

DROUGHT — SOUTHERN RANGELANDS

**1276. Hon COLIN de GRUSSA to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:**

I refer to the minister's comments in *The West Australian* today regarding the critical drought situation in the southern rangelands.

- (1) What infrastructure developments, if any, is the government considering to provide the southern rangelands more stable and long-term water supplies into the future?
- (2) How does the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development plan to transition pastoralists to carbon farming in a timely fashion, given the lack of rainfall in this region?
- (3) Will the minister introduce legislation to enable any carbon farming plans in Western Australia?
- (4) Will there be state-funded programs to incentivise destocking?
- (5) Has the minister planned for the animal welfare risks associated with destocking weak animals; and, if yes, please table that plan?

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:**

I thank the member for the question.

- (1)–(5) Water supply in those pastoral regions is generally the responsibility of the pastoral operations, but the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation has been undertaking aerial surveys to help identify where better water is. Of course, we also are seeking from the federal government engagement on the program to look at how we can strengthen the southern rangelands more generally, and that will be about not only water. That has to be about regeneration.

The member seems to be a bit concerned about us going down the path of carbon farming. Indeed, the pastoralists very much want to take this path forward. We are working to achieve that and, hopefully, at some point we will be able to have in place a regime that will allow those pastoralists in the southern rangelands to engage in carbon farming through human-induced regeneration. It is hard work to get it done. I understand it could not be done under the previous government, but, hopefully, we will get there.

Is there a program to incentivise destocking? We have to look at this issue. Reducing stock is part of the practice of pastoralism. When we have a dry season, we move our stock to somewhere else. That has to be an essential part of management of our farming systems. Do we need to do something more than that, something more radical? Possibly we do, and again we are seeking to develop a long-term response, because this is not a short-term problem. This has been getting worse and worse. If we had been monitoring the rangelands over the previous government's term in government, it probably would have become more evident that this is becoming an increasingly difficult problem.

As I said in answers to earlier questions, we have definitely had our officers going out there into those most at-risk stations, talking about destocking and stock being fit to transport. Our advice is that there are only a couple of properties where the animals are too weak to be moved, that it has been left to that point. We are certainly supporting the farmers in making sure that they understand that and can manage that task.

Quite clearly, a very low percentage of our farmers is applying for the federal household assistance scheme, which can add \$100 000 a year to income. I think that will go a long way to helping some of these marginal stations survive.