

FERAL HORSES — LAKE GREGORY

Statement

HON COL HOLT (South West — Parliamentary Secretary) [5.36 pm]: Last week the house debated a motion moved by Hon Rick Mazza that focused on the RSPCA and its role within our society. I want to rise briefly and give credit where credit is due. I refer to reports that came out yesterday and today, and also to a question that was asked today in Parliament, around the RSPCA's support of the wild horse cull in the Kimberley. I think that the RSPCA took the right position and made the right call.

Having worked in that region over many years and been involved in some of those control activities, I can see exactly why the RSPCA would come out on the side of an aerial cull as the best way to control those horses. We ask a lot of our pastoralists in managing their land. We ask them to manage the land sustainably, to protect the environment and the land's carrying capacity, and we ask them to be good custodians of the land. That is exactly what we should ask of them. We also ask them to look after the animals they control, and generally that is their own stock. We ask them to make sure they address all animal welfare issues in the stock they control.

One of the greatest challenges in the pastoralist industry is the effect of uncontrolled grazers on pastoral lands, which can affect how pastoralists look after their own stock. There have been many programs throughout the pastoral region to control those grazers, which include feral donkeys, goats, horses and camels. Feral animals can have a great effect on the rangelands and also put pastoralists and their animals at risk in terms of animal welfare issues.

I have been to Lake Gregory and around Billiluna and I have seen the state of the land there. I know the unique challenges that face anyone who wants to muster those horses, capture them and move them on to a truck, or whatever it is people talk about doing. In my view, it is almost an impossible task. To have, reportedly, 8 000 to 10 000 feral horses running around that area puts the whole of the rangelands at risk. Not controlling those feral animals puts domestic stock at risk, and it puts the feral horses themselves at risk.

Hon Sally Talbot: And puts the leases at risk.

Hon COL HOLT: Yes, it puts the leases at risk. Having been there and seen the situation and knowing about the intricacies of aerial control, I have no doubt that this is the right decision. I truly welcome the comments made by the RSPCA in saying that this is a humane approach to the control of those horses. The last thing we want to see is a situation in which the horses and stock are put at risk from overgrazing those areas. Having seen the effects of overgrazing and poor management in the past, I would not like to see that happen.

Congratulations to the RSPCA on this occasion. I do not move away from some of the comments I made last week, but to give some credit to what it should be doing, the RSPCA has done all right on this occasion.