

PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT — VETERINARY OFFICERS

**584. Hon COLIN de GRUSSA to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:**

I refer to the current foot-and-mouth disease, FMD, and lumpy skin disease, LSD, outbreaks in Indonesia and the threat that an outbreak poses to Western Australia's agricultural sector.

- (1) How many qualified veterinary officers are currently employed by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and where are they located?
- (2) Are all veterinary officer positions currently filled; and, if not, what steps is the government taking to fill these positions, and why have they remained vacant?
- (3) In the context of a disease outbreak such as FMD or LSD, can the minister please outline how DPIRD provides adequate veterinary officer capability in areas where there is no locally based DPIRD veterinary officer?

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:**

I thank the member for the question and I agree absolutely that both foot-and-mouth disease and lumpy skin disease have the potential to be devastating to our export-oriented livestock industry. I can assure all parties that since the increased risk occurred with the move of FMD and LSD into Indonesia around May this year, we have been very focused on dealing with it.

- (1) At the moment, there are 53 qualified veterinary positions in the DPIRD biosecurity team; 43 of these are in animal biosecurity policy and operations and are located in Perth. Regionally, there are positions in Bunbury, Albany, Broome, Northam, Kununurra, Geraldton, Moora, Katanning and Narrogin. DPIRD diagnostic laboratory services has 10 qualified diagnostic veterinarians; eight are located in Perth and two in Albany.
- (2) Currently, five policy and four field veterinary positions are vacant. It is well recognised that there is a national shortage of veterinarians. DPIRD has and continues to undertake extensive recruitment activities to fill vacant positions.
- (3) The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development works closely with the private veterinary sector to build partnerships, increase awareness of reportable animal diseases and build capacity regionally. This includes subsidising significant disease investigations to enhance early detection and awareness for emergency animal diseases. Private veterinarians regularly investigate disease reports in the regions in collaboration with DPIRD diagnostic and field veterinary staff. Special vet foot-and-mouth disease forums have been taking place across the state. In a biosecurity response, DPIRD can engage private veterinarians across Australia to work in the response and has made contingency plans in this regard. This may include activation of the commonwealth's international resource arrangements for specialist staff from other countries.