

KATANNING SALEYARDS — PRIVATISATION

**351. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:**

I refer to the answer to my question without notice last week in which the minister stated —

... my chief of staff has had nothing to do with the former Deputy Prime Minister for many years ...

- (1) Is it true that the minister's chief of staff met with the former Deputy Prime Minister, Mark Vaile, at Parliament House on 31 March 2009?
- (2) How does the minister explain his misleading statements made to this house last week?

I thank the member for Collie–Preston for the question.

- (1)–(2) I still maintain that there was no conflict of interest. The member will recall from my response to the question he asked last time that we sought the advice of the Public Sector Commissioner, who also shared that view. I said in the house that I had a meeting with Hon Mark Vaile, who at that stage represented a group that was showing interest in private investment in saleyards in Western Australia. In attendance at that meeting was my chief of staff. Firstly, I do not see that that in any way suggests a conflict of interest on his part, which was confirmed by the Public Sector Commissioner. Secondly, as the Minister for Agriculture and Food, having a meeting and having my chief of staff in attendance in no way conflicts with the response to the question the member asked me last week. There is no conflict of interest.

The last formal association that my chief of staff had with the previous Deputy Prime Minister was six years ago. As I said in response to the question last time, between his formal contract at that time and now, he was working for the National Farmers' Federation and has not maintained any personal or business relationship with Mark Vaile. I think our actions have been well and truly above board, even to the extent of seeking the advice of the Public Sector Commissioner, who confirms the position that we have taken. There is no conflict of interest.