

House of Assembly

Grievance

24 June, 2010

FARM PLAGUES

Mr TRELOAR (Flinders) (15:18): I rise today to inform the house that regional South Australia is dealing with not one but two plagues at present. Much has been made of the locust plague and what action the government is going to take in reaction to it, but mouse numbers have reached plague proportions across much of Eyre Peninsula, the Mid North, Yorke Peninsula and, indeed, the Mallee.

Unfortunately, this poses an environmental and social problem for our farming communities, on top of the financial burden of purchasing baits. Currently, farmers themselves have responsibility for taking control measures. Baiting is in the order of \$10 a hectare. This has occurred on many properties, not once but twice, and sometimes three times. Over a considerable acreage the cost adds up and eats into the profitability of the farming operation. In fact, I know that some individual property owners have spent up to, and maybe in excess of, \$20,000 on control measures.

High mouse numbers have been a frequent occurrence over the last few seasons and, as I said, many farmers are finding it increasingly costly to bait. My belief is that mouse numbers are high and are tending to remain high mainly as a result of our move into more environmentally sustainable farming methods, the retention of ground cover and inadvertently supplying a food source and cover for the mouse in the field.

The natural resource management boards currently provide advice to landowners on keeping mouse numbers under control, but I believe that, if they were given departmental support, they could take on a more active role in managing mouse numbers. Under the Natural Resources Management Act, mice are not a declared species for control; however, the act is quite clear in its intent to provide for 'the prevention or control of impacts caused by pest species of animals and plants that have an adverse effect on the environment, primary production or the community'.

The obligation is there, and clearly any reasonable person would acknowledge that mice are a pest species of animal which cause environmental problems and adversely affect primary producers and particularly their communities. As the weather gets colder, mice tend to head towards farmyards into haystacks, into outbuildings (and ultimately into houses) and in towns into shops. What I am doing today during this grievance is calling on the Department of Primary Industries and Resources (otherwise known as PIRSA), in conjunction with the natural resource management boards (and I have spoken with our Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management Board on this issue), those two arms of government, to assist landowners with control measures which will ultimately benefit the environment and the state's agricultural sector.

I know that as recently as last week our local NRM board did meet and resolved to set up a task force to address this problem. My concern is that it is too late for this autumn/early winter period. The sowing operation is complete. My fear and concern is for the coming spring where mouse numbers will again be high and will attack the crop as it is nearing maturity. It is a real concern, and I urge the two departments I have mentioned today to take immediate action in this regard.