AGRICULTURE AND FOOD — PERI–URBAN REGIONS

3438. Hon Robin Chapple to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

(1) I refer to question on notice No. 3172, asked on 14 May 2015, to the Minister for Agriculture and Food, and the Minister's answer to 3172(d), which states that "even when zoned as priority agriculture this does not prevent mining as mining development is approved under the *Mining Act 1978* with environmental impacts assessed under the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*". The Minister's response does not distinguish in any way between bauxite on priority agricultural land that is subject to the jurisdiction of the *Mining Act 1978* and bauxite on priority agricultural land that is excluded from the Mining Act's jurisdiction, being bauxite on private land that was granted by the Crown before 1 January 1899, which is the property of the landowner, known as Minerals to Owner land (refer S9 of the *Mining Act 1978*), and I ask:

(a) in the peri–urban Shire of Chittering which has been targeted by Bauxite Resources and Alpha Bauxite for six years now, is the Minister aware of the extent of Agricultural Resource land that is Minerals to Owner land where bauxite has been excluded from the jurisdiction of the *Mining Act 1978* and its predecessor, the *Mining Act 1903* for over 110 years;

(b) given that a proposal to explore for or mine bauxite on Minerals to Owner land in the Shire of Chittering is not subject to the *Mining Act 1978*, and is instead subject to planning laws and principles, does the Minister agree that such a proposal is within his portfolio and that SPP5 should be applied to preserve Agricultural Resource land from surface mining for bauxite (along with other relevant planning and environmental principles); and

(c) if no to (1)(a) and/or (1)(b), why not?

(2) The Minister's answer to 3172(d) also states with great authority that "given bauxite mining is a mechanical extraction process where the soil above the deposit including the topsoil is carefully put aside (stockpiled), it is expected that the rehabilitation of the sites under the supervision of the Department of Mines and Petroleum and Department of Environmental Protection will return the sites to their previous level of agricultural production". Is the Minister aware that:

(a) bauxite deposits are found in the top six to 12 metres of land, including the topsoil and surface material, and that all this material is permanently removed in the mining process, including between 65–75 percent waste (soil);

(b) following bauxite mining the soil profile and landforms are permanently changed thereby permanently altering the soil profile, the groundwater recharge and surface water runoff; and

(c) if no to (2)(a) and/or (2)(b), why not?

(3) Is the Minister aware that the site of a trial bauxite mining operation undertaken by Bauxite Resources Limited on prime Agricultural Resource land in the Shire of Chittering in 2009–10 resulted in a concave 3.5 hectares paddock of highly compacted soil that residents have observed has been seeded and re–seeded by the landowner six times in five years to sustain the pasture, caused the removal or slow death of all mature Marri and Jarrah trees on the site and loss of any residual topsoil from high winds?

(4) If yes to (3), is the Minister also aware that none of the operations or impacts of this bauxite operation were supervised, measured or monitored by the Department of Mines and Petroleum or the Department of Environmental Regulation before, during or after the operation?

(5) If no to (4), why not?

(6) Would the Minister provide an example of where bauxite mining has occurred on prime agricultural land in Western Australia and has been demonstrated to "return the sites to their previous level of agricultural production" supported by proper environmental measurement and data?

(7) If no to (6), why not?

(8) Does the Minister agree that Farmnote 39/2001 – Recharge Management for Salinity Control issued by the department to advise farmers on the management of groundwater salinity suggests that the impacts of clearing all remnant native vegetation and stripping all pasture from large areas of priority agricultural land for the purpose of bauxite mining is likely to result in increased groundwater recharge at the sites and therefore an increased risk of downslope salinity in the area?

(9) If yes to (8), why?

(10) If no to (8), why not?

Hon Ken Baston replied:

(1) (a–c) I am not aware of the extent of agricultural resource land that is "minerals to owner" land, however, when the Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia (DAFWA) advises local government about high quality agricultural land, it uses information on soil types, landforms, climate and crop types. It also considers other factors such as water that might be used for irrigation, as well as property and lot size. Information about minerals and the ownership of the minerals is not included in this advice.

In addition to providing advice about the potential of land for agriculture, DAFWA also provides information to planners about agriculture and the planning needs of agribusinesses. Examples where DAFWA has done this include the State Planning Strategy 2050, and rural planning policies. Decisions about planning and mining are not part of my portfolio.

(2) (a–c) I am aware that bauxite mining requires the removal of soil and other materials and, for this reason, land rehabilitation can be challenging.

(3–5) I am not aware of the trial bauxite mining site in the shire of Chittering or whether the state agencies mentioned were involved in monitoring this work.

(6–7) I am unaware of any specific examples where bauxite mining has occurred on prime agricultural land in Western Australia where the site has been demonstrated to return to its previous level of agricultural production.

(8–10) I agree that the cause of dryland salinity in Western Australia is extensive clearing of native vegetation across the south west. Shallow–rooted annual crops and pastures use much less water than the native vegetation they replace, allowing more water past their roots and into the groundwater. Salt moves with the rising water tables, damaging and even killing plants where the watertables come close to the surface.

I am unaware of research linking bauxite mining of cleared agricultural land to an increased risk of downslope salinity. I would expect that risks to groundwater and of increased soil salinity would be assessed on a case by case basis, through the mining and environmental approvals process.