

MEDIA RELEASE

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Mineral Resources Development – Forests

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Clouds over regional ag centres

The future of South Australia's regional agricultural information and research centres remains unclear in the wake of recent questions in state parliament.

Shadow Agriculture Minister Adrian Pederick said stories of regional office closures were rife and some were well-sourced and compelling, leaving country office employees and communities very uneasy.

Mr Pederick said cuts apparent in the recent budget pointed to reductions in staff and the possible closure of facilities, prompting questions during last week's Budget Estimates Committee hearings.

'News that four jobs would be lost from a research program at the Loxton Research Centre gave rise to rumours about office closures,' Mr Pederick said.

'Then we had some more specific information that closures were imminent.

'To clarify this, I asked Agriculture Minister Paul Caica how many administration and operational staff would be lost, to which he replied the figure had not yet been determined.

'In answer to my question about office closures, Minister Caica replied "There will not be any offices cut through this exercise",' Mr Pederick said.

'Yet when my colleague Ivan Venning asked a similar question about the likelihood of 'business as usual' at several specific offices, the minister's response was "No, I cannot assure anyone of that", and further commented "...there will be places that will not continue to exist".

'The impact these job losses and program and office closures will have on struggling country communities is broad and deep and the minister acknowledged that the final decision on these matters was his,' Mr Pederick said.

'With many parts of the state reeling from the effects of drought, and the Riverland hit particularly hard, the last thing regional communities need now is less front line services.

'If decisions to cut services and offices have already been made, the public of regional SA have a right to know.'