

PUBLIC SECTOR RECRUITMENT FREEZE — DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

234. Hon DARREN WEST to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

I have a question without notice.

I refer to the minister's letter to the Treasurer, as reported in *The West Australian* yesterday, which asserted that the high number of vacancies in his department was impacting negatively on services delivery and increasing the risk of regulatory failure. Does the minister stand by these assertions?

Hon KEN BASTON replied:

I thank the honourable member for no notice of the question! I would just like to say that what actually happened was that staff had been advertised for before the freeze came in; the freeze came in while that was being done. All departments in that position could put in for an exemption. Another classic example was at Muchea saleyards where the stockades are taking over the running of the saleyards; that is, the board is actually doing it. Twelve employees are needed there and that need coincided with the freezing of full-time equivalents on 1 July. As the minister, I wrote to the Treasurer from one department to the next department asking him for an exemption. I have not had an answer to those letters yet.

Hon Ken Travers: Do you stand by your comments? That's what he asked you.

Hon KEN BASTON: The comments were in the press. I stand by what I am telling you are the facts. It is between one department and another department seeking an exemption. It is quite common for that to happen.

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!