



**CUMMINS RURAL CARE FACILITY
5 June 2008**

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders) (15:00): My question is to the Minister for Education and Children's Services. Will the minister advise when Cummins will have the funding to build a rural care facility to enable parents to have their children cared for while they work or have time out? The Cummins community has been without a rural care facility for a long time and, in this time of severe drought and the accompanying stress and depression, when there is a need for families to seek off-farm employment, child care is needed more than ever. The community bank has put forward over \$50,000 towards this project which should be funded by the Department of Education and Children's Services. There has been continuing delay in the upgrade of the facility to licensed standards that would enable it to commence operation.

The Hon. J.D. LOMAX-SMITH (Adelaide—Minister for Education and Children's Services, Minister for Tourism, Minister for the City of Adelaide) (15:01): I regret that I missed the sense of the question. Could the member for Flinders repeat it please? I did not hear the town.

Mrs PENFOLD: Will the minister advise when Cummins will have funding to build a rural care facility to enable parents to have their children cared for while they work or have time out?

The Hon. J.D. LOMAX-SMITH: I apologise to the member; I did not catch the name of the town to which she was referring. Now I know it is Cummins, I am still unable to give her a precise answer, but I will look into the matter for her.

**CUMMINS RURAL CARE FACILITY
8 May 2008**

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders) (15:36): Yesterday the final report into life/work balance was handed to parliament, and there has been much rhetoric about 'the Rann government being committed to supporting parents'. However, when you live in rural parts of South Australia, life/work balance is even more difficult, and this government appears to have forgotten about our parents. I speak in particular today of the town of Cummins, the hub of Lower Eyre Peninsula, which caters to families in surrounding farming districts. In this time of severe drought on Eyre Peninsula, families need 'off farm' work to relieve the financial debt burden. However, it is very hard for families when there is no care facility in the district.

Drought brings with it much more than debt. Stress and depression are common among our farming families. A rural care facility is essential for new mums in the community who want to help financially and return to the workforce after maternity leave. Many are qualified, skilled workers such as nurses and teachers who are highly valued and needed in the community. To lose them because of a lack of child care puts even more pressure on our rural communities.

Research initially indicated Cummins was adequately served by family day care. However, care providers subsequently left, leaving the community without any day care services. A public meeting was held in December 2005 to confirm the need and look at solutions. In May 2006, funded by a \$13,300 grant from the Cummins Bendigo Community Bank, a steering committee was established and a consultant employed.

In September 2006, the committee received advice from the Minister for Education and Children's Services that consideration of a rural care service for Cummins was dependent on the building, and that the

current child and parent centre based at Cummins Area School was to be upgraded to accommodate the rural care facility for children aged zero to five years. The school agreed to provide the supervising manager role for the rural care program, once established. Having Rural Care based at the school keeps it simple for parents who have both school-aged and younger children.

On advice from the builders and DECS, the community successfully applied to Cummins Bendigo Community Bank for a further grant of \$37,000 to fund building costs to accommodate Rural Care. Since that time, there has been a raft of bureaucratic changes to the building plans causing the budget to blow-out to \$150,000. DECS has now advised that the renovations should be done in two stages: the first stage expected to come in at \$80,000—a bandaid solution. It has now been more than 20 months since the feasibility study and the grant submission, and the community is still waiting and costs are increasing.

The Cummins Bendigo Community Bank has donated a total of \$50,300 towards the rural care facility project, even though the facility should be funded by the Department of Education and Children's Services. I refer to a letter I received from Wendy Holman, Secretary of the Cummins District Financial Services, expressing frustration at the many 'hiccups' that have occurred. The letter states:

The Government makes a strong case for community/business/government partnerships to support infrastructure projects, but when a community manages to fund a project so it can be achieved it is then with considerable annoyance that we hear the stalemate is actually between government agencies.

DECS is responsible for funding a facility upgrade to appropriate licensing standards. DECS has failed to fulfil this obligation, which is why the Cummins Community Bank provided the second grant of \$37,000. Since then, the cost has escalated to five times the original estimate.

It is time to bite the bullet and build this facility in its entirety. Any further delays will only increase the amount of funding required. Drought is depleting Eyre Peninsula, and I do not want to see more families leave because of inadequate childcare facilities caused by the government's incompetence.

Many members of this parliament would not survive without childcare facilities. Why should our rural farming communities be further disadvantaged? They already have to deal with so many other disadvantages. I ask the minister and her department to at least fix this one for this wonderful, small can-do community. Poor project and money management by this government is a common theme in the issues I so often encounter in my communities. Perhaps the Yalata bus is the next one I should be speaking about.