

BOVINE JOHNE'S DISEASE

91. Hon KEN BASTON to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

Madam President, may I congratulate you on your new role.

I refer to Western Australia's status with regard to management of bovine Johne's disease. Western Australia is moving to implement the Johne's beef assurance score of eight protocol, referred to as J-BAS 8, on 1 July.

- (1) Will the minister provide an approximate combined estimate of the size of the Western Australian cattle herd?
- (2) Has the Department of Agriculture and Food received correspondence from industry groups and/or individual businesses, indicating that they do not wish to operate under J-BAS 8?
- (3) If yes to (2), how many head of cattle do these groups represent?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question and for notice of the question. Madam President, I wonder if I could seek some clarification; I think standing orders might have changed. I have an answer here. Am I required to strictly stick with the text or can I add to it?

The PRESIDENT: Is it your answer?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: Yes, it is my answer. I am the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

The PRESIDENT: If it is your response, minister, you can provide the response that you are comfortable with. If it is a response in which you are representing another minister, you would simply read out the response.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: I thought that was the case. I was just a bit surprised at these three copies of written answers that we have to hand up.

The PRESIDENT: I am sure you will get up to standard with the current standing orders in quick time.

Hon Simon O'Brien: We're a bit more civilised in this place than others you've been to.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: Don't tell me you are becoming more animal than vegetable!

The size of the WA cattle herd is estimated to be about 2.2 million head. Although the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia advises that it has had no direct correspondence on this topic, we understand that the Cattle Industry Funding Scheme management committee has received correspondence from four producers and one industry association. I have had discussions with several cattle producers as well. DAFWA estimates that the producers who have written to the chairman of the Cattle IFS would have a cattle holding of approximately 300 000 cattle out of the 2.2 million herd.

The Cattle IFS was established in 2010 to address biosecurity threats. The former Minister for Agriculture and Food Dean Nalder approved a particular area of operation and a 20 per cent contribution to fund surveillance programs for bovine Johne's disease and enzootic bovine leucosis—EBL. I met with the chairman of the industry-led fund last week. He has provided advice that its current program is to have targeted surveillance to test whether this condition is to be found in our herds. That has been a point of conjecture with some of the pastoralists. The results of that targeted surveillance will provide the evidence required to statistically verify the prevalence—hopefully, non-prevalence—of BJD in Western Australia and to provide a rational basis for further decisions.

I see that cattle producers in the southern half of the state are particularly keen for us to keep this high level 8 standard of protection. Obviously, there is a different interest amongst those—breeders in particular—who have cattle in the north of the state and who have traditionally brought in stock from Queensland and the Northern Territory, and those who send their northern stock down to be finished off in the south. We understand that there are competing interests but, on balance, we say that the owners of the herd predominantly support us maintaining this high standard. I think it is important that we do that, particularly as we test the prevalence of that condition in our herd.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you, minister. One thing that has changed a little bit since you were last here is that we have tried to have more succinct responses so we can work through questions faster.