

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON SALINITY AND WATER QUALITY

**1005. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:**

I refer to the national action plan on salinity and water quality, which the State Government has failed to sign and fund. The agriculture industry is the industry most affected by salinity. What has the Minister for Agriculture done to secure \$158 million over seven years, which is being offered to land care groups?

**Hon KIM CHANCE replied:**

I have tried to protect the State's interest in what has been a difficult issue for our Government to resolve with the Commonwealth. It was a difficult issue also for the former Government to resolve. At this stage, Western Australia is the only State that has not signed an intergovernmental agreement with the Commonwealth on the national action plan. The preface to the member's question is accurate. However, it is misleading to adjudge from that fact that other States have made any more progress than Western Australia in reaching an agreement with the Commonwealth. As the honourable member will be aware, this is a two-part issue. One must first reach agreement on the intergovernmental agreement before the bilateral process can start. Every other State save perhaps South Australia has stalled at the bilateral stage. Although people have suggested to me that Queensland has made substantial progress on its bilateral arrangements with the Commonwealth, the outcomes from the Commonwealth-Queensland negotiations are actually going backward and not forward. There is clearly a problem with the structure of the national action plan on salinity and water quality as currently formulated by the Commonwealth.

Prior to the last federal election it was clear that the Commonwealth Ministers for the Environment and Heritage, and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry were keen to get the other States over the line on the bilateral arrangements and Western Australia on the intergovernmental and bilateral agreements. However, since the election it has been difficult to progress any real negotiations. As a result, and pertaining perhaps more directly to the member's question, officers from my department, the Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet met with officers in Canberra in the week before last to try to progress the issue. This Government is as keen as the Commonwealth to try to get to a point at which we can understand how to progress the national action plan. It gives this Government no joy to put back programs simply because the Commonwealth will not accept the State's position on the matter. The Commonwealth is refusing to accept that money which this Government believes is new money; that is, money over and above the money shown in the forward estimates as new money and as money matching the funds - \$158 million over seven years - which the Commonwealth has identified. It is frustrating. We are about halfway to reaching an accord with the Commonwealth.

It is my belief that with the goodwill that has been shown between commonwealth and state officers, we will be in a position to sign an intergovernmental agreement by the time the Primary Industries Ministerial Council meets in Hobart in May. That is my target at this stage. However, I cannot give any clear undertaking that that will be the case. It is something that the State and Commonwealth want to resolve. Every State is in the same position as Western Australia, in that no money is getting onto the ground. We need to work together to make sure that happens.