

MEDIA RELEASE

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Pederick challenges government on locust action

SA's new Agriculture Minister has been challenged to show what the state government is doing to avert another agricultural disaster.

On the first day of the new Parliament, Shadow Agriculture Minister Mr Pederick asked new Agriculture Minister Michael O'Brien what action he and his department PIRSA were doing to combat the locust threat.

Mr Pederick said all reports coming in from the state's Riverland and Mallee regions indicate the current locust plague threatens to be the worst on record with enormous crop losses and pasture damage.

'SA's agricultural commodities were valued at \$4.2 billion last financial year. SA farmers have been dealing with the worst drought on record and a successful crop this year is critical.

'In the major locust plague of 2000, over half a million hectares were treated to combat the problem. Over 80 percent of that was carried out by the government department.

'At a recent public meeting on the imminent locust plague, farmers were effectively told they are on their own at this time.

'According to PIRSA's existing policy, at this moment, farmers are expected to arrange and pay for spraying themselves. PIRSA say they are getting ready for the spring hatchings. Their cutting of 100 jobs late last year was very untimely.

'The meeting was told there was no funding for locust treatment until later this year. That will be too late for many and the government will then find itself being asked for assistance for destitute farmers and their families.

'In his answer, Minister O'Brien talked at length about future hopes and plans but made it clear that for the moment, farmers are on their own. He talked about utilising farmers' resources 'on ground' and I have no doubt farmers will be prepared to contribute their time and effort but in return the government should be prepared to assist with the cost of chemicals.'