

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, EUCLA, RAVENSTHORPE AND ESPERANCE OFFICES

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

This morning at the Western Australian Farmers Federation conference, the minister mentioned that the number of employees at the Eucla, Ravensthorpe and Esperance offices of the Department of Agriculture were similar to last year. Did the people who left the department have expert skills in the areas of natural resource management, land conservation and regional economics and include a Grain Development Research Council canola expert, a hydrologist support expert and a perennial plant expert? Will they be replaced with people with the same skills?

**Hon KIM CHANCE replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

I do not quite understand the reference to Eucla and Ravensthorpe. However, I understand that we are talking about the Esperance region, including the Esperance Downs Research Station, Eucla and Ravensthorpe. The member's question was prompted by my statement that the only two positions that will be removed from Esperance are National Heritage Trust-funded positions or employees of LandCare Australia. However, I must qualify that statement by conceding that the other positions the member mentioned - I recognise that at least two of those positions are vacant at the moment - are positions for which we have already sought to fill the vacancy or indeed have already filled the vacancy and are waiting for people to refill the positions. The position of regional economist at the Esperance Downs Research Station will not be filled. That position will be replaced by a position for an additional skilled economist who will be employed at Ravensthorpe. The services that were provided by the former regional economists at Esperance Downs will soon be provided from Albany rather than Esperance, but an additional skilled economist will be employed at Ravensthorpe.