to 2009-2010, with an additional \$5 million received from fees and charges and \$3 million from internal allocations within the department.

- (a) In the 2007-2008 year there were 20.2 full time equivalent (FTE) staff allocated to starling management, 11.62 were located at Esperance. The Esperance work force was enhanced by an indigenous team undertaking surveillance of starlings (6 FTEs).
- (b) In the 2009-2010 year there are 8.5 full time equivalent staff allocated to starling management. Five Biosecurity officers are located at Esperance (3 FTEs) and three officers are based at Eucla (3 FTEs), preventing starlings coming into Western Australia. Because the management of starlings is most effective when they are breeding, the Esperance staff is supplemented by Biosecurity officers (2.5 FTEs) from the southern agricultural region (2 officers), the southwest agricultural region (3 officers) and the metropolitan region (1 officer). This occurs on an ongoing basis between September and April. The border protection at Eucla continues year round.
- (c) The Government has approved an additional \$400 000 from the Natural Resource Management budget for the Starling Eradication Program, taking the total commitment to \$1.9 million for 2009-10. This additional funding will allow the control and surveillance work to be enhanced at the appropriate times by more Biosecurity officers from the agricultural region of WA. This is seasonal work and is labour intensive.