

Question Time - 14 October 2009
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND RESOURCES SA

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:03): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. Can the minister advise how many more positions PIRSA is seeking to shed, further to the 90 staff who have already accepted targeted voluntary separation package offers; what specific services have already been cut; and how many are from regional South Australia? It is understood separation package offers were finalised at the end of last month. There is considerable concern throughout rural communities which stand to lose local officers and services through these cuts.

The Hon. P. CAICA (Colton—Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Forests, Minister for Regional Development) (15:03): There is no doubt that each minister has been responsible for finding savings in their portfolios. That almost goes without saying, but I will say it to help—

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. P. CAICA: Look, we have been required to find some savings. Prior to that, when I came into this job as minister for agriculture, I asked for an assessment (if you like) of where we have people, where our offices are located, how we were servicing those areas and how the people in those areas were using those services. That was even before a decision was made in respect of the separation packages which have been announced. That is ongoing.

I have no doubt in my mind—and I think I have provided you with a briefing to date, and if I have not, you are quite welcome to come to one, and you know that I offer them continually—that certain changes will occur in our rural areas regarding what services are being provided, where they are being provided and how they can be provided most effectively and, in fact, that will relate to their level of use by the community that we are there to help. If people are not using it, do we spend \$100,000 or \$200,000 per year providing a service that only a handful of people might use? Are there better ways in which we can do things? I am responsible—

Mr Pederick interjecting:

The Hon. P. CAICA: Well, I will give you the detail when it is finally worked out, but part of this process is to ensure that we do things properly and correctly and that we are able to provide a service at the end of the process. We are going through that process. Quite simply, one day—and I am not being disrespectful in any way—the honourable member may be on this side of the house sitting on the front bench and he will be required to do exactly the same thing; that is, make decisions that are appropriate for the delivery of service.

I make no apology for having to make some difficult decisions in the context of the economic climate in which we live. At the same time I am also responsible for ensuring that the outstanding presence that is PIRSA in the rural areas will continue, but it will be focusing on—

Mr Pederick interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order, the member for Hammond!

The Hon. P. CAICA: —the services the community wants and, importantly, (as my colleague says) the community uses. I am happy to meet with the

honourable member every day in order to help him understand this process, so he can meet with me—

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The Hon. P. CAICA: I have told the honourable member that we are working through a process. If he wants to understand the process I am happy to sit down with him, without any problems at all. Again, I make no bones about it: there will be changes and we will be doing things differently—that is what is required—but at the same time we will minimise, if you like, the impact of those changes to provide services that are not only warranted but also the community tells me and my department it requires.