AGRICULTURE AND FOOD — PERI-URBAN REGIONS

3172.   Hon Robin Chapple to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

Professor Michael Buxton heads a research team of researchers and scholars at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University carrying out extensive research into peri-urban regions which form belts of non-urban land fringing metropolitan centres. These peri-urban regions typically contain important natural resources, intensive agricultural enterprises, remnant biodiversity and significant landscapes. These areas are increasingly under threat from development and overuse.

The Queensland Liberal National Party government introduced the Regional Planning Interests Act in 2014. The Hon Jeff Seeney MP, former Minister for State Development, described the legislation as delivering on the then Queensland Government's commitment to protect prime agricultural land and resolve land use conflict where it occurs. He also said that the assessment process established by the Act restored the balance of power between rural producers and resource companies. In Western Australia, the tension between forms of land use is evident in many peri-urban areas, and I ask:

(a)   Does the Minister have any plans to protect highly productive land in peri-urban regions close to the Perth metropolitan area, like that introduced by the former Queensland Liberal National Party;

(b)   If yes to (a), will the Minister please provide details.

(c)   Is the Minister aware of a proposal by Bauxite Alumina Joint Venture (BAJV) to develop a bauxite mine in the peri-urban areas of the Avon Valley in the Shires of Toodyay, Mundaring and Northam that are primarily used for goat, alpaca and sheep farming, cattle grazing, horse studs, vineyards, olive groves, organic farming, canola, serial grain growing and hay production; and

(d)   If yes to (c), does the Minister support the development of open cut strip mining by BAJV and associated Bauxite Resource Limited (BRL) given the effects it is likely to have on productive agricultural land in a reliable rain fall area, where there is much local enterprise and more than 900 people live in close proximity of the proposed mine?

Hon Ken Baston replied:

(a)–(b) There are no plans, at this stage, to introduce additional legislation to protect highly productive land in peri-urban regions.

The Western Australian Planning Commission's State Planning Policy 2.5 *Land Use Planning in Rural Areas* encourages local government to identify and zone areas of high quality agricultural land as Priority Agricultural Land in their local strategies and schemes.

The Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia can assist local government by identifying areas of high quality agricultural land, based primarily on land capability but also considers data on rainfall as well as water resource information supplied by the Department of Water. Priority agricultural land is derived from High Quality Agricultural Land data that has removed land required for existing and future urban/development areas, public use areas and land required for environmental purpose. This is then subject to further refinement by the local government after consultation with the local community.

(c)   Yes

(d)   The area identified for bauxite mining by Bauxite Alumina Joint Venture is not currently zoned as priority agricultural land.

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 *Environment Protection Act 1986*. These Acts are outside my portfolio. Also outside my portfolio are the merits of current mining practices. However, 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 Regulation, will return the sites to their previous level of agricultural production.