

MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FISHERIES

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:51): Does the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries stand by his statement that he is the most qualified and best person nationally for his current role as Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries? During his recent tour of the Riverland, the newly appointed minister for agriculture said publicly, and I quote, 'I am probably the most qualified member of the South Australian parliament—both Liberal and Labor—to be doing this job, and I am probably one of the best nationally, so I think I am a bit of a natural fit for this portfolio.'

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. M.F. O'BRIEN (Napier—Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, Minister for Forests, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for the Northern Suburbs) (15:52): I thank the member for Hammond, I hope that was picked up clearly in *Hansard*, and I stand by it. If the member for Hammond can illustrate to me that either he or his colleagues have operated at an international level with a firm like Elders, I will stand corrected. I stand by my statement. I started—

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order!

The Hon. M.F. O'BRIEN: The question was put to me in the Riverland that, as a Labor—

Members interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order! Can we listen to the minister's answer, please?

Mr Pisoni: He's pumping himself up.

The Hon. M.F. O'BRIEN: I could say a few things about the member for Unley and about slipping his wife into his directorship when he realised his company was going bad, but I will not.

The SPEAKER: Order! Minister, can you return to the question, please?

The Hon. M.F. O'BRIEN: Yes. I was asked by a journalist in the Riverland that, being a Labor member of parliament, and Labor having a high level of representation in the metropolitan area but not in rural South Australia, would I be able to represent the interests of rural South Australia. My response was that I thought I was extremely well-qualified, having—

Mr Hamilton-Smith: You said you were the greatest, the best.

The Hon. M.F. O'BRIEN: I said that I was—

Members interjecting:

The Hon. M.F. O'BRIEN: Yes, I did. I was fortunate to work for what was then Elders Pastoral. I was employed—just by way of a quick thumbnail—by Elders in a national position. I was promoted to Elders Agribusiness, operating a division of Elders IXL, one of four operating divisions, in an international position. I worked out of Elders Grain in Melbourne.

Members interjecting:

The Hon. M.F. O'BRIEN: Yes, okay. I was asked.

Members interjecting:

The Hon. M.F. O'BRIEN: I think I have answered the question. If the member for Hammond wants to get to his feet and tell me that there is somebody—

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:55): As a supplementary question, in light of his answer, can the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries equate this with the subsequent statement that he made on the day regarding the locust plague that he was informed of, and I quote, 'A bit surprised they've actually arrived in this state,' clearly demonstrating his ignorance of the

existence and extent of the locust plague currently threatening the state, particularly the Riverland and the Mallee? Presumably locusts have yet to reach green, leafy Springfield.

The SPEAKER: I fail to see how that was a supplementary question to the last question.

Mr Pederick: I think it is very relevant.

The SPEAKER: I think we will count that as a question. Minister.

The Hon. M.F. O'BRIEN (Napier—Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, Minister for Forests, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for the Northern Suburbs) (15:56): I was acting on the advice of the department.

Members interjecting:

The Hon. M.F. O'BRIEN: Yes. When I arrived in the Riverland the first thing I did was put in a call and that was the response that I got, so I was acting on advice. The advice that I got at that particular time, which I did query—

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. M.F. O'BRIEN: The advice that I was given was that there had been some activity over the previous 18 months but not approaching the level of plague proportion and that PIRSA were quite surprised at the level of locust activity over those few days. That was the advice that I was given, and it was subsequently modified by PIRSA.