

MT BARKER RESEARCH STATION

633. Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

Will the minister explain what changes he has made to the Mt Barker Research Station?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank the member for the question, although we addressed this issue in question time a couple of days ago.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: Not satisfactorily.

Hon KIM CHANCE: Perhaps the member's question could have been more detailed, in that case. The home block of the Mt Barker Research Station - an area of some 664 hectares - will be maintained. The area known as Manurup -

Hon Peter Foss: What is the origin of that word?

Hon KIM CHANCE: I will not speculate on the origin of the word. Manurup, west block and the 20-hectare block at Denmark are proposed to be sold. Effectively, no trial work has been done on that small Denmark block for some five years, so there is no change in that regard. Much of the west block is bush, although I understand there is some cleared land on it. The key area is the Manurup block, which is an area in which trials, including, I understand, the successful raised bed trials, had been carried out until recently. I also believe the area is important for the production of the date-bred ewes, which is a service provided to the University of Western Australia for a human health project.

It is understood that the 664-hectare home block will be able to accommodate the raised bed trials and the continuation of much of the date-bred ewe project. However, there is also a view that discussions could be held with, presumably, the Department of Justice, which is the owner of Pardelup Prison Farm, about a continuation of some trial work and/or the continuation of the rest of the date-bred ewe project on the Pardelup Prison Farm, which is an extensive area. That proposition was put to us by the local community. We believe that presents real opportunities.

Those are the bare bones of what is being sold and maintained. The home block, of course, contains the bulk of the houses and buildings relative to the research station. The retaining of those facilities will allow the research station home block to be used as a springboard for much more on-farm work off station than has been the case in the past. It will also provide an opportunity for the research station to provide a much wider range of services and to conduct trials on a much wider range of soil types in varying climatic and environmental conditions than has been possible in the past. Indeed, the Mt Barker Research Station staff will provide increased services east to Jerramungup, west to Denmark and Fitzgerald, and north to Kojonup. Therefore, the research station will continue to be an important part of the department's commitment to the area. However, on analysis of all the Department of Agriculture's physical and human assets, it was felt that the Mt Barker Research Station, in its current form, was not providing a reasonable return to agriculture as a result of those assets which, as members can imagine, have a considerable value.