

ANIMAL WELFARE — DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

313. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

I refer to the announcement the minister made with the Premier this morning about the transfer of responsibility for animal welfare to the Department of Agriculture and Food and the substantial increase in funding for animal welfare inspectors. Can the minister please provide details of how this new arrangement will help to better protect animals in Western Australia; and what impact this will have on the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals?

Mr D.T. REDMAN replied:

I thank the member for Jandakot. I must highlight that, I think, the member for Jandakot mentioned to me that he has been a life member of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for almost 20 years. Therefore, I respect his interest in this matter. I want to highlight the very good decision made by the Liberal–National government, which I announced today with the Premier at the Royal Agricultural Society of Western Australia’s facilities in Claremont. We are doing two things. We are transferring responsibility for the Animal Welfare Act from the Department of Local Government to the Department of Agriculture and Food, plus we are putting in significantly increased resources to support that act and to support the very high expectations of animal welfare that the community has of governments in Western Australia, particularly this government. The Department of Agriculture and Food is indeed an appropriate venue to locate responsibilities for animal welfare. It currently has a significant footprint in Western Australia, particularly in the regional areas.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The department covers the state from the Kimberley to the south coast and already plays a very, very proactive role in animal welfare right across the farming sector. It already has a very close relationship with the RSPCA and, of course, that relationship will only be built on to ensure that we maintain the highest levels of animal welfare standards in Western Australia.

We are doubling the funding for animal welfare in Western Australia to \$1.6 million, which is a far cry from what happened with the last government. In fact, the previous government made some cuts to animal welfare in its time.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: There will be an extra six full-time inspectors on the job to assess and monitor animal welfare in Western Australia, taking the complement to a total of 14. Also, the Premier announced, which might have been missed by some people in this house, an extra \$250 000 for the RSPCA to support the very, very good work that it does for animal welfare in Western Australia.

The Australian government and, indeed, the Western Australian government have some of the highest standards in the world as far as animal welfare is concerned. The Animal Welfare Act in Western Australia has some of the harshest penalties for animal cruelty. Animal welfare is something that we take very, very seriously and it is something that the community takes very seriously. This budget is clearly a measure of our support for that very high community expectation that we will maintain those standards and ensure that we in Western Australia have the highest of standards. The Liberal–National government recognises that. We place importance on the community view that animal welfare is very critical in Western Australia and, of course, we have backed that up with resources and with key decisions in this budget.