



EYRE PENINSULA REGIONAL STRATEGY

18 February 1999 Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): As you know, Mr Acting Speaker, I take every opportunity to promote a greater understanding of the wonderful electorate that I have the privilege to represent. Eyre Peninsula is a vibrant region of South Australia and has enormous potential in fishing, farming, mining and tourism enterprises. This potential is only just beginning to be realised and, in the case of the farming sector, has been greatly assisted by the comprehensive and cohesive approach of the Eyre Peninsula regional strategy. The Eyre Peninsula regional strategy came about due to a series of adverse events which coincided over the 1990-94 period. These exceptional circumstances were devastating to farmers on the Eyre Peninsula and consisted of record summer rains that damaged and downgraded cereal crops; loss due to a substantial mouse plague; the combination of poor coarse grain prices and drought in the 1993 and 1994 seasons that made it impossible to operate profitably during that period; and hail and frost which damaged crops.

Eyre Peninsula suffered greatly as a result of these adverse events. Many farmers were burdened with significant levels of debt. The sustained poor seasonal conditions meant that they were incurring increasing levels of debt during this period, coupled with very high interest rates. The net result was a serious drain on the social and economic base of Eyre Peninsula which people were not then in a position to be able to address. The need for a comprehensive scheme to assist farmers and other regional enterprises became obvious and led the Commonwealth in partnership with the State Government to trial a regional strategy approach to alleviating or eliminating some of the more acute and ongoing problems. A task force headed by the Hon. Caroline Schaefer MLC was charged with the task of developing a package of measures for the Minister for Primary Industries.

The package was to address farm business reconstruction and related natural resource issues on Eyre Peninsula. The task force believed that, in order for any strategy to work, it had to be community owned and community driven. Five hundred organisations and individuals were advised of the task force's mission in an effort to ensure that solid community input was obtained. The Eyre Peninsula Regional Strategy was formed as a result of task force recommendations to the Government. Various bodies such as the Natural Heritage Trust, the Rural Adjustment Scheme, the Australian Council for the Arts, the Eyre Peninsula Local Government Association, Festivals Australia, SACAT and DEETYA are actively involved in the strategy and have a stake in its success.

The strategy is being conducted as a pilot program for the rest of Australia and is based on information and recommendations received from Eyre Peninsula residents during the public consultation phase. The strategy seeks to educate our farming community in a multitude of areas which include: property management planning; farming and land capabilities; soil, water and vegetation management; and sustainable farming practices. Farming communities have traditionally been extremely conservative and followed the practices of generations past. Our rapidly changing economy and increasing knowledge of our impact on our environment dictate that many traditional farming and business practices can no longer be followed.

The objective of the Eyre Peninsula Regional Strategy is to facilitate rural adjustment, which contributes to the enhanced viability of farm enterprises through encouraging environmentally sustainable resource use, long-term profitability through increased farm productivity, effective property management and assisting farmers without the prospect of long-term profitability to leave farming with the improved ability to adjust to life after farming. The Eyre Peninsula region involves approximately 1 600 rural holdings from which 3 000 farmers earn a living.

The region is a highly effective agricultural producer, as 10 per cent of the State's farmers actually produce and earn approximately 13 per cent of the State's agricultural income. The Eyre Peninsula annually produces 40 per cent to 50 per cent of South Australia's wheat, 20 per cent to 30 per cent of South Australia's barley and 15 per cent of the State's sheep flock. The adverse years in the early 1990s clearly demonstrated that farming can no longer be considered just a way of life but must also be considered a business; therefore, it is necessary to establish a positive business planning ethic in farmers on the Eyre Peninsula.

The Eyre Peninsula Regional Strategy plays an important part in providing training for farmers in advanced management skills. The strategy coordinates field days to demonstrate and share with farmers knowledge of such

practices as reduced tillage, clay spreading, desalination systems and sustainable crop management practices. The Cleve Field Day is a biennial event at which agricultural exhibitors can display and demonstrate their products and services. The 1998 field day exhibited displays featuring satellite communications, the Internet, differential global positioning systems, yield mapping and vehicle guidance systems.

A farm technology expo held at Wudinna has allowed for transfer of information between local and visiting researchers and farmers across the whole of the peninsula. The sharing of dreams, ideas and information is probably the most potent component of the whole strategy. In turn this has fostered a culture of cooperation within the community, promoting a philosophy of working together to promote and support self-reliant businesses and sustainable land management practices. Another project associated with the Eyre Peninsula Regional Strategy is the Better Business Centre's network concept, which was developed with the support of the Eyre Regional Development Board's 10 member councils to provide a shopfront agency.

The Better Business Centres provide a direct link to the business community in each council district. The service will assist local communities to identify employment and training opportunities in their area, increasing employment prospects for people living in rural Eyre Peninsula. The Eyre Peninsula Regional Strategy is community owned and community administered. The committee is comprised of representatives from various communities and interest groups which gives it a broad network and range of experiences on which to draw. The vision of this group for integrated, sustainable, viable and progressive industries based on self-reliant businesses that present a positive image of Eyre Peninsula is being realised through the efforts of the team.

Where the community has a vision of what can be achieved and the will to pursue that vision then there is no end to what can be achieved. I commend all those who have participated in the Eyre Peninsula Rural Strategy and made it the great success that it is.

Motion carried.