

RABBIT POPULATION — ESPERANCE DISTRICT

**1153. Hon COLIN de GRUSSA to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:**

I refer to reports that the rabbit population throughout the district of Esperance has increased to the extent that it is impacting farmers and the community.

- (1) On the basis that the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 requires landholders to control pests on their own land, what activities are being undertaken by Main Roads WA to control rabbits located on road reserves that fall under its control?
- (2) Has the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development been made aware of the rabbit problem in Esperance; and, if so, what work has been undertaken by DPIRD to determine the extent of the problem?
- (3) What activity has been undertaken by DPIRD to convene local stakeholders, such as the Shire of Esperance, the Esperance recognised biosecurity group, relevant state government agencies and local landholders and farmers, to assist in developing a coordinated response?

**The PRESIDENT:** I was about to comment on the length of the question, but I will allow the parliamentary secretary to answer.

**Hon DARREN WEST replied:**

I thank the honourable member for the detailed question. On behalf of the Minister for Agriculture and Food, I provide the following detailed answer.

- (1)–(2) Rabbits are a widespread and established pest and will always be present in the environment. Numbers will fluctuate depending on seasonal conditions and I am advised that there have been ideal breeding conditions for rabbits through winter and spring—who knew!

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development has released biocontrol in rabbit hotspots five times over recent months and confirmed through sampling that the biocontrol agent is causing mortality in rabbits. The Shire of Esperance and Tjaltjraak Aboriginal rangers have also been releasing biocontrol on lands under their management.

I have sought advice from the Minister for Transport on Main Roads' pest control activity.

- (3) DPIRD supports a coordinated response to widespread and established pests through funding and support for recognised biosecurity groups. RBGs work with their communities to determine priority declared pests for control and then work with relevant stakeholders to coordinate this work at a landscape scale. Rabbit control may be something that the Esperance RBG could take up, should there be community support for it.