

AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

Motion

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West) [10.11 am] — without notice: It is my pleasure to move —

That this house notes the failure of the Minister for Agriculture and Food to support the agricultural industry in Western Australia, especially the traditional agricultural sector that delivers over 90 per cent of our production, and notes in particular the minister's apparent —

- (a) opposition to live export;
- (b) opposition to genetically modified crops;
- (c) opposition to the use of glyphosate;
- (d) failure to find a real solution to the impending farm labour shortage crisis;
- (e) failure to control invasive weeds and pests, noting the recent Auditor General's report;
- (f) victim-blaming approach to farm invasion protection for farmers; while at the same time her
- (g) failure to hold anyone to account for the mass cattle deaths on Yandeyarra and Noonkanbah stations.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! I have not even had a chance to put the question yet. Is it an indication of things to come?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I start this contribution by making the very simple and obvious observation that we have the most anti-agriculture Minister for Agriculture and Food this state has ever had. We are inflicted with a minister who has no understanding of agriculture and is given to stunts, such as bringing hats into state Parliament.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I could have brought in my own akubra and I could have worn my work boots. I note that I am probably the only member in the chamber who has the residue of cattle manure on their shoes—because I actually walk onto farms. The minister bringing in a hat has demonstrated my point amply and adequately in that it is a lovely hat that has not the least trace of agricultural production or dirt on it. It shows not the least trace of any understanding of what happens in agriculture in this state. She has beautifully proven my point: this minister has no understanding of agriculture. This minister is not a champion for agriculture. She is a champion for alternatives. She does perform one particular role, though, and that is to keep the only apparently working farmer in Parliament from taking over the role and being a greater disaster than the current minister already is. So, for that one particular role, I thank the minister! Even though we think it is bad, there is usually always one step downwards.

Agriculture in this state is vitally important. It is the case that traditional agriculture underpins all of our agriculture. It is one of the two great pillars of the economy of Western Australia that has put it in the sound economic position that it is in. The other, of course, is the mining sector. Without the Western Australian mining and agricultural sectors, this state would be in a bigger disaster than the state of Victoria is in at the moment. Agriculture deserves a round of applause from all of us for being a great component of our COVID recovery and a great pillar in upholding our economy in a very difficult set of circumstances.

What does agriculture look like in Western Australia? It might surprise the minister to learn that traditional agricultural production is where all of this activity is underpinning our economy. The Western Australian agricultural system puts out about \$10 billion of farm production every year. Of that, approximately \$3.4 billion comes from the WA wheat industry and \$1.6 billion comes from the WA barley industry, and that is based on last year's production and markets, so we will see how that goes. The wool industry is worth \$1 billion, the cattle industry is worth \$800 million, the canola industry is worth \$750 million and the sheepmeat industry is worth half a billion dollars. It all adds up to about \$8 billion of the \$10 billion of agricultural production in this state. That is before we put in things like the dairy, wine, vegetable and fruit industries. All those things are making a massive contribution to the economy of Western Australia. Well over 90 per cent of the production value of agriculture in Western Australia comes from these traditional industries—industries that this government and this minister appear to hold in absolute contempt. Although people who would like to grow biodynamic quinoa or run a small boutique brewery might say that this is a great Minister for Agriculture and Food, it is not the minister or the government for someone who is a grains producer or an animal producer in Western Australia, or for someone who works in any one of those great big marketplaces that underpin agriculture and provide the exports that feed and support regional communities in particular, but also the entire economy of Western Australia.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Colin Holt; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Darren West; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Aaron Stonehouse

This minister has no respect for traditional agriculture. It is traditional agriculture that gets us where we need to be. It is not enough to have a nice, clean shiny hat and turn up on a farm every once in a while to make an announcement. It might come as a surprise to the government to know that it does not understand the picking of fruit if it is already in the bottle! That is not understanding agriculture and agricultural production, and I will demonstrate precisely why this government and this minister have no understanding of agriculture.

Let me run through the list, because today's debate has an extremely short time frame. This minister should be a champion for agriculture. I do not see how she can do that if she spends most of her time attacking a significantly important part of agricultural production. I think the minister and I agree that there will come a time in the future when chilled meat products will replace live export, and that will be a great day.

Hon Darren West: They already are.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: They already are, so there is no live export from Western Australia! This is why we do not want Hon Darren West as the minister, because that would be worse. There are still plenty of live exports from Western Australia, Hon Darren West, and they will continue for a few decades to come yet. If the government pulls the rug out from under the live export industry, it will pull the underlying price support out from under the entire sheepmeat industry. It is essential that it be retained. A champion for agriculture in this state would be looking after the interests of those producers that rely on that industry.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: They would be a champion for the industry, instead of doing everything they possibly could to undermine it.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Yes, we should always be careful of someone who wears hats inappropriately. I think that is a good lesson we have learnt.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: That is why I've got you one!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: We are in dreamland, Madam President!

Opposition to live export undermines the traditional agricultural industries in this state. This minister is also apparently firmly in opposition to genetically modified crops. I am not the greatest advocate of genetically modified crops, but I understand that they play an important role in agriculture and will continue to do so in the future. This is probably the reason why the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs examined whether compensation was necessary for someone who had some genetically modified crop contamination. To the credit of that committee, it came back and said, "There is nothing to see here. This investigation was of little value. There is no evidence of any contamination causing any problems." But this minister is a champion for those who attack agriculture when we need a champion for agriculture. Genetically modified crops will play a role.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Where is the actual evidence?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I think the minister should read the report because that might give her some of the answers. That would be very useful.

In American courts, there are some questions about the safety of glyphosate, but everybody in Australia is telling us that glyphosate used as per the label is still allowable and considered safe for use in farming. The use of glyphosate means that no-till cropping has become a major part of agriculture in this state. The minister is again attacking one of those underpinning and underlying supports of agriculture.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Where's the evidence?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The evidence is out; it is called the wheatbelt. The evidence is in the wheatbelt because so many farmers who are still reliant on glyphosate —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Perhaps the minister should read the scientific papers. She should look at what Food Standards Australia New Zealand and other authorities are doing on this. Although opposition to almost every traditional form of agriculture might support the minister's agenda, she should be a champion for agriculture instead of spending her time undermining it.

The next one is an absolute ripper. Paragraph (d) refers to the failure to find a real solution to the impending farm labour crisis in Western Australia. This government was told six months ago that farm labour is a problem and that a crisis is pending. Its initial response was to put out a few more training places. Those training places are welcome, and maybe in a year's time they will provide a few more experienced farm workers to help pick crops, bring in wheat harvests and shear sheep, but for the time being it is a drop in the ocean. The government's next response was to say

that people from the city will simply walk to agricultural areas and take over these jobs. We have had unemployment in this state for decades. I actually live in a regional area, unlike, it would appear, the entire Labor upper house ticket from the South West. Those members will potentially be the fly in, fly out workforce of the south west. I live in the south west and I have worked around agriculture for decades. Donnybrook orchardists have relied on backpackers forever. Despite the fact that there has been unemployment in this state forever, we have not been inundated with people from the metropolitan region looking to pick fruit; and the few who do turn up tend to last two days before asking to be paid and moving on again. It is not easy work; it is difficult work. The government's advertising campaign, which started out as Wander Out Yonder and is now Work and Wander Out Yonder, is one of the most ridiculous things I have seen in my life. Not only will it be completely unable to deliver, it is a misrepresentation. I have seen the ad. The ad is great. It shows a couple of young ladies walking along the corridor between a set of fruit trees. They trot down the corridor, laughing and chatting to each other, and they pick the occasional piece of fruit while they have this lovely conversation. They are on a holiday! The ad says that they are on holiday.

Hon Diane Evers: What is your response?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: They are trotting down the corridor because they are on a holiday. The government's advertising campaign says, "If you pick fruit in a regional area, it's a holiday."

Hon Diane Evers: Give us your answer.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I will in a minute.

That might be perfectly reasonable if they were actually going on a holiday, and it might be what the government thinks fruit picking is like, but, as I have said, whether people pick fruit or just grapes, it is the picking part and not what ends up in the bottle that determines whether they know what they are talking about. It is the picking that matters, and it is a hard and difficult job. It is not a holiday. This campaign is a half-hearted and pathetic response from the government, which has been caught out and is utterly embarrassed by its response. It is absolutely the case that Western Australian industries need labour certainty. I was asked what my response is. My response has been public for weeks. The Northern Territory government has a deal with the federal government that allows it to bring in workers from Vanuatu to save the mango crops in the Northern Territory. There are 170 or so workers who arrived last week and they are doing 14 days of quarantine. They will be tested for COVID. They have come from a COVID-safe environment but the tests are still important. I propose that that continue in Western Australia. A workforce will be available and it will be funded by industry. It is also supported by the Northern Territory government, which, I believe from memory, is a Labor government, unless I have got that wrong. I think Labor won the last election. The commonwealth government has said to every state in Australia, "We will help you do the same thing." The problem is that this government has said, "We are not interested. We are going to tell young people in Perth sitting on Jobseeker that they should wander and work out yonder and blissfully drift down the aisles, picking the odd apple or pear as they go." That is this government's solution to the labour shortage in Western Australia.

Negotiations with the commonwealth should have happened already; if they have not, they should be happening now, because it will take months before such a workforce will be available and it has to be done before the crisis hits. This government will see fruit rotting on the vines and grapes unable to be picked. It will see sheep unable to be shorn, which will create a welfare crisis of its own. The government will see struggles with harvests because it does not understand the agricultural industry and what a harvest actually looks like. It is not a holiday, and to suggest it is a holiday is a significant slap in the face for the producers of Western Australia; and to suggest, as the minister did, that the problem is that they need to pay more to workers in agricultural areas—the suggestion was that farmers are too cheap—was a double slap in the face for farmers of Western Australia. This is an example of, let us call it, policy on the run, but it is actually no policy on the run. This is a media argument but it is not a sensible one. The way the government has maintained its approach is disgraceful.

I am going to run out of time. Paragraph (e) of the motion is an absolute ripper as well and refers to the failure to control invasive weeds and pests. The Auditor General's report that came out last week is an absolute beauty. It said that the state has failed in biosecurity. I am the first to say that it has failed for decades. I absolutely get that. But right now this minister is in charge. I have asked a couple of questions about this issue this week and the minister has again demonstrated that she has no understanding of agricultural production and no interest in looking after the interests of farmers. A champion for farmers would be out there saying, "We need to do better." The invasive species that are already on Western Australian land are a problem for farmers—they are a billion-dollar problem for farmers. Part of the problem with spraying chemicals about—I know that the minister hates the spraying of chemicals—is that we have weed invasion problems. The minister is a supporter of the organics industry and I think that is a good thing. I, too, am a supporter of the organics industry. Alternative farming has a place. I am a supporter of that. The people in that industry need to control pests and weeds, but they need to be encouraged to grow the industry, and the minister is doing that, so well done, minister. However, the difference between the Minister for Agriculture and Food and the shadow minister is that the minister supports those industries at the expense of

traditional agriculture, while I, as the shadow minister and a champion of agriculture, am interested in only having those things done concurrently. There is a place for alternative production. I am happy if people want to grow biodynamic quinoa or sell boutique beer. I am happy to support that, but I will not use that as an excuse to attack traditional agriculture and undermine its capacity to do its job, support regional communities, support farming families and underpin the economy of the entire state of WA. That is the big difference between the two of us. It is not one or the other; there is room in agriculture for all those productions.

The Auditor General's report was scathing of the government in its handling of biosecurity. It effectively said that nothing has been done. The minister is very careful to say that our focus is on exotic pests. That is great, but do members know what? The exotic pests are the ones that are not here yet. It is important to keep them out—we do not want foot-and-mouth disease in this state; there are a lot of things we do not want in this state—but what is happening right now is that invasive animal, plant and pest species are causing issues to farmers in this state, and that is still important. That includes, interestingly enough, the wild dogs out in Esperance, which I know Hon Ken Baston is very interested in. An interesting story came up this week. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions—that is the worst name of any department I have ever heard, DBCA; let us go back to calling it the Department of Parks and Wildlife—has stopped supporting the recognised biosecurity groups in their use of fluoroacetate for controlling wild dogs. Fluoroacetate, or compound 1080, as members might know it, is actually critically important, but the risk-averse DBCA is now saying that it will not support these recognised biosecurity groups. Of course, the problem with that is that the governments—governments plural—have set up these groups so that the various departments of government do not really have to bother. These groups are out there working on unallocated crown land and state-held land controlling wild dogs before they become a problem. They are doing that because nobody has made the departments look after the land for which they are responsible, which is in contravention of the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act, but that act had its teeth pulled in this house way back in 2007. Departments do not even have to report that; the government department gets a listing on the department of agriculture and food annual report saying that it has failed, but there is no penalty. But then we have recognised biosecurity groups out there doing their job, and this government is saying, “We’ve handballed this work off to you because we can’t be bothered doing it, but we’re not going to support you to do that work.” That is one of the most insane things I have ever heard. The government is saying, “We’re cost shifting off to you. We’ve abandoned ship on biosecurity; we can’t be bothered. By the way, the mere fact that you are actually doing the job for us doesn’t mean we are supporting you.” That is an absolutely ridiculous statement.

The last part of the motion—the victim-blaming approach to farm invasion—is something that I think this house is well aware of. This house previously examined in detail the Animal Welfare Amendment Bill 2017 and firmly rejected this minister’s animal rights agenda. We accept that there are important animal welfare issues to address, and if the minister wants to put those important animal welfare issues into a public debate, I am more than happy to take them up on her behalf. I am still a registered and qualified vet. I have some experience in the area, I have some qualifications, and I actually know what I am talking about, which I think is an exception to what we see in the government. I hope members will again reject this agenda. Farmers deserve protection in their own right. Farmers deserve to be protected, particularly because their homes are also their places of business. Agricultural producers deserve some protection. Agriculture needs a champion for agriculture, not a constant critic harping on about their own personal agenda. It is time for the government to figure that out and support the industry.

HON COLIN HOLT (South West) [10.32 am]: I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate today. I really want to concentrate on the announcement that was made yesterday by the Minister for Regional Development; Agriculture and Food about the redevelopment of the South Perth facility for the department of agriculture and food. She announced that around 500 office-based staff will move to a facility near the CBD. To my mind, that is a completely missed opportunity to look at how agriculture is being delivered in this state.

Yes, the ag department in South Perth is very old and has been in need of redevelopment for many, many years. The minister pointed out yesterday in her statement to this house that it has been promised over many decades and many previous governments, but the decision was finally made by this government to redevelop the site and move the department of agriculture and food—the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. There is no doubt about that need for redevelopment. But the decision to not look at moving that office to regional Western Australia, or at least to some interface with its main purpose, is absolutely a missed opportunity. We know that this government can make those decisions. Surely the Minister for Regional Development; Agriculture and Food would not make the decision to relocate departments like agriculture and regional development into the CBD if there were opportunities for them to be moved to other regional centres. I know there is capacity in a lot of those regional ag offices, especially in Albany and Bunbury. It would be interesting to know how much capacity there is. There was a great opportunity to say: how do we look at the new model? I understand it is difficult to move people out of South Perth, but guess what? That is what is going to happen. People are going to move out of South Perth. Here is the ideal opportunity to combine the two roles of the minister—agriculture and regional development—

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into one policy shift and to say, actually, let us take agriculture and regional development and put it into the regions, where most of the activity is.

I know that this government can do that because there are some great examples of it having been done, mostly within fire and emergency services. For example, a multipurpose bushfire management facility has been established in Collie, and there is a training facility there. We know that the government can do that. It has also moved the Bushfire Centre of Excellence, which is being built at the moment on the corner of the City of Mandurah and the Shire of Murray, so we know that it can make decisions on those sort of regional development opportunities. Another example is the Frontline Fire and Rescue Equipment manufacturing facility, which was awarded to a Malaga company, but some components of it are placed in Collie. In fact, the government incentivised that company to move from Malaga and take up residence in Collie. I think it is good that the government is incentivising regional businesses to provide regional development opportunities in those towns that really want and need it. Obviously, Collie is going through a transition in its economy. It is a good location for some of these facilities. But with the closing of the South Perth ag department, the same opportunity could have been provided to many regional communities and regional centres. Around 500 people will be going to the CBD. Perhaps we could take two-thirds or 300 of them and say, "Actually, your main role is in agriculture in the regions; let's relocate you to a regional facility where the ag department already has a major footprint."

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Why didn't that happen during the eight and a half years you were in government?

Hon COLIN HOLT: I have already said that the minister could have done that. The minister made the decision; she should defend her decision to put those people into the CBD. Do not keep blaming previous governments.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon COLIN HOLT: I am not the decision-maker. The minister made the decision to put it in the CBD. The minister should tell us, from a cabinet viewpoint or from her own viewpoint, what was involved in the decision: "Actually, this is a really good idea, we know we need to close it, we're going to put people in the CBD." The minister should defend that decision. We will defend the fact that we did not do it, but the minister should defend the decision that she did do it and made the decision not to relocate them to the regions. That is a question for the minister.

In the last six to eight months, we have had to operate differently in this state. The COVID pandemic and the response to it means that we have had to work remotely. We know that in many cases, although they have not completely improved, things like the national broadband network and telecommunications have improved throughout the regions, so there is no reason an agency such as the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development could not work effectively from outside the CBD of Perth. We know we can do it; we have been doing it effectively for six to eight months. The closing of the facility in South Perth was a natural step and an opportunity to invest in regional communities. When this government came to office, one of the first things it did was to stop the relocation of the Department of Parks and Wildlife, as it was named in those days, to Bunbury. The reason given was that the director general did not have the funds and the government needed to pull back on some of those decisions because of the state of the budget. Okay; that was the decision that the government made. That was going to provide a great incentive and a great injection of investment into Bunbury and the south west that would have helped enormously, just like the investment into the Bushfire Centre of Excellence in the Shire of Murray and other investments into Collie helped those places, but that was not done, for whatever reason. This was another opportunity for the minister to invest in those communities by taking an agency, the focus of which is almost completely outside Perth, to provide that same type of incentive, but it was a missed opportunity.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [10.40 am]: It is good to have this debate. I brought in my hat. I do not wear it, but I brought this in for you, sweetheart, because —

The PRESIDENT: Minister, as much as that might have been a term of endearment, you know that the standing orders require you to refer to members by their appropriate title.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: I thought Hon Dr Steve Thomas was one of the members of Parliament who had a little intellectual integrity. He gets obsessed by things like perfluoroalkyl substances. I thought that at least he was a guy who had intellectual integrity, but what he has shown today—hat or no hat—is that he is just a poor man's Barnaby Joyce. He is getting himself whipped up into this fury: "I'm gonna get out there and I'm gonna tell these farmers I like really like 'em and I'm just gonna tell them everything they want to hear", even if it means that he is absolutely and completely ineffective. He did not offer any evidence for a single thing that he said. He just made these Barnaby-like claims.

I find it incredible that anyone in the opposition could come in and actually be prepared to put their head above the parapet to talk about the conduct of agriculture in this state. During their eight and a half years in government, when we had record receipts and record income and royalties coming into this state, we were able to have plastic cows and singing toilets but we could not invest in the real cows! What we were told was that it had to cut and slash

from agriculture in every budget. That was extraordinary. When we got this portfolio, it was a basket case. It had been cut over and again by Mr Barnett, who used to say, “When we cut it, the farmers don’t complain, so we kept cutting.” We saw those extraordinary cuts and the department was in crisis. There was an acting director general. There had been such great animosity and trauma in the department that the director general had to be moved off to the Department of State Development. Because of the blue on green walls, the agricultural endeavour was spread across five different agencies and there was no morale. When we came in, we had to try to rebuild it.

I agree with some of the comments Hon Colin Holt made. I think it would be preferable, ultimately—this is our aim—to move more people out, but we inherited an organisation that was so dispirited that we had to rebuild it. At this point, our focus is on trying to get the show back on the road. We are talking about the absolutely essential endeavours. One of the first things that was presented to me to sign on the line when I became minister was a plan developed under the previous government to sell InterGrain—the premium wheat, barley and oats grower in this state—to an entity owned, in part, by the South Australian government, and it was to be headquartered in South Australia. I said no. We have to have that agency here, based in Western Australia, producing for and focusing on the needs of our grain growers. That has been a rip-roaring success. We have rebuilt InterGrain and it is performing a vital role. Likewise, with the grains industry. The previous government had some idea about establishing an institute but there was no active engagement with the Grains Research Development Corporation. We got in there and put \$40 million on the table. We told GRDC that we wanted some long-term funding from it and that we would match it dollar for dollar, because we understand that the most important thing for the grain sector is constant research. It is because of the R&D effort that that industry, over the last 40 years, notwithstanding the drying climate, has quadrupled its production. That is the way that we need to deal with this. The continuing opposition to that role of R&D is amazing.

Recently, as part of the restoration of these regional premises, we expanded the Merredin Dryland Research Institute. We could not believe that that facility had been instructed that it was no longer to be called the Dryland Research Institute. I think the research institute was initially opened by Dick Old and reopened by Monty House. For decades it had been called the Dryland Research Institute but was told that the name had to be changed to something generic. We are rebuilding that.

We are rebuilding the pride and the facilities to enable people to do this research. In the first couple of weeks when I was the minister, I went to Carnarvon. I was ashamed of the Carnarvon Research Facility. It was literally in tatters and had not been repaired since a cyclone hit it a few years ago. The endeavour at that station had been wound back. It was doing some research into fruit fly but not much else. We have rebuilt that facility and restaffed it. We have got that whole centre energised. Likewise, when we got into government, we found that funding for the Frank Wise Institute of Tropical Agriculture was probably down to about 25 per cent from what it had been. We have brought in new agriculture scientists and early career scientists, and senior professors of etymology are now based in that area. The institute is back to full production and is thriving, as is the Northern Beef Development project. This is mainstream stuff. The grain and beef producers in the north were highly dissatisfied with the Northern Beef Futures program, which for some reason or other was run out of Waroona and South Perth. We moved all those personnel to Broome. We talked to industry and got that back rocking and rolling. There is absolutely no evidence to support the member’s contention that we have not been focusing on those big sectors. In fact, we have done the things that the former government failed to do. We have spent much time trying to rebuild the capability and the morale of those agencies. I can tell members that we certainly are not entirely where we would like to be, but, my God, we are so much better than we were three and a half years ago.

This live export—what a load of cobblers! The opposition wants me to take the Barnaby Joyce approach. The Barnaby Joyce approach, federally, was to strip out of the federal agency all the animal welfare architecture. He presided over a regime that made it very clear to the regulators that they were not to regulate; they were absolutely to see no problem. He would put his hat on, get out there and talk about how much he loves live export. He was a champion; that was a champion. What happened? On vessel after vessel we saw extraordinary deaths in the summer period as the sheep were taken from the southern ports into high heat and humidity destinations in the Middle East. Of course, that created a huge catastrophe for the industry. When that occurred, our response here in WA was to say that we wanted a moratorium on exports during the northern summer. That is what our position was. Guess what? After about six months, all the industry recognised that that was a sensible way forward and it became the policy. We were not going to jump up and down and behave like boofheads. We were going to address the issue and ask: How do we de-risk this? How do we make sure that we have an industry that goes forward? The way we do that is by having a transparent and accountable system, and having a moratorium in place that deals with areas that are very, very high risk. That is generally supported across the board. The member’s mate Graham Daws probably does not support it, but the Australian Livestock Exporters’ Council generally has supported that position. It knows it is the sensible one. Organisations have to move with their communities.

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I turn to the next thing, which is genetically modified crops. I mean what a load of cobblers. Again, absolutely no evidence that I am against GM has been presented. Hon Dr Steve Thomas just asserted it. He is better than that. He has an intellect. As he and many people in the south west would know, there has been a big debate there amongst farmers, and not just there. In Canada, of course, we have also seen this. I was asked: do we want to look at whether there is an issue of compensation and do we want to address the complex legal problems associated with GM?

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: There was no complication.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: Legal issues have emerged around the world. Anyhow, the evidence came back from the committee that, as a practical matter, there was not a real issue here in Western Australia, so it has been done with. I know when the last mob was in government, for some bizarre reason they sold part of InterGrain to Monsanto because it wanted to develop genetically modified wheat. Monsanto walked away from that because it realised that, at the end of the day, there just was not a market and it sold its interests back to the department, and that was going to be sold to the South Australians before we stopped it. In the GM area we are working incredibly hard in the Kimberley to get the cotton industry underway. The whole viability of the cotton industry in the Kimberley is predicated on the use of genetically modified cotton plant fibre. There is absolutely zero evidence that I am opposed to GM.

I turn to glyphosate. We have not opposed glyphosate, but what we are saying responsibly is, “Hi guys, we have to see that there might be a problem down here.” Bayer, which now has bought Monsanto, has established a fund of €1 billion for compensation for people who have been exposed to glyphosate. China has banned it in our barley crops. We have seen successive countries such as Germany, Thailand and Vietnam all banning the use of glyphosate and the products that have been potentially exposed to it. We have to look at that. We cannot have a whole industry predicated on the use of one product and not be thinking, further down the chain, about how we make sure that if the science changes and the assessment of it is different, that we have some alternatives. To me it is completely and utterly irresponsible not to be looking at the changes occurring around the world and making sure that our farmers are well prepared. This is a job that requires people not to go out there bloody wearing a farm hat and some boots, but to apply some intelligence and discipline to the task.

HON DIANE EVERS (South West) [10.54 am]: I thank Hon Dr Steve Thomas for moving this motion. I really appreciate the opportunity to speak about agriculture, knowing so much about it, as I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago and studied accounting, but it is amazing how much we can pick up living for 25 years in the regions, talking to people and seeing what they are interested in and what they need to know. The member said something about traditional agriculture having got us to where we are, and I agree. We have been doing traditional agriculture since it became industrial agriculture, say, post-World War II, around that time, when we really put so many chemicals and so much mechanisation into it. But what we have going now is increasing land degradation and increasing salinity. Our pastoral regions have lower and lower stocking rates, not just due to climate change, but because there is just no feed out there. If the member wants to call it traditional agriculture, that is fine, but I would like to call it industrial agriculture.

I would also like to speak to the comments made by Hon Colin Holt. I strongly support having agriculture department representatives, the people, working in the regions, being out on farms and having a distributed network of officers, because we know we can work from multiple locations. We have to re-establish that connection to people so that the agriculture department staff are talking to farmers, learning from them and sharing the information they learn. It just makes sense to me.

I will get on to the motion. It talked about opposition to live export. That suggests to me that the member who moved this motion has an opposition to jobs in Western Australia. If we change from live export to processing onshore, think of the number of jobs that could be distributed around the regions processing those sheep and shipping the chilled meats. We know that area is increasing, and it is increasing because we are trying to increase it. The public is saying it does not want live export and that it wants animals treated humanely, as most growers do. That is the idea. I cannot imagine that the member would be opposed to increasing processing onshore. If all our sheep could be processed onshore, we would not have to export them, and what we would work on is getting that price up for the farmers growing the sheep and getting a fair price for those sheep.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas interjected.

Hon DIANE EVERS: We will get there a lot slower if we do not do anything about it, so we need to keep working on it and aim to end the live export context, because we can do that. It would also give us more opportunity to have more abattoirs around the state. Right now, people have to transport their sheep many hundreds of kilometres to get them processed, and we do not need to do that. We need to increase the number of abattoirs across the state for not only sheep but also other animals so that people can keep processing here and we keep building the jobs here.

I turn to the second part of the motion, which is the opposition to genetically modified crops. Again, I think the member is putting forward an idea of opposition to quality over quantity. With genetically modified crops we are usually looking just to increase the production level, but we are not looking at the quality of the goods. I know we are in theory, in research, but with the GM crops out there now, it is all about the quantity regardless of the quality.

Extract from *Hansard*

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 10 September 2020]

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Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Colin Holt; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Darren West; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Aaron Stonehouse

It seems that the member is also in opposition to profit over revenue. We have to increase profit back to our farmers. The revenue is lovely, it looks great on the books for our exports, but it is the profit that we want. We need to make farming more profitable.

I turn to opposition to glyphosate. Again, it seems that the opposition is suggesting that it is opposed to health over sickness. We know that around the world plenty of research has been happening on this. The reason that farmers here are becoming concerned that we may not be able to use glyphosate is that around the world it has been shown that this is not a good idea. It is appearing in our food products, it is appearing in breastmilk and it is appearing in our cows' milk. It is not something that people want to consume. There is research showing that it causes damage, but if there is not enough conclusive research for the member to understand this, I think it is only a matter of time. I think we should plan for the future when we will not be using glyphosate and we must come up with alternatives that work. We have to move on. We have to keep looking at the research, and planning for the future.

I turn now to the farm labour shortage, and to bringing in overseas workers to fill jobs here when we have high unemployment. It seems to me that something is missing. If we have high unemployment, we need to find out what we can do to get those people employed. If it is not working currently, and I do not think we like the government's involvement in trying to make it work one way or another, we have to get the employers and the employees together and say what will make it work. I agree that we need farm workers. We do not want fruit and veggies to rot on the trees and in the ground. We have to get people to do that work. It is hard work. Let us work out what we can do so that unemployed people here might think that picking fruit could be a better job than being a check-out chick at a grocery, a barista, or standing and holding a Stop/Go sign. There are other jobs that can be available for those people. We need to get the conversation going, possibly facilitated with some sort of government help to make that happen. We need to get back to what I said yesterday about people being involved in decisions. Let us get the employers and the employees talking together. Let us have some democracy happening so that we can come up with solutions that people can deal with and live with and are happy to do. There are a lot of positives about living in the regions. If we can find a way to get that across to some of the currently unemployed people, maybe they will go to the regions and establish their life out there.

I turn now to the control of invasive weeds and pests. I note the recent Auditor General's report. I want to give a little plug to the Auditor General. Remember to fill in those surveys. It is very important that the Attorney General continues to do work like this and provide those recommendations. Seven recommendations came out of that report that the member alluded to. All those recommendations had the words "DPIRD should". I agree that the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development should be supported. Our agriculture department, as part of DPIRD, is the poor cousin in some way. Only one of the five executives of DPIRD came from the agriculture department. It is a vital part of that. Our regional development depends on our agricultural regions to produce what they do and to continue with that.

One thing I see with our agriculture department and where we are going to locate that department is that this seems to be another place for the bipartisan camaraderie that is going on between Labor and Liberal—"It's their fault"; "No, it's your fault." It just goes back and forth. To limit the department and what it can do seems to have been happening from both sides. I acknowledge that some positive work is happening, but there is much more to do. We need to get the department into the regions and distribute those office spaces so that people can do the research and be on farm with the farmers to see what needs to be done. That is what we have to do. Both sides have failed. Labor and Liberal have both let down our agricultural industry and farmers.

I think that better can be done. I believe the minister thinks that better can be done, too. That is what she is aiming for, and I wholly support that. I would like to see our agricultural industry thriving, and not just looking at monocultures and at the next genetically modified crop that we will cover the planet with. We need to diversify. We can do a lot more. If we want to plan for the post-COVID reality that is coming upon us, we need to be self-sufficient in as many areas as possible. Western Australia is great at food production. We can produce much more than we will ever need. But we should then start looking at what things we should be producing. We are relying on wheat, when many other countries around the world can produce wheat and are doing it almost as well as we are doing now. We have to diversify. Our agriculture department could be looking at: what things will be needed around the world that we can export viably and safely and will be financially profitable? That is where we need to go—diversify. We can bring back some health to the landscape by diversifying, rather than just putting in the same crop year after year, with the same chemical fertilisers on top of it, and damaging other parts of the state by having to produce these chemical fertilisers. We can do better. We do not have to rely on what was done in the past.

One last thing is the inspections that are proposed in the legislation that is coming up. We need legislation that allows inspectors to go to abattoirs and industrial —

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Industrial agriculture.

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Hon DIANE EVERS: Not industrial agriculture. It is to do with animals. The word escapes me at the moment. That is what this is looking at. Intensive animal raising—that is what we need to see.

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [11.04 am]: What a provocative motion we have before us today. Anybody would think an election is on the horizon at the moment! It is very disingenuous of Hon Dr Steve Thomas to target the Minister for Agriculture and Food for a lack of interest in agriculture. Frankly, it is the entire government that has no interest in agriculture. That is evident at the moment when we look at the government benches—we have the only farmer in the Parliament; the Whip, who has to be here; the agriculture minister; and, of course, Hon Laurie Graham, who is always very diligent in staying within the Parliament.

The PRESIDENT: Member, you know it is not appropriate to reference who is currently in the house and who is not.

Hon RICK MAZZA: My apologies, Madam President.

Since this government has come into office, it has wanted to shut down the Schools of the Air and close Moora Residential College, which I think it would have done had it not been for the intervention of the federal government.

We have some major issues and challenges before us with COVID-19. I feel for the Minister for Agriculture and Food. However, while “Iron” Mark is marching up and down doing border control, and looking at Metronet and Westport, many issues in the agricultural sector are being neglected. Yesterday, I asked a question without notice about what the government intends to do with labour shortages, particularly around shearers. The answer that I got back was quite varied. There was mention that the wool clips were lighter, so they would be easier to shear. There was mention that we have falling wool prices. Wool still grows; it does not matter what the price is. There was mention that some training is being undertaken for some shearers. The problem with wool, as the only farmer in the Parliament would know, is that the clip has to come off at the right time of the year. We are coming into the flystrike season. The weather is warming up. If we have wet wool and warm weather, the flystrike will be absolutely relentless. Farmers have to be able to get the clip off the sheep’s back, regardless of the wool price. Some real animal welfare issues are coming up. Part of the answer that I got was that farmers should undertake some management practices. If farmers do not have shearers, how will they be able to do that? All they can do is jet the sheep to try to hold off the inevitable. We need to have workers for shearing. Recently, I saw a *Landline* article about how some shearers, aged in their 70s, are being brought out of mothballs to undertake the job. The spirit of country people is that they will come out of retirement to do the job. One old shearer reckoned that he had sheared over a million sheep in his lifetime, and he is still going and wants to assist. That is how dire things are. Unfortunately, we cannot teach someone how to shear in a matter of months; it takes a long time. Many shearers have come from farms and have been brought up with shearing. Finding skilled shearers is not something that we can resolve in a heartbeat. We have to look at how we can get shearers into the state.

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon RICK MAZZA: The member will have his turn, I am sure, after me.

We have to get shearers into the state to deal with the issues at hand right now.

The other issue, of course, is fruit picking. I refer to an article that was on ABC News last month that is quite heartbreaking. It was about Ray Guadagnino from down south, who has said that he will have to pull out 1 700 apple trees because they are too labour intensive and he cannot get them picked. The article goes on to say that the industry body, Pomewest, expects labour supply disruptions to continue for up to five years. It is not a matter of sending people who are on JobSeeker down south to pick apples, grapes or strawberries. Believe it or not, there is a bit of skill in some of that.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas interjected.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I do not think people can just wander down south, visit the wineries, and then pick a few apples or something. It needs to be a bit more organised than that. There has been talk about bringing in backpackers, if that is the term members want to use. I know that on the east coast, they have been bringing in people from the Pacific Islands, which have very low rates of COVID, if any, quarantining them, and getting them to help with strawberry picking. Some of these products have a very short window of opportunity in which to be picked, or they are gone. We have all sorts of issues surrounding our workforce.

I do not think enough is being done to deal with this, and some of the ideas are a little fanciful. There is certainly a lot of work around that.

The Auditor General’s report was quite damning on invasive weeds and pests, but we have been losing control of that for quite some time now. When the Agriculture Protection Board was disbanded some years ago, the approach to biosecurity became much more fragmented, and we have seen plants like cotton bush spread throughout the south west, causing major issues for farmers. The real problem with a lot of biosecurity groups and councils is that

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they put pressure on landholders to deal with their cotton bush infestations, which costs a fair bit of money, but down the road all the public-managed land is choked up with cotton bush, all down the gullies. I have noticed other weeds that I have not seen before starting to crop up. One has a little yellow flower. I do not know its name. I have tried to find it on the internet.

Hon Darren West: It's capeweed.

Hon RICK MAZZA: No, it is not capeweed, member. It has a little bellflower and a wobbly seed. That plant is starting to choke up land, too, and I believe livestock will not eat it. We are starting to lose control of a lot of issues when it comes to pests, whether that is insect pests, weeds or even animal pests. The problem with biosecurity groups is that they are quite fragmented and there is a fragmented approach to biosecurity. There is no coordinated approach in dealing with these things. I think a lot of work needs to be done there. The Auditor General's reports have highlighted the issue and pointed out that the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development needs to do some work in that area, and I think there needs to be some investment in that. A lot of people complain to me that they resent that they have a \$30 levy on their rates to deal with this, but they do not know where the money has gone. It goes to the biosecurity group and the government matches it, but I do not think there is a lot of reporting after that.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Member, we are actually trying to improve that.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is good news.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: I believe that certainly the operational plans—the annual reports are published, but I think we've got to do more in terms of transparency, and I've said to the biosecurity groups that will certainly change from next year. If we can get it happening retrospectively, we will.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is good to hear, minister. There might have to be an entire review of how we are handling this because at the moment it is failing.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: We are reviewing the BAM act. That will start later this year, and that will be a significant part of it—whether or not that structure has worked.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Thanks, minister.

In the few minutes I have left, I want to touch on farm invasions and activists who enter onto farms. I believe the trespass bill has been read in to the other place. The problem with that bill is it has a barb in it. A lot of farmers who I have spoken to about the trespass bill have said that they think it is a good idea that people will not be able to trespass, but when I explained to them it contains designated inspectors, they are horrified.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Inspectors would go into an abattoir.

Hon RICK MAZZA: They do not like the idea of people entering their farms.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Can I finish, minister; I have only a couple of minutes, and I am not going to take any more interjections.

They are horrified by this bill. It is a bit disingenuous to say that it is a trespass bill when in fact it contains an amendment to the Animal Welfare Act as well. There needs to be some transparency and truth when it comes to naming bills. It is a bit like the puppy farming bill, whereby the only place "puppy farming" is mentioned is in brackets in the heading. It is not mentioned anywhere else in the bill; it is a headline. I am sure much of this is to do with the election coming up, as a point of difference.

I think that the government should focus a lot more on agriculture in Western Australia, particularly with the COVID lockdown, as far as the workforce is concerned. We also have water deficiencies and there are many challenges out there. At the moment, there does not seem to be a great focus by government on agriculture in Western Australia. I am sure that very shortly I will hear a very different point of view, but that is the way I see it at this point in time.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.13 am]: I think it is important to give the perspective of a purveyor of agriculture, as the only working farmer in the Western Australian Parliament. I was disappointed. Hon Dr Steve Thomas is a man of some intelligence and he does have an interest in agriculture, but what a disappointing way to start his foray into the shadow agriculture portfolio. He is the third string from the Liberals—the third choice behind the member for Geraldton and Hon Jim Chown. We finally get down to Hon Dr Steve Thomas, and this is how we start. The honourable member follows the four failed Ministers for Agriculture and Food in the Barnett government, and he is continuing the tradition of people who do not bring any ideas or policies or have an agenda for the future of agriculture, but just have an A-grade whinge. That is all we got today from the shadow minister, and I encourage him to change tack and perhaps work more productively—pardon the pun—on how we

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might better agriculture in Western Australia, rather than just getting stuck into a very good, hardworking and dedicated minister. I point out the honourable member —

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Why aren't you the minister?

Hon DARREN WEST: I am quite happy to be parliamentary secretary to the best. I am quite happy with that arrangement.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Members, I am trying to hear Hon Darren West.

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you. I know it causes great speculation among the opposition, but on our side we are quite happy with the arrangements as they are, because we are doing good work in agriculture. The minister and I went out to Kulin recently. There were a couple of hundred farmers in the room. Naturally, we were not the political flavour of the people in the room, but we were extraordinarily well received. We talked positively about how we can look forward to dealing with the issues of water deficiency, climate change and tier 3 rail. Do members remember tier 3 rail? Hon Simon O'Brien knows a thing or two about tier 3 rail. We talked positively about how we might be able to work closely with farmers in the eastern wheatbelt, and we were extraordinarily well received. We know that we are not the political flavour liked by farmers out there; we accept that. But this minister is one in a long line of outstanding Labor agriculture ministers—the late Hon Kim Chance, the late Hon Ernie Bridge and now Hon Alannah MacTiernan.

I will remind members that 300 staff in regional Western Australia were sacked from the Department of Agriculture and Food under the previous government. In fact, Esperance went from 44 staff to 20 staff under the previous government's watch. In 2008, when the Barnett government came to power—surprisingly and regrettably—45 per cent of staff in the Department of Agriculture and Food worked in regional Western Australia. When that government was turfed out in 2017—thankfully—that was only 41 per cent. The number of staff in the department was not only decimated; it was decimated more in the regions. I point out that the honourable member is a brave man to pop up his head and talk about agriculture and put his side's perspective, because, obviously, it is a terrible story that he has to tell! People in the agricultural industry have not forgotten what the former government did to their industry—it cut all the research, cut all the staff and centralised jobs in the city.

I know other members want to speak, but I want to run through the points in the shadow minister's A-grade whinge. On the opposition to live exports, I can make the shadow agriculture minister very happy by informing him that in five more sleeps, the *Al Kuwait* will arrive to pick up live sheep destined for the Middle East as the moratorium, suggested by the minister and taken up by industry, will have ended. Members will remember the *Al Kuwait* because I had a bit of trouble last time it was here, and it left a little late, with permission.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: It still owes \$400 000.

Hon DARREN WEST: It does owe us \$400 000. The ship left and every day I got an email about the state of the stock and what was happening on that ship. That is a far cry from the Barnaby days, when nobody knew anything, and we all saw the outcome of that. This minister has made a much more positive contribution to the live export industry than the honourable member gives her credit for, because we still have one. The *Al Kuwait* will be here in five days to pick up some sheep and take them to the Middle East. In the last 11 years, numbers out of Western Australia have dropped from 2.5 million to one million. There are about 28 abattoirs, some of which are owned by live export companies, so the trend is on, member. The jobs processing those animals are moving to Australia; the trend is on.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: Barnaby Joyce had a total failure as an agriculture minister.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: His failures don't excuse your failures.

Hon DARREN WEST: I think there are other people like him on the honourable member's side of politics.

Genetically modified crops are still being grown in Western Australia, but they are losing favour with farmers, because we have moved on. We are putting mills on harvesters and finding other ways to deal with grass weeds in crops. They are very expensive to buy because the seed must be bought from Bayer. The other day, the discount hit \$100 a tonne. Farmers are making the decision with their feet to move into more conventional canola or into lupins. Genetically modified canola in the wheatbelt is not the panacea that was sold to farmers, but it is still being grown and as the minister pointed out, we are making advances in the Ord in growing cotton. This minister is not opposed to genetically modified crops—that is incorrect. We are not opposed to the use of glyphosate. We use glyphosate regularly. There is an issue with using it as a desiccant and there could be an issue in using it on genetically modified crops, but using it as a pre-emergent, as a knockdown, is no problem. Our customers have concerns. It is not the minister's concerns, it is our customers in Europe and other parts of the world who have concerns. We have

to respond to our customers' concerns, because the first rule of retail is that the customer is always right. That is not an opposition to glyphosate, it is a concern that we might want to think about a future when our customers will say that they will buy the product at a discount. We might want to think about a future when we can have alternative arrangements. As I said, we used no glyphosate in our last two croppings because we have had no opening rains.

That is my segue into the biggest issue facing agriculture that is not listed in the motion. Although the issues in the motion are important, the biggest issue is the change in our climate, with water deficiencies and shorter growing seasons. As I pointed out, we are in a safe farming area and we had rain on 4 June and 24 May in the last two years. We had seeded by then and did not use any glyphosate in those last two years. We are going to have a warmer and drier climate. How might we as an industry adapt to that warmer and drier climate with less water, more evaporation and shorter growing seasons? I suggest that a good way to start would be to invest in research. That is what this minister has done; she has put \$45 million into research bringing scientists back into the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to do that very important research.

Members, we have a good story to tell in agriculture. The agricultural sector will disagree as a whole with the motion. This minister is highly motivated, solutions based, very driven and brings a lot of energy to the portfolio. Earlier, I referred to the previous four failed ministers. As a senior minister in cabinet, the Minister for Agriculture and Food has the capacity to get good decisions made with much-needed funding allocated—funding that was cut under the last government. I have said it 100 times before and I will say it again: there has never been a better time to be in agriculture. This motion talks our industry down. The member needs to stop. Can I suggest that the shadow minister takes a different tack, because as we run up to the election—I will help him here—the public and the agricultural industries do not want to hear whingeing, moaning and bickering between politicians. They want to hear about a vision for the future, because there is absolutely nothing in this motion other than an A-grade whinge.

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [11.22 am]: Other people want to speak, so I will try to make this as quick as I can. I thank the member for bringing this important non-government business to the house. It is quite clear to me that most of the seven points that the member pointed out in the motion are very important: opposition to live export, opposition to genetically modified crops, use of glyphosate, impending farm labour shortages, failure to control invasive weeds and pests, a victim-blaming approach to farm invasions, and, of course, the absolute silence on Yandeyarra reserve and Noonkanbah station. These areas are very important, and some of them have not been discussed today.

One of the areas that is also very important is water. I would like to talk a little about that. In its 2018–19 annual report, the Water Corporation reported that half a billion dollars was put back into general revenue. I cannot believe that it would put that money back when there is a complete lack of infrastructure reinvestment going on. Standpipes are non-functional and farmers are now having to travel an extra 20 to 30 kilometres to get a tank load. It is incredible that there are whole communities without decent water infrastructure, yet the Water Corp is returning money to general revenue. That is a failure. I have also seen in the Water Corp's annual report that its value for money came out at five out of 10. That does not surprise me. There are massive increases in hardship requests, not just in the country and regional areas, but also in the metro area. People just cannot afford to pay their water bill. The farm water rebate scheme was abolished. Maybe the Water Corp should look at that again. We need help when it comes to water, because the work is not being done and it is returning money to general revenue, which is a real disappointment.

I also want to get on to an issue with farm labour. I am certainly in favour of Western Australians taking up Western Australian jobs, as Hon Diane Evers mentioned; however, it is not always possible. Certainly, under the cruel and uncompassionate way that our Premier is handling the COVID-19 situation, he is making it very, very hard for shearers and farm workers to make their way to work on farms here. There will be a lot of waste. Sheep will need to be sheared, fruit will need to be picked and many jobs on farms will go undone, which will affect the bottom line in the end. It is not good that sheep producers will have to wait an extra month. As we know, wool prices have halved. Animal welfare issues will also be looming, with flystrike due to the delay in shearing. Hon Rick Mazza mentioned that.

It did not surprise me that Hon Darren West mentioned that the Labor Party was not the political flavour for farmers. It is not the political flavour for farmers because of its past and current record. Its interest in the regions has been wanting for many years; it rates less than five out of 10. When we look at farm labour issues and the lack of expenditure on and work done in water infrastructure, it is no wonder we see regional Western Australia struggling. Regional Western Australia continues to deliver, even with all these difficulties. If this government and this minister gave some more thought to the points mentioned in this honourable member's non-government business motion, maybe we would start to make some headway.

Regarding Yandeyarra and Noonkanbah, I have been to both stations. I know the Aboriginal people who work on those stations and the elders who run those stations. They are prepared to be held accountable for anything they do wrong, and the silence from this government is disappointing.

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HON AARON STONEHOUSE (South Metropolitan) [11.27 am]: I appreciate other members limiting their debate to allow time for me to contribute to this motion. I rise in support of this motion. I believe the Minister for Agriculture and Food has failed the industry for the reasons that have been outlined by previous speakers, but, for me, it is no clearer than in how the government's hard border is currently affecting the agricultural sector. Right now, fruit producers and wool producers are suffering the potentially severe hardship of not being able to get in seasonal workforces from over east and New Zealand. We also have a problem in that the entire ag industry will very shortly be looking at a shortage of truck drivers, because truck drivers are being attracted to jobs in the resource sector that are high paying, of course. The resource sector does not have problems with this hard border. It has the scale and scope to import workers and settle them permanently in Western Australia. The ag sector does not have that scale or purchasing power in the same way. Some of this workforce is low skilled. Shed hands are low skilled, fruit pickers are certainly low skilled, but shearers are not. That is a highly skilled profession in which years of experience can increase the productivity and efficiency of a shearer. One person can shear a few dozen sheep a day, and another can shear 100 or more a day.

A member interjected.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: They absolutely are essential workers, honourable member.

The same goes for truck drivers. Someone can be trained up to be a truck driver in a fairly short period, but to train them to drive the specific configuration needed for road trains can take quite a long time. We do not want amateurs or people who are rushed through training driving road trains on our roads. That is dangerous. Nobody wants that. Normally, we would rely on a transient workforce from the eastern states and from New Zealand. We cannot do that in this case because we have a hard border in place.

It is all good and well to say that we have public health concerns and that we cannot raise the hard border for the sake of the agricultural industry. But it turns out that we can. We have been raising it. We have been providing exemptions for professional sportspeople, players in the AFL and other sports codes, and businesspeople. Kerry Stokes gets waved through; he gets a shorter quarantine period than anybody else does. Mates of the Premier get the red-carpet treatment. But truck drivers and shearers who are looking for some hard, honest work in the agricultural sector in Western Australia are sent packing; they are sent on their way. Why is our Minister for Agriculture and Food not beating down the doors of the Minister for Health, the Premier, the Minister for Police and the Commissioner of Police demanding some kind of travel bubble for the ag sector labour force—for shearers, fruit pickers, truck drivers and all the other kinds of transient workers the ag sector relies upon?

I find it absolutely hilarious that members and the government are suggesting—the Greens' contribution was laughable—that we can somehow get people from the city to go out there as fruit pickers. Has anyone ever been a fruit picker?

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Yes, I have.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: The minister has? That is great.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: And I'm from the city and I loved it.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: That is great.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: I thought it was fantastic!

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: Shush, minister! I have only a minute and a half left.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Member, I am the only one who will call shush, and I have been trying to do that and none of you is listening. Hon Aaron Stonehouse has the call.

Hon AARON STONEHOUSE: It is unskilled work but it is not easy. Granted, I did it for only one day. When I was a teenager, I volunteered to work for an orange producer that had a shed burn down. I did it for only one day. It was not easy. The government thinks it is going to get Instagram teenagers out there picking fruit on a regular basis. It is not going to happen. Pol Pot tried that, and it resulted in the death of millions. This weird idea that somehow we are going to get city folks out there picking fruit for pennies, as we do with backpackers, is not going to happen. It is absolutely shameful. It will mean the financial ruin of farmers. It will also potentially result in a crisis for animal welfare. When it comes to lambing season and we have high temperatures and there is the risk of fly strike, grass seeds and all the other problems, and farmers are not able to shear sheep in time, we will have an animal welfare crisis on our hands, and it will be on this government's head. It will be the government's fault.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.