

ESPERANCE - EXCESSIVE RAINFALL

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

Following the difficulties caused by excessive rainfall in Esperance, the government announced that a package has been put together. I have had discussions with people in the northern agricultural area, which is outside the areas already declared. Is there likely to be any assistance for those people, because of the difficulties of the year resulting in the dust and fence damage that they are experiencing? I live in that area, and I assure the minister that I will not be making a claim, just so that everybody understands.

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank Hon Murray Criddle for asking this important question. I will explain the situation a little further. In the vast majority of cases in the northern agricultural area, which as we all know was affected by a drought, farmers, on advice, destocked the area as quickly as they could. I think everyone in that area did everything they could to try to protect the land. Tragically, since then, notwithstanding the destocking, and the growth of some ground cover as a result of very light, late winter rain, weather events have caused that cover to be stripped away, and there has been some quite severe erosion in the area. That erosion has, as Hon Murray Criddle indicated, moved sand to the extent that it has covered fences. I have seen reports of this. Indeed, the rural media carried some photographic evidence of this. The short answer is that, to this point, we have not considered additional support for this area. However, I would be happy to consider any approach from farmers in this area, preferably through the Dry Seasons Advisory Committee, or directly through Dexter Davies. I think that would be the most effective way of dealing with this matter. It is a terrible situation. We can only hope that when the first of the winter fronts come through, they come through very gently and very wetly, because one dry winter front could exacerbate the already serious damage that has occurred. There are limits to what we, or indeed anyone, can do in a circumstance such as this. However, we will be happy, as always, to work with farmers in the area to see whether we can do anything by way of intervention that may help minimise the damage.