

FARMERS — ASSISTANCE PACKAGE

11. Hon KEN TRAVERS to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

My question without notice is very similar to Hon Philip Gardiner's. By way of introduction, I congratulate the minister on his appointment to his ministerial position.

I refer to the minister's comments last week that he is awaiting formal confirmation of key aspects of the federal government's multimillion-dollar aid package for farmers.

- (1) What are the key aspects holding up this package?
- (2) What action has the minister taken to reach agreement with the commonwealth on the package?
- (3) When did the minister raise any concerns with the federal minister about the package?
- (4) Will the minister table any correspondence he has sent the federal minister outlining his concerns; and, if not, why not?
- (5) I think the minister has already answered this question: when does the minister expect that farmers will be able to —
 - (a) make applications for assistance under this package; and
 - (b) receive funding assistance from this package?

Hon KEN BASTON replied:

I thank Hon Ken Travers for the question.

- (1)–(5) First of all, I had a telephone call. The first time I heard that \$60 million would be available to each state was on the radio on a Saturday morning in Broome. The federal minister let the press know before the state agricultural minister in Western Australia.

Hon Ken Travers: And as a government you notify him before you bag the commonwealth?

Hon KEN BASTON: I actually spoke to him on the phone the next day, Hon Ken Travers, and told him it was a problem. I then attended what I call a "SCoPI" meeting in Sydney. I actually dined with the federal minister. All state ministers were there. We discussed it verbally over the table. He said it was not a problem: "Here is what the interest rate is. Just let your fellows behind the scenes know." It was not as simple as that; not as simple at all. All the other states have a similar issue. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry did not even understand the ramifications of how the loan would be delivered. I wrote a letter last week to the federal minister. I am waiting for an answer. I set out our concerns in that letter. I have learnt that the state will not have to wear any losses on the loans. Members must remember this is a loan—it is not money just being given to us; it has to be paid back, with interest. We are now awaiting a response to that. I believe that DAFF and the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food are working together to have an outcome for that as soon as possible.