



Rural crime inspector for Moora

AN officer from the new Rural Crime Unit will be based in Moora, giving the district its first farm-specific crime protection service since the Stock Squad was disbanded by the previous State Government.

The unit comprises seven inspectors from the Department of Agriculture and Food's Livestock Compliance Unit, who have specialist knowledge of farming practices and have been trained by WA Police.

A memorandum of understanding has been signed by the two authorities.

Agricultural Region MLC Brian Ellis, whose family has farmed at Bindi Bindi for three generations, said the establishment of the unit honoured an election promise by the Government.

"As a farming man I am well aware of the high cost of farm fuel and the fact that there has been specific fertiliser theft feeding an interstate market," Mr Ellis said.

"There have also been issues with stock losses and machinery theft, at a time when the farming community has already been battling low incomes."

Mr Ellis said the officers in the previous specialised police squad had been highly valued because of their proven rural knowledge.

However, they had

been split up and relocated by the previous government on the premise of providing additional child protection policing.

"Unfortunately, it was not practical or realistic to reconstitute the same officers into the new unit so their irreplaceable experience was lost and the opportunity was taken to 'think outside the square'," Mr Ellis said.

"I am aware that farmers and farming organizations are watching this new idea with interest, but I agree with reported comments by the Pastoralists and Graziers Association that it is fair to wait for a year and see if the runs are on the board.

"One of the advantages is that there were only four officers in the previous unit, while now there are now seven, with indications that that Police Minister will consider expanding the team further down the track to cover additional regions.

"There are times when Moora has had only one police officer, and even when there are two there is insufficient local cover as they also patrol the Brand Highway which is an 80 minute round trip before they even get down the highway.

"Three Springs only got a third officer after I raised the matter in Parliament.

"I am hoping that the new Rural Crime Unit will take some of the



Birdseye view: Agricultural Region MLC Brian Ellis is pleased the region will get an officer from the new Rural Crime Unit. The officer will be involved in farm-specific crime protection.

investigative pressure off regional police who are already stretched to the limit."

The livestock compliance inspectors will take some of the legwork out of the policing by:

- increasing surveillance in saleyards, export depots and abattoirs;
- increasing compliance with stock identification and movement and National Livestock Identification System legislation (and thereby decrease livestock theft);
- identifying suspected livestock offences and undertake preliminary inquiries and collect evidence before referring these matters to WA Police for further investigation; and
- maintaining a database of suspected livestock breaches.

investigations, prosecutions and outcomes.

"The inspectors have been given additional investigative powers to allow them to collect evidence," Mr Ellis said.

"They will work closely with regional detectives, providing livestock identification and traceability expertise to assist with livestock crime investigations.

"Police will continue to conduct crime investigations for offences such as fraud and theft.

The new livestock inspectors are Bevan Wooldridge (Moora), Alex Stewart (Williams), John Barden (Cranbrook), Trevor Fitzpatrick (Waroona), Maree Glasby (Broome), Donna Pead (Perth), and Nicole Cottingham (Perth).