

WATER — AGRICULTURAL LAND — WEST KIMBERLEY

3444. Hon Robin Chapple to the Minister for Agriculture and Food representing the Minister for Water:

I refer to the Minister's public statement that there are around five million hectares suitable for agriculture in the West Kimberley and the Minister's reference to this information being sourced from the *State Water Strategy — Irrigation Review* (2005), and I ask:

- (a) is the Minister aware that the figure of five million hectares referenced in the *State Water Strategy — Irrigation Review* is in turn referenced to the Wright (2004) report, *Interim report on water use for irrigated agriculture in WA*;
- (b) is the Minister aware that the *Interim report on water use for irrigated agriculture in WA* does not mention five million hectares;
- (c) can the Minister explain the methodology that identified the five million hectares suitable for agriculture in the West Kimberley;
- (d) if no to , why not;
- (e) is the Minister aware of the recommendations made in the *State Water Strategy — Irrigation Review* (2005), specifically those at section 8.6.3, recommending the accelerated formulation of legally binding statutory water management plans;
- (f) given the Government's current promotion of potential large scale water extraction from groundwater and surface water sources in the Fitzroy River catchment, will the Government undertake a statutory water management plan for this iconic river system;
- (g) if no to (f), why not;
- (h) if the Government will not commit to a statutory water management plan for the Fitzroy prior to new large scale allocations, does the Government intend that each project will be considered on an ad hoc basis without assessing cumulative impacts; and
- (i) if yes to (h), how does this ad hoc approach comply with the Government's statutory and policy obligations including under the National Water Initiative, the *Rights in Water and Irrigation Act 1914* and the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*?

Hon Ken Baston replied:

- (a)–(b) The figure of five million hectares suitable for agriculture in the West Kimberley is referenced in Wright (2004) *Interim report on Land capability and availability for Irrigated Agriculture in Western Australia*.
- (c) The information was referenced from the *State Water Strategy — Irrigation Review 2005*.
- (d) Not applicable
- (e) Yes. This Government is progressing drafting of the Water Resources Management Bill. The legislation provides for Statutory Water Allocation Plans, however, it does not advocate that these plans necessarily be developed for all water resources.
- (f) No
- (g) At this early stage of development the water licence is the appropriate regulatory tool for these disconnected mosaic developments.
- (h) The water licence issued under *Rights in Water and Irrigation Act 1914* is the appropriate regulatory tool. Larger scale proposals which may have cumulative impacts or impacts that cannot be managed under a water licence will be referred to the Environmental Protection Authority.
- (i) The approach outlined is wholly consistent with the Government's statutory obligations including those under the National Water Initiative regarding statutory water plans.