

DROUGHT RELIEF

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

I refer to the continuing dry seasonal conditions in Western Australia and the significant impact they are having on our primary producers and regional communities.

- (1) What financial assistance has the state government provided to date to assist producers or regional communities in response to drought conditions?
- (2) What departmental resources are being provided to support producers and communities in the drought?
- (3) Is the state government providing or considering any other assistance measures, including in-kind support, freezes on pastoral rent increases or exemptions from transport permit fees for destocking?

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:**

I thank the member for the question.

- (1)–(3) As I have probably pointed out before, it was decided in 2008 that we would move away from the exceptional circumstances–drought declaration mode and move into assessing farms on a needs basis to encourage farmers to develop resilience. A range of strategies, including the farm household allowance, were established around that. I would like to again table some maps that show that although there is absolutely no doubt that 2019 was a horror year right across the state, particularly in the southern rangelands, which had far less fat to play with in terms of water resilience, if we look at the maps for 2018, 2017 and 2016, we can see that even under the old terminology, a drought would not have been declared for the majority of those areas, and particularly the southern rangelands. Under those circumstances, we are certainly not looking at making changes around the payment of lease fees.

The government has been making significant contributions to cell fencing to provide employment opportunities for pastoralists who are struggling; settling the carbon farming initiative, which is going to enable a lot more resilience for those southern rangelands farmers; and investing in ways in which we can provide longer term resilience. Our problem is not a short-term deficiency in rainfall or something that will stop in a couple of years. We know that we have had a decade-long decline in rainfall, so we have to invest in systems that will turn around that resilience. Carbon farming is part of that. We are working on a range of programs with the Minister for Water that will be submitted to the federal government for assistance under its future drought fund. However, we have to change the fundamentals. We are not going to solve this problem with a short-term approach. The millennium drought cost the federal government around \$7 billion. The current drought had cost the federal government \$15 billion by the end of last year. What we have to do is to make sure that we have a new basis, new farm management systems and new rangelands systems to ensure that this is an affordable and sustainable area for farming. We cannot just have that old mentality of providing short-term handouts.

[See paper [3587](#).]