

AGRICULTURE — WORKPLACE SAFETY

Statement by Minister for Industrial Relations

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Industrial Relations) [12.07 pm]: I rise to inform the house of the safety performance in the agricultural industry. During the period 2010–11 to 2019–20, 172 people were fatally injured in work-related traumatic incidents in Western Australia and 41 of those incidents occurred in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors. In the last five years alone, there have been 18 work-related deaths in the agricultural industry. Despite a relatively small workforce compared with other industries such as construction and mining, the agricultural industry has both the highest number of work-related fatalities and the highest frequency rate. In fact, during the aforementioned period, agriculture, forestry and fishing represented 25 per cent of all work-related fatalities but were only three per cent of the hours worked. These statistics are unacceptable and illustrate the significant challenges in achieving a zero harm safety culture in the agricultural industry. As the minister responsible for work health and safety, the over-representation of agricultural workers in work-related fatalities is of significant concern to me. The agricultural industry needs to do more to improve workplace safety. The McGowan government is committed to working with the industry to achieve better work health and safety outcomes for their workers. In line with this commitment, the new Work Health and Safety Act 2020 will improve protections for all Western Australian workers, including those in the agricultural industry.

Under the new laws, the Agriculture Safety Advisory Committee will be formed to advise the Work Health and Safety Commission on matters relating to safety in the agricultural industry. The committee will work to identify major health and safety issues in the industry as a part of the government and industry's shared efforts to improve safety and achieve zero harm and zero deaths for agricultural workers. The Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety is undertaking significant work in this space. This includes directing departmental resources to the areas of most need and developing strategic relationships with agricultural societies, distributors and grower groups to identify how to best support industry in achieving better health and safety outcomes. I am hopeful that developing positive networks with the agricultural community will help achieve improved compliance and lead to fewer fatalities and injuries. The data cannot be ignored and demonstrates the need for workplaces in the agricultural industry to review their existing risk management approaches to ensure the safety of their workers. These shocking figures and the terrible tragedy they represent cannot be allowed to continue. I urge the agricultural industry to demonstrate its commitment to safety and work together on developing coordinated strategies. It will be important to see how the industry can change its culture to improve safety for its workers. The McGowan government is serious about reducing fatalities and injuries in the agricultural industry and is committed to working with industry to achieve this vital objective.