

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

**DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT —
MACHINERY-OF-GOVERNMENT CHANGES**

Motion

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural) [1.12 pm]: I move —

That this house —

- (a) recognises the lengthy time line for implementation of the McGowan government's machinery-of-government changes;
- (b) notes the effect of the MOG changes on the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development; and
- (c) calls on the Premier and the Minister for Regional Development to immediately take action to stem job losses and mental health concerns within DPIRD.

I bring on this important motion for discussion today because the machinery-of-government changes implemented by the McGowan government are a seismic change in the structure and function of government departments, and obviously that will have a very big effect on the people within those departments and their ability to deliver the remit of government.

Change is difficult in any circumstance. Change of this scale is even more difficult, especially organisational change in which a number of different departments are being amalgamated. A whole raft of things need to be considered and adopted in making those changes, ensuring that staff uncertainty, fears and concerns are dealt with along the way, and ensuring that the change delivers what it intends to deliver. That requires strong management. What consideration did this government give to how that change would be managed and to how all those other things would be allowed for? In the course of my research, I came across a document published by the Victorian Public Sector Commission that refers to leadership errors commonly made during organisational change specifically in the public sector. I will list those common errors: focusing on content, not on the process and the people; overlooking accountabilities; mistaking communication for consultation; creating change plans that do not change; not planning for a drop in organisational productivity; forgetting to revise formal delegations; not doing what others are expected to do—that is, change; and withdrawing focus too soon. The point about not planning for a drop in organisational productivity is really important, because in this case, a department is going through a seismic change not long after the election of a new government, which considers itself to have a strong mandate to implement its policy and legislative reforms, so it really wants an increase in productivity at the same time as it is managing this significant change, which is more likely to result in it being very difficult for the people in those departments to deliver the required productivity.

What is even more important is when the change is unplanned. On 28 April 2017, Stuart McKinnon and Dylan Caporn wrote an article in *The West Australian* titled “McGowan flags imminent public service cuts”. It states —

Mr McGowan said the Government had committed to public sector reform before the election.

In a speech in December, he said a Labor Government would aim to reduce the number of agencies by 20 per cent ...

That was in December 2016, but, interestingly, the second paragraph of the “WA Labor Public Sector Policy” released in December 2016 states —

We recognise the need to respond to the changes in the WA economy and population by recruiting, retaining and supporting our public sector employees ...

In December 2016, at the same time as the aspiring Premier was announcing a 20 per cent cut in the number of agencies, Labor was referring to recruiting, retaining and supporting public sector employees in the “WA Labor Public Sector Policy”. That is incredibly important. Of course, on the same day that that article appeared in *The West Australian*, a media release from the Premier stated that he had announced that 40 per cent of government departments would be amalgamated or abolished. First it was 20 per cent and then it went up to 40 per cent, so Labor has certainly surpassed its pre-election commitment and has well and truly surpassed its policy of recruiting and retaining people in the public sector. All these announcements about change created a great deal of uncertainty. Of course, subsequent to those announcements, the government went on to announce a service priority review, which was meant to set out the blueprint for reform and cultural change in Western Australia's public sector. That report was delivered in October 2017. That was six months after that announcement and, in fact, 10 months after the announcement in December that there was going to be significant change.

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

Fast-forward to 28 November 2018, when there was an article in *The West Australian* by Paul Murray titled “Cogs of change turning slowly in government”. Mr Murray states —

Nearly 18 months into the process, the Auditor-General is unimpressed with how the program is performing.

“Progress with amalgamating systems of the various constituent entities is slow, with most departments continuing to operate on several financial, human resource and administrative systems,” a report released on November 8 says.

The Auditor General’s “Audit Results Report—Annual 2017–18 Financial Audits of State Government Entities” released in November 2018 states that implementation is taking longer than expected and that departments are having problems amalgamating a number of the systems.

Fast-forward to June this year and the estimates hearing held with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, when the minister said in her opening statement —

We recognise that the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is still going through its machinery-of-government phase, and that this does present some challenges.

We have gone through 2017 and 2018 and we are halfway through 2019 and there is still the uncertainty created by these changes, and that is putting a tremendous amount of pressure on the employees of the department. There is no doubt that change of that scale takes time to implement. However, it is also very interesting to look at yet another article in *The West Australian* of 25 July 2017 by Dylan Caporn titled “Government cuts causing stress in WA public servants”. Mr Caporn referred to a poll of public sector workers that showed that more than 60 per cent had found out about downsizing from colleagues rather than managers. This is very interesting. It is research done by Stephen Teo, a professor at Edith Cowan University. I reached out to Professor Teo in the course of researching this motion. He was presenting in the USA, but he came back to me, very graciously, in an email, and I am very grateful for his response, in which he outlined some of the results he found in the survey that he had done of these public sector employees. To summarise some of the key points: people do not know how to plan for their lives or make vital decisions, because of the stress and pressure that is being put on them through these changes. Fifty-seven per cent of respondents to his survey reported some degree of stress; 65 per cent reported feeling tired for no good reason; and 60 per cent reported feeling nervous at work. As employees experienced frequent and uncertain change, there was an increase in insomnia and psychological stress, which in turn was leading to depression. All of these things were going on in 2017, when this work was done. It was published in *The West Australian* of 25 July 2017.

Now let us fast forward to 2019, and a survey released just last week from the Community and Public Sector Union–Civil Service Association of WA into the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. It is very interesting that the issues were foreshadowed in 2017, but what do the survey results tell us in 2019? I understand that this survey was done in about May this year. Seventy-one per cent of respondents to the survey had no confidence in job security in the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. Sixty-nine per cent of respondents felt that organisational change was having a negative impact on their mental health. One survey respondent commented that DPIRD has become a dysfunctional and unhappy workplace and that it is only through the goodwill of the people that the organisation continues to function, but this comes at a cost to morale and the health of individuals. This clear data from the CPSU–CSA shows that there are a bunch of problems within the department. The survey done across the public sector in 2017 by Stephen Teo also indicated that issues were occurring, so it is pretty reasonable to say that the problems identified in this CPSU–CSA report should have been foreseen and managed. Systems and processes should have been put in place to identify these issues and deal with them immediately.

One of the interesting questions asked in this survey was: are you clear about your ongoing role within the agency? Of the respondents to that question, 3.6 per cent said they were very clear about their ongoing role within the agency, while 96 per cent were not clear, a little bit clear or not at all clear. Ninety-six per cent of people who responded to that survey within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development are struggling to know what their ongoing role is within that agency. That is incredibly challenging for the people in that organisation. If they do not know what they are supposed to be doing, how are they able to do it, how is productivity able to be improved, how is their health and wellbeing supposed to be managed, and how are the functions of the agency able to be carried out in a timely and effective manner, especially when we layer on top of that the priorities of the government and ministers in policy and legislation? That creates a pretty big sandwich for these employees to find themselves in, and leaves them in a very difficult situation in managing their way through all of this.

Massive change and uncertainty has been created by these machinery-of-government changes. I believe that the government has forgotten that the government is not a machine; it is people. The public sector is full of very good people who do a very good job of implementing the work of government. Most people in the public sector would

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

say that they are doing something for the people of Western Australia. It is incredibly important that we support them through that, and that, when changes like this are occurring, we ensure that systems and processes are put in place so that their health and wellbeing is monitored and maintained all the way along, so that we know that we can effectively identify when problems arise. It is interesting that this survey, which came out very recently, identifies, as I said, a number of very significant issues with the health and wellbeing of people in the department, who are working hard to carry out their roles and functions within the department even though 96 per cent of them are uncertain about what their role is.

To move forward and talk a bit more about the roles within the department, I have asked a number of questions over the course of this Parliament about the roles and functions of people within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. For example, in a question taken on notice at this year's budget estimates hearing I asked the department to provide a split of the full-time equivalents across agriculture, fisheries and regional development. The response was —

It is not possible for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) to provide a split of its current FTE between the subject matter areas of the previous legacy agencies. The restructure of DPIRD's functions and positions to implement the 2017 Machinery of Government ... changes, has resulted in the realignment of functions and, in some cases, the movement of staff from specific roles held in the legacy agencies into broader roles to support DPIRD's broader remit. While many staff members continue to provide expertise in one or other area, identification of these staff members would be a significant task and would not provide a meaningful split of FTE overall.

We cannot get that information. In a question asked prior to the hearing, the answer to which was provided immediately ahead of the hearing, the minister provided some very helpful information—I have no issue with that. The response is a very helpful and useful document. There are tomes of information here. I asked specifically about the breakdown of FTEs by region, town and position right across Western Australia for DPIRD, over the course of a number of years. Very helpfully, a table in this document lists the 1 663 FTEs across the department, in the various locations where it has offices. Very helpfully, this document provides a position title for a number of these officers, but we are clearly told that it cannot be ascertained that staff members provide expertise in one area or another, because their roles are split across a number of different functions within the department. The CPSU–CSA survey identifies very clearly that people are not clear about their roles within the agency. Looking at some of the examples of FTEs across the department, is a senior fisheries and marine officer providing services to agriculture, regional development or fisheries? Whose remit is biosecurity? It is agriculture or fisheries? It could be argued that it can be spread across fisheries and agriculture, although possibly not regional development. Again, what about quarantine inspectors?

Given that this information is in a very convenient spreadsheet, it should not be that difficult to establish at least the baseline number of people providing services across agriculture, fisheries or regional development, and to provide clarity to those people that at the very least the title of their job means something, and give them some clarity about their role in the department. That is clearly identified as a significant problem in the CPSU–CSA survey. Research undertaken by Professor Teo way back in 2017 also identified these uncertainty issues. I have talked about how change creates uncertainty, and how that uncertainty must be managed, because the government is not a machine—it is people, and those people deserve to be treated fairly, have clarity about their roles and know that they are valued and important to the government and the people of Western Australia. It must be particularly challenging for those who have roles not only within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, but also in other departments.

The last part of the motion is self-explanatory. The Nationals WA ask for the support of other members in the chamber to immediately call on the Premier and the Minister for Regional Development to take action and address the mental health concerns and job losses in the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. In 2017, we clearly identified a number of warning signs of significant health and wellbeing problems in a broad number of government departments, including the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. The Community and Public Sector Union–Civil Service Association of WA survey subsequently came out and clearly identified very significant issues. Why were the early warning signs not heeded? Why has it taken until now for something to be done? The managers of this change must be held responsible for checking in with the people who have been impacted by the changes. They must understand that their health and wellbeing are incredibly important to ensure that the organisation's productivity continues to be strong and that it delivers the government's commitments, policies and legislation and performs the essential functions for the industries the department represents. Regional development is an incredibly important function. Agriculture is an incredibly important function and obviously a very significant Western Australian industry. Fisheries is a very significant industry. The people working in those organisations and the industry at large need the certainty that staff are

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

functioning at their best and that they are in turn being looked after so that they can perform the functions the industry requires of them. We call on the Premier and the Minister for Regional Development to take immediate action and explain to the Parliament how they will address the concerns we have raised in this motion.

HON ROBIN CHAPPLE (Mining and Pastoral) [1.31 pm]: I will be brief. Part of the problem that we are talking about is what has been a systemic externalisation of responsibilities. In 1995, I was the national state convener for the rangelands project. At that time, we were incredibly well funded and had a lot of staff. I am talking about Alec Holm, Don Burnside and many others who were real experts in the field. There was a real impetus to get bureaucratic processes into the rangelands. We would have people inspect pastoral properties three or four times a year. Both the former and present government have tried to externalise the Western Australian rangeland monitoring system so that pastoralists themselves have to report on the project. Many of them have said, “We’re not skilled and we’re not capable to do it.” The issue for me is that we need more people in the rangelands and greater staffing. This issue has not arisen during the time of this government but over a long period, since 1995 when I was working in this space, whether on rangeways in the north east goldfields, the national rangeland strategy or the rural assessment panels. We have continued to see a diminution of services and staff, who are there to make sure that we do not trash the rangelands. I encourage the government to look at some of the incredible work that was done in these areas by people such as Wilcox and others, who were really good officers of the department and who are now working in South Africa or at universities because they were not supported or sustained by the department in the long run. We had a very good system back in the 1990s. Maybe I am old and I can remember the 90s!

Hon Martin Pritchard: I can remember the 70s!

Hon ROBIN CHAPPLE: I cannot, unfortunately. They were back in the 1960s!

Having said that, the rangelands at the national and state level are incredibly important. We cannot understand how badly they are being degraded, unless officers are on the ground doing the job. That is where I come from. I will not attribute this issue to this or the previous government; rather, there has been a policy of moving the responsibility to people whose job is really to run cattle or who are in the pastoral or agricultural industry. They are not the technical people who need to be out there to provide support, comfort and guidance. We used to have programs that involved us sitting down with pastoralists to work out a strategic management plan. It was done with the assistance of government. We did not leave it to them to throw back at us and for us a few years later to say, “You’re not doing it right.” In those days, government was heavily ingrained and integrated with the agricultural and pastoral industries. As I said, maybe I am old, but I would love to go back to those days.

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [1.35 pm]: It gives me great pleasure to rise on behalf of the opposition to support the excellent motion moved by Hon Colin de Grussa. It is timely to have a conversation about the government’s public sector management policies in general and their impact at the organisational level, particularly on the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. I make the point up-front that the Minister for Regional Development has been placed in an invidious position by the whole-of-government public sector strategy. It is one thing to devise for media impact a very superficial transactional public policy. It is very simple to say, “We are going to reduce the number of departments by X per cent or X amount.” It is another measure to give effect to that and to implement a superficial strategy in an effective way. The machinery-of-government changes represent a superficial public policy that was designed to give effect to a particular political outcome and the circumstances have not been given consideration and the effect on frontline service delivery has not been countenanced. The situation at the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is particularly unsettling, but I do not think that it is an orphan. Indeed, very much the same sort of claims can be made about the condition of the Department of Communities.

I will provide a background to the McGowan government’s approach to public sector management. The machinery-of-government changes were designed to reduce the quantum of departments by name—that has been its only effect—the outcome of which gave the government the excuse to divest itself from the continuing services of a number of senior bureaucrats, who were probably considered not particularly sympathetic to a McGowan government or who otherwise moved on. This came at significant organisational cost to the departments. It came at a serious corporate knowledge cost across the entire public sector and it came at a financial cost about which it is worth reminding members. Effectively, a very short time after the election of the McGowan government, 75 senior executive service officers across the Western Australian public sector were pensioned off. There is a long list, including Stephen Wood from the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation, at nearly \$500 000; Dr Ruth Shean from the Department of Training and Workforce Development, at a cost of around \$425 000; Mr Ron Chalmers from the Disability Services Commission, at slightly under \$420 000; and Mr Paul Andrew from Lotterywest, who departed on a severance payment approximating \$340 000. I draw special attention to that last name, because we on this side of the house found Mr Andrew’s departure to be particularly interesting. We sought

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

clarification of why he left and were told that it was a departure by mutual agreement. To the embarrassment of the Premier and government members in this place, a freedom of information application I submitted proved otherwise.

The pattern of behaviour the McGowan government has indulged in has come at a significant cost. This motion should also be considered against the voluntary targeted separation scheme. Again, that scheme was heralded as a cost-saving measure by the McGowan government with the departure of 3 000 FTEs. That has come at a significant cost because those people were paid redundancy payments. I would have thought that if the government had been consistent in its policy setting and genuine in its attempt to deliver a certain level of service efficiency or ongoing cost savings, it might have considered what I would consider to be a controversial but nevertheless consistent policy measure—that is, to introduce a public sector hiring freeze. I think it is important to reflect on the outcome of the VTSS because, like the machinery-of-government changes, it has been an abject failure.

If the FTE allocations for each agency from this year's budget papers are tabulated, we will discover that 3 780 FTEs are employed across the Western Australian public sector in addition to the 3 000 who were let go. Effectively, the government has paid for 6 780 FTEs. That is not how money is saved. I noticed an interesting thing as I went through the tabulation—that is, some departments have been winners and some have been losers. Compared with the 2017–18 financial year, the Western Australian health portfolio has gone from having 36 496 employees to 37 449. The education portfolio has likewise increased its public sector profile, as has the Department of Justice. Just about every single department has benefited, including the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, which houses the director general who was the architect of these machinery-of-government changes. His workforce has gone from 687 people to 709 people. It is not a significant number of people compared with the total public sector footprint, but as an agency it has done particularly well. A department that has not done as well is the Minister for Regional Development's department, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. From the 2017–18 financial year figure of 1 664 FTEs, it has gone down to 1 592 FTEs. There has been an exodus, if you like, from that minister's department. I suppose there are benefits to reshaping, realigning and the like, but there has also been a significant loss of corporate knowledge and capacity to deliver services to regional communities.

I will reflect on an update of how well the government has managed the machinery-of-government changes. Hon Colin de Grussa referred to the Auditor General's report from 2018 titled "Audit Results Report—Annual 2017–18 Financial Audits of State Government Entities", which was a review of how effective the government had been in implementing the machinery-of-government changes. This is the assessment of an exceptionally reputable and impartial source. To quote from page 23 —

- progress with amalgamating systems of the various constituent entities is slow, with most departments continuing to operate on several financial, human resource and administrative systems. This is impacting the realisation of cost savings that can be achieved by rationalising systems.

That means that if a government is to be effective in implementing this kind of organisational change and transformation agenda, all the consequential actions and requirements that will come from making big changes on the back of an envelope have to be thought through. That thinking and the implementation of the strategy was botched, and has probably been most botched in the Minister for Regional Development's department.

I refer to the annual report hearings conducted by the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations on 13 November last year. Members should bear in mind that that was 16 months after the machinery-of-government changes had been brought into effect. Those changes took effect on 1 July 2017, and 16 months down the pipe I had this exchange with the director general of the minister's department. I asked Mr Addis —

Bearing in mind that the agency was formed on 1 July last year, when will you complete your integration processes? I am given to understand that it is a work in progress but there must be an end date soon. When is that likely to be?

Mr Addis replied —

It is a very good question.

This was his assessment —

There is a whole raft of things to integrate, starting with structure and people, and systems and platforms. The deeper and longer task is to, I suppose, integrate the culture of the organisation so we are all about the same things. The people integration—we are about 25 per cent through that now.

The department was a quarter of the way through, 16 months after the fact. He continued —

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 14 August 2019]

p5449c-5465a

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier; President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

We anticipate completing that process towards the middle of next year. That will have all of our people migrated into a new functional structure. That has been a challenging process but, ultimately, it will have us all lined up around quite a new organisational design, which is quite a bit simplified and less siloed than the former agencies if we had have left them in that shape. That is the people and structure side. In terms of systems and platforms, obviously that is complex. It is likely to take us, to complete that including knitting together three sets of different policies and procedures, a good two years from now but we will make progress with the core platforms certainly during the course of next year. For finance, HR, payroll and IT, we would expect to have made very good progress on those core platforms during the course of next year.

To the minister's credit, at that hearing and the recent budget estimates hearings, she acknowledged the challenges her agency has faced from the outset in implementing the whole-of-government policy. Nevertheless, that is the minister's challenge. As a result of that exchange with the director general of the department, I wanted to know the cost of merging systems, noting that a number of things need to be knitted together. I sought a ballpark estimation about the cost that would be involved in delivering an integrated payroll system across the department through supplementary information. Members would think that that is a fundamental systems hygiene measure. The department did not have such a system at the time and I do not know whether it has one now, but I would be interested in hearing an update. The answer was —

The cost to implement a Human Resources Management Information system will be in the order of \$500,000 with the chosen vendor. It would be an off the shelf system with some configuration and customisation to meet agency requirements. It will be implemented by DPIRD staff and external consultant, the cost of which is ... to be determined.

The director general's best ballpark estimation at that stage was something close to half a million dollars, at a point two years on from the merging together of the entity, to get a single human resources information system. This is an indicator of very poor organisational capacity, structure and systems. Agencies cannot be run like this when one is responsible for merging them together in the first place. That was that director general's best estimate about the unanticipated costs, from November last year. When Mr Foster was drawing up his new grand structure on the back of the envelope on the night of the Labor Party's election win, he probably did not anticipate that if he were to give effect to this dream, it would mean that additional costs and supplementation would need to be found. He did not understand that when we deal with a complex system, it gives rise to a series of complex problems that need to be solved. He gave the Premier the headline, but what he actually did is give the minister a headache. That headache has been shared by the senior executive of that department and by all its staff.

I want to refer to exactly the same document that Hon Colin de Grussa referred to, which was the recent staff survey conducted by the Community and Public Sector Union—Civil Service Association of WA. I am happy to talk to my friends in the union movement. It might surprise members opposite to learn that, but I find that they provide me with some very useful information on occasion, and I am always happy to keep the channels of communication open, whether it is with the Maritime Union of Australia; the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union; or the Electrical Trades Union—whoever wants to come to me and tell me a story or two, or three, I am all ears. I always find it quite interesting. I find their assessments of the performance of the McGowan Labor government to be particularly interesting on occasion. Not all is rosy and not all is as well as the government might want members to believe. The survey is an overall snapshot or assessment of what the machinery-of-government changes have done to that department. Forgive me if the member has already mentioned this—I will quote it again—but I think that it encapsulates the challenge that the minister has to address. This is the assessment, which is an accurate assessment —

DPIRD has become a dysfunctional and unhappy workplace.

That goes to the third part of this motion. Not only is the organisation crook, but also the welfare of the people in it is being compromised and that needs to be addressed. It continues —

It is only through the goodwill of the people that the organisation continues to deliver, but this comes at a cost to morale and the health of individuals.

There are a couple of little factoids that I will make reference to, including that 69 per cent of respondents feel that organisational change is having a negative impact on their mental health. Any business school theorist will tell members that organisational change and transformation elicit these kinds of emotions from affected workplaces, but they can be effectively managed, if managers know what they are doing. It gives people a sense of ownership if they participate in helping to shape the organisation's sense of purpose and think they have skin in the game in building its culture, but obviously these people do not feel that they are in that position, otherwise 69 per cent of them would not have reported that outcome.

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

Probably the most alarming outcome for a Labor government, I would have thought, is that 71 per cent of respondents have no confidence in job security at the department. During the recent budget estimates hearings, I noted the decline in FTE over the last few years at the department. I do not want to misquote Mr Addis—I recall this pretty clearly—but he indicated that there would be at least another 60 job losses at the agency over this year. I sought to understand where those job losses might come from, whether it would be in the centralised metropolitan area departmental organisation or spread through the regions. I got a sense, though, that the workforce profile at the department is an issue that is under constant revision and downward adjustment. I would like to get a clear indication from the minister, if she is able, about where it is that the department will bottom out, because I understand that a number of resignations have been submitted. I also understand—I might have this information incorrectly, but I use this opportunity to seek accurate information—that individuals in significant parts of the department, as a consequence of the MOG changes, have been asked to reapply for their jobs. I do not know whether that is true, but I would like clarification on that.

Members of the chamber, I am about to wrap up my remarks, but this is an exceptionally well crafted motion. It goes to government competence around public sector management overall and its effect on frontline service delivery in regional areas specifically. In the time available, I will just say that another piece of public sector management legislation is dangling in the never-never. Debate on the Public and Health Sector Legislation Amendment (Right of Return) Bill 2018 was adjourned on the very last sitting day in 2018, when the minister was advised that certain members of the government agreed to Hon Alison Xamon's motion to preserve existing industrial rights, and we have heard nothing since.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [1.56 pm]: I thank members for their contributions. I understand why Hon Colin de Grussa—who, from his analysis, does his research at *The West Australian*, having spotted this article—would want to take this up. It is very legitimate. I give him some due for not being histrionic about it and, in fact, putting his motion in fairly measured terms. Of course, with any organisational change, there is absolutely an impact on staff and we would never want to underestimate that. We are working on dealing with those issues and I think we have reached a very positive outcome. I need to talk a bit about the department's history, because, honestly, members on the other side should be hanging their heads in shame at how they left this department and what they did to the former Department of Agriculture and Food.

I will share with members some insights from an August 2016 document entitled, "Future Directions for the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia". This secret report was sought by the previous government when it recognised that what was left of this department was wildly dysfunctional. Please understand what happened in the Department of Agriculture and Food, which is now the largest unit in the merged entity. The report outlined how DAFWA had gone through an extraordinary period of staff cuts during the period of the last government, from 1 581 staff to 965. We had had staff cuts of over 40 per cent and then, factored in over the forward estimates, another 200 staff were to be cut on top of that. Let us look at the sorts of things that that did to the department. This is the previous government's own report. It put an expert panel together and talked about things such as this —

There is widely held criticism that DAFWA has withdrawn from R&D so abruptly that it has compromised its capacity to initiate and facilitate collaborative research in the interests of the WA agriculture sector. Industry and other Stakeholders pointed to the growing lack of capability of DAFWA staff to engage and understand their opportunities and issues. With the exception of some outstanding individuals, they see the Agency lacking credibility and relevance with industry.

That is what we were left with. It goes on to state —

There has been external criticism of management, as much to do with the plethora of projects as with the impenetrability of knowing how they contribute collectively to outcomes. This seems to be exacerbated by project clients not getting knowledge outputs tailored to their needs ... The Panel also heard of DAFWA's inability to grasp challenges and opportunities, and interpret and act on them.

I could go on for ages reading these comments—some of them are really disturbing. The report continues —

... DAFWA was an environment where the best young graduates wanted to start because it was a science-based career-building opportunity. Now that environment for getting a good grounded knowledge and developing people has been lost. In very recent times that has been compounded by whole-of-government staff freezes ...

That has prevented DAFWA from implementing these strategies. The report goes on and on. The previous government commissioned this report because it knew it was in trouble and that it had absolutely undermined this organisation. We came into government and had to work out how we were going to repair that agency. We knew immediately—I think one of the first things that I said—that we were going to rebuild that R&D capability. I am

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

extremely proud of how far, over the past two years, we have been able to take the Frank Wise Research Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Kununurra and the Carnarvon Research Facility, which were absolutely on their knees. When we first walked into the Carnarvon facility, we saw shade structures that had come down in the cyclone in 2015 still flapping in the breeze. There were issues with the number of personnel and their commitment, and the management structure was profoundly flawed, but we have been able to turn those things around. We have a heap more work to do, but members need to understand that this was the context in which we found the organisation—it was a deeply wounded and hurt organisation in which there had been so much conflict over the years. I see that Hon Ken Baston is in the chamber. He would know a lot about this conflict and how people had to be shoved off to the Department of State Development and elsewhere, and that the functions were distributed amongst four different agencies. We had to bring those functions back together and then do the merger.

I think the merger has been a very, very positive measure. It has taken time. I agree that that has made it very difficult for many of the individuals involved, but we did not want to just weld together the regional development, agriculture and fisheries agencies with the development commissions. Where possible, we sought to integrate these agencies. For example, most compellingly, in relation to regulatory functions and the enforcement of the various biosecurity standards, which are very important, we wanted to bring together the very considerable capabilities in both fisheries and agriculture. It was a case of weaving these capabilities together. Rather than just putting together silos and having them function as re-envisioned organisations, we wanted the relevant skill sets across those areas of endeavour—agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture—to act in unison. We also wanted regional development to focus much more on agribusiness areas where agriculture is an important part of regional economies. It absolutely makes sense to have those regional development personnel in areas of high agricultural activity to ensure that they can work with other parts of the agency to maximise the return for the community.

When we came into government, there were instances in which development commissions were running off on frolics that were completely and utterly disconnected from what the growers in their region wanted to do. For example, the Northern Beef Futures program for the Kimberley and Pilbara was run from Waroona and Bunbury. When we went up and met with the industry, people were very, very angry about the program and the lack of accountability and engagement. We sought to restructure the agency to give much more local content to the decision-making, so that we could deal with the issue that comes up in this report over and over again of the department being disengaged from the industry it is there to serve. We have not reached perfection yet. These things cannot be turned around so quickly—it will take us time.

I note some of Hon Robin Chapple's comments. There are references in this report to just how disappointed the natural resource management organisations were with the support and engagement they received from the Department of Agriculture and Food; that there was no NRM framework; that DAFWA's absence from any lead role was a very real impediment; and that opportunities to promote sustainability in agricultural practices had been lost. Again, we are working very hard to turn that around and actually develop that framework.

Hon Robin Chapple: Roughly the amount of money that is going to rangeland management through the NRM organisations is a quarter of what it used to be in my day.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: I think the member will find that some of that is because the federal government has walked away with its land care funding. I would love the member to raise those other rangelands issues with me. When I have adequate time, I will give the member some time to deal with those very specific issues of how we are turning around, and seeking to turn around, that decade of neglect.

I will get on to some of the immediate issues that the staff survey identified. One of the problems when we came into government was that the trajectory across the forward estimates was taking the combined department down to 1 300 people. Clearly, that was unacceptable. For us to be able to argue that position, we had to have a full capability review of the function of the old Department of Agriculture and Food and the combined entity. We had to go through and establish a business case for the baseline of FTEs that we require. We did that capability review. It was a very substantial body of work. It was completed in late 2018 so that it could be fed into the budget. We fed that review into the budget and we were able to deal with this systemic problem. Again, the problem had been recognised and action had been called for under the last government. The agency pointed to the fact that the constant steep decline in consolidated fund resourcing and the temporary top-ups from royalties for regions was unsatisfactory, and that money needed to come back into the budget to establish a new baseline. I am pleased to say that we did that. We got an extra \$131 million for this agency across the forward estimates, of which, very critically, \$58.7 million is increased funding from the consolidated fund. The budget was announced in May. At that point, we were able, as the Western Australian Farmers Federation has said, "to chock the wheels". We were able to show that we were not going down to 1 300 people; we had approval for 1 585 FTEs. After that, we were able to be very clear about recruitment levels.

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

Until we got that decision, until we had done that capability review, and until we had across-government support for and understanding of what the requirements were, we were not able to do that. Having done that, we are now able to be very clear about how many permanent positions we will be able to offer. That has enabled us to start bringing on what has been for many people a difficult and painful process—I agree with Hon Colin de Grussa—but we are on the path now to dealing with this.

Hon Tjorn Sibma said that the director general indicated that that would possibly be finished by mid-next year. The government has made an absolute commitment to the union and the staff that that will be completed by the end of the year. The whole job design and allocation of the job design is moving forward quickly and it will be completed by the end of the year. We have given clear time lines for the ODP2 process. We have taken on board the critique of the union. New structures are in place for dealing with personnel to explain those issues. There is a new process for determining the job descriptions and giving people an opportunity if they feel that their current job description does not adequately capture what they really do, to have some input into the redesign. We have been able to bring forward some reclassification processes, which was a matter for concern. We have made commitments to salary maintenance for all staff through that organisational design process. This has all happened since that survey was brought to us by the union. We have ensured that there will be no forced redundancies after the ODP and strong commitments to provide every possible placement avenue for staff.

We absolutely recognise that this has been a challenging time for staff; however, we are dealing with not just a merger but, indeed, a department that was left in an appalling state. I am pleased that we have done that. The feedback we are getting from the union is very positive. I will read an email to me, which states —

On behalf of the CPSU/CSA, I just wanted to provide feedback and an update in relation to our meetings ...

Following our meeting, the Department has ensured that the workplace is safe for staff and have offered increased access to EAP and, a more prompt open communication process has been implemented.

More clarity about the ODP2 process has occurred and a timeframe allocated to the changes.

Further, the Department has committed to a more transparent process so that staff feel more confident in the change that is occurring ...

We once again thank the Minister, along with Minister Kelly for meeting with CPSU/CSA Delegates and responding so promptly to the concerns they raised on behalf of members. CPSU/CSA members look forward to maintaining a positive dialogue with your office and the Department, which includes a meeting with the Director General in the coming weeks.

I think we have absolutely taken on board those problems. We had to deal with the systemic budget problem—the destruction at the department. We have done that. We now have clarity over the forward estimates about our staffing levels. We have listened to all the concerns of staff. As that email shows, the union and the staff are happy with the progress that has been made over the last month. With that in mind and given the facts that we have been able to lay on the table, I would like to move an amendment to the motion moved by Hon Colin de Grussa. It is an amendment that truly captures what has gone on here.

Amendment to Motion

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: I move —

To delete all words after “house —” and substitute —

recognises that the McGowan government has —

- (a) ruled a line under the years of budget cuts and dysfunction in the agricultural portfolio;
- (b) made the important strategic decision to bring together the government’s primary industry and regional development functions; and
- (c) worked with the unions to ensure the machinery-of-government changes are completed in a timely and equitable manner.

Point of Order

Hon PETER COLLIER: That completely changes the context of the motion. I seek a ruling on that. We had exactly this situation last week and members opposite complained. This one completely changes the context of the motion.

The PRESIDENT: Having had a look at standing order 87, “Amendment to be Relevant and Not a Direct Negative”, which deals with amendments, in relation to the point of order made by the Leader of the Opposition, the amendment is not itself a direct negative under that standing order. The other part of the standing order says that

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

the amendment shall be relevant to the question before the Legislative Council. This amendment does pick up on matters that are canvassed in the earlier motion moved by Hon Colin de Grussa. I do take on board, however, the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition and the debate last week about the nature of amendments that seek to change entirely a motion, which would seem to defeat the purpose of the original motion in some ways. I am not going to rule against this particular amendment on this occasion. I might seek some further advice, because I would hate to see a pattern of behaviour emerge in the chamber when we are dealing with these motions, which, I must admit, did occur from time to time in a previous Parliament, and I would not want to see that behaviour repeated. It is one thing to modify an amendment to a certain extent, but another to change it significantly. I will allow on this occasion for this amendment to be moved. I am sure the house will determine whether it will accept or reject it. However, I will say to members that I will have a further look at how we manage the nature of amendments during this period of debate, and I will provide a further ruling at a later stage.

Debate Resumed

The PRESIDENT: Hon Alannah MacTiernan has moved an amendment without notice, so the question before us is that the words to be deleted be deleted. I remind members that you each have five minutes to speak to this amendment.

HON DR SALLY TALBOT (South West) [2.19 pm]: I would like to say a few brief words in support of the proposed amendment. I look forward to making some comments about this whole topic when we get to the substantive debate. I feel very strongly about several elements of this motion. The proposed amendment moved by the Minister for Regional Development more accurately reflects what the member who moved the original motion was trying to promote discussion about in this place. I say that for one particular reason. Looking at parts (a) and (b) of the original motion, we could all be in broad agreement about the sentiments. The problem with the original motion and why it needs amending is the points made in part (c) of the original motion, which were —

That this house —

...

- (c) calls on the Premier and the Minister for Regional Development to immediately take action to stem job losses and mental health concerns within DPIRD.

We are all aware of the survey that was done by the Community and Public Sector Union–Civil Service Association of WA, and the results of that. What we are now aware of, which we might not have been aware of a few days ago, is what has happened since the minister and others within government with responsibility for these things became aware of what the survey results have shown. I venture to suggest to members that that would not have been a surprise to Hon Alannah MacTiernan as the minister taking responsibility for this very significant part of the machinery-of-government changes. Those members who know the minister and have worked with her over many years, as I have, know that she is not out of touch with the people with whom she works. She is one of those ministers who does not accept that doors are closed to her. She walks through them and she talks to the people on the other side. The minister has indicated in various forums her awareness of how challenging this transition was for people working in all the departments that are affected by the transition into the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development structure.

The minister has shared with us this afternoon the fact that not only has she met with the union, along with the other relevant minister, but she has also addressed these issues. She has taken them through to a stage where she has demonstrated that she is addressing those concerns. They are the points that are made in part (c) of the original motion and that is why it needs to be amended. After receiving a memo from her department or receiving press cuttings in the morning, the minister is not a person who would just put them to one side and get on with her day job. She is a person who picks up the phone to people when she knows there is something wrong. I could tell members a number of stories about people who have firsthand accounts of how, when they get a phone call from Minister MacTiernan asking them to do something, they jolly well do it! If they do not, they will have her to answer to. She will be at their door five minutes after the time frame she has given them to fix things! That is exactly what she would have done. It is no surprise to me that the minister picked up the phone and rang the union, and she has already had the meeting. As she has had the meeting, that would be enough to suggest to me that at least part (c) of the motion needs to be amended. Not only that, she has it in writing from the union that it feels that it has been listened to. This is the Labor movement working at its very best, and I think tribute should be paid. I have paid tribute to the minister for the work she has done to resolve this situation, but I also want to pay tribute to Rikki Hendon, the secretary of the Community and Public Sector Union–Civil Service Association of WA, whose work has been exemplary. She has gone out and listened to her members. She has brought those concerns to the attention of the relevant people in government and those concerns have been addressed. Rikki, or one of her officers, has written back to the minister to say, “Thank you for doing that. Thank you for hearing us.” Members of Parliament know from their own constituencies that one of the things people want more than anything else is to

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

feel their voice has been heard. This union, on behalf of its members throughout the public sector, has put it in writing to the minister that it feels its voice has been heard.

Members sometimes hear the argument but cannot do anything to address it. In this particular case, Hon Alannah MacTiernan felt that she could do things to address it, and that is what she has been doing. She has it in writing from the union that it is happy with the way things are progressing now in terms of the machinery-of-government changes.

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural) [2.24 pm]: I rise to indicate that the Nationals WA will not support this proposed amendment. It is very surprising to see an attempt made to make such a significant change to the intent of the motion. Hon Dr Sally Talbot spoke about the minister being well in touch with the organisation and acutely aware of what is going on. Why, then, did it take a survey in 2019 to draw these things to the attention of the Minister for Regional Development? I indicated in my comments on the substantive motion that these issues had been highlighted in 2017, but nothing was done.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: There were surveys about the public sector reforms. We are talking about machinery-of-government changes —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Minister, let the member on his feet have his say. Everyone else has been heard pretty much in silence.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: We are talking about machinery-of-government changes, and surveys of public sector workers indicating significant levels of stress and mental health issues occurring. The minister tries to say that somehow that does not count; that those people's issues are different or should not be heard. I absolutely cannot accept the fact that part (c) of my motion needs to be amended. Those concerns are very real for those people and we need a guarantee as a Parliament that something will be done, or has been done, to immediately take effect to stem those health concerns identified in that survey. They are quite clearly significant through that department, and probably in many other departments as well. There is no way I can accept any changes to my proposed motion, especially this amendment here, which is in fact a totally new motion and seeks, as usual from those opposite, to throw the blame at someone else.

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [2.26 pm]: I very much respect the President's very considered ruling in respect of this proposed amendment. Might I say that there is absolutely no way the Liberal Party will accept it. It is utterly disingenuous. The arguments put forward in its favour are utterly unconvincing and, to be frank, they do a disservice to the Labor movement. There is a very clear, well understood, demarcated and calculated mental health and organisational health challenge within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development that the Minister for Regional Development is responding to reluctantly, belatedly and only because she has been called out. This kind of thing is an absolute disgrace. It must be condemned and it must be opposed.

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral) [2.27 pm]: I rise to talk in support of the proposed amendment to the motion. Talk about a disgrace. Why do members opposite not look at what happened in the past? The minister has gone through the absolute diabolical mess that was left in these departments by the previous government. I can say that when I first got out to the goldfields region, particularly the Goldfields–Esperance Development Commission, just after the Labor Party was elected to government, my first conversation was at a Goldfields Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils meeting with all the shires. The shires come together to discuss the region's planning and strategy issues and where they are heading. The first conversation that happened was how diabolical and useless the Goldfields–Esperance Development Commission was. There was no direction, no strategy and no planning. There was this predetermined understanding that there was a bucket of money it could dip its hand into whenever it liked. There was no other reason to use the development commission whatsoever. Unless there was a bucket of money to take, there was no need for a development commission. That was the attitude that was being put across the table the first time I walked into a GVROC meeting.

The Minister for Regional Development, since taking over these portfolios, has garnered together this group of people from industries and created direction and certainty, and consultation. For this, the fruits are showing. Shires are now contacting me on a regular basis telling me how great the Goldfields–Esperance Development Commission is doing and how great it has been on setting a plan for the future—not just looking for buckets of money; looking for ways to interact all its strategic planning and putting it into practice. As I said, when I went out there, the shires were not happy with the way the development commission was acting and were unsure about what its actual position was. The shires are now going to the development commission on a daily basis and working with it on how to move forward with different grants, and trying to get funding out of the feds, which has been ridiculously

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

hard for the goldfields. Members just have to look at the example of the Building Better Regions funding, which the goldfields has absolutely, diabolically missed out on.

It is about capacity building. The minister has put funding into the dog fence. The minister and the departments have shown strategic thinking in using a range of local programs with local content, and utilising locals as much as they can in those programs. It has been a massive success to get that dog fence up and running. I do not think anything happened previously in the dog fence space. When we first came into government, Murchison was screaming out to get its dog fence started. It had put so much effort into a business case. Did the minister sit back and wait? Bang! She was straight out there with the funding and work on the dog fence started. We also looked into other areas such as Indigenous engagement. It was an important strategic decision to bring the departments together and I think it is important to acknowledge that the agriculture portfolio was severely damaged by the past government, as the minister mentioned. The honourable minister has made a real effort to ensure that we get it back on track and \$131.5 million has been expended across the forward estimates in this space. It is important that we get these departments working together again. There has been positivity right across my electorate, not negativity. The minister has explained that she worked with the unions, which is something that I know the past government found very difficult to do, so I think it is very important to acknowledge that. I support this amendment.

HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA) [2.31 pm]: I also rise to indicate that the Nationals WA will not be supporting the amendment to the motion. I actually find it really disappointing that the Minister for Regional Development seeks to disrespect the responses to the Community and Public Sector Union—Civil Service Association of WA survey—those answers were owned by the people who responded to that survey and nobody else—by suggesting, tongue in cheek, when she moved the amendment, that the motion moved by Hon Colin de Grussa, who with very genuine intent sought to try to highlight the issues that some of the staff were facing, will be now completely eroded by her actions. I think that is disappointing, but those are the minister's actions.

Talking about the well-oiled Labor machine, the amendment to the motion was already prepared. It is amazing that we all had a copy of it distributed to us the moment it was moved. Hon Dr Sally Talbot was keen to stay in the chamber —

Hon Alanna Clohesy interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Hon Dr Sally Talbot was keen to stay in the chamber because she knew this amendment was coming up. Last week, in response to Hon Dr Steve Thomas's amendment to Hon Pierre Yang's motion, her very comments were —

Members opposite should not come in here and play those tricks.

Hon Stephen Dawson admonished Hon Dr Steve Thomas for falling prey to his Liberal Party colleagues' tricks. That is in *Hansard*. Government members play around with motions that members spend an enormous amount of time researching and putting to the house. I say to members who want to amend motions, "Put your own motion up, and we're happy to debate it." We are happy to debate it. We will not be supporting this trite amendment to the very important motion that is trying to highlight the concerns of members of the union and staff of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development in their own responses to a survey. We did not put those responses down in that survey, but it is our responsibility to highlight those very concerning results, and that is what we sought to do with the motion. Therefore, we will not be supporting the amendment.

HON ADELE FARINA (South West) [2.34 pm]: I think we need to get to the basics here. Hon Colin de Grussa presented a motion to this house for debate in which he raised the concerns within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and called on the Premier and the Minister for Regional Development to immediately take action to stem the job losses and the mental health concerns within DPIRD. The minister stood and explained the history. She acknowledged that there were issues. Let me just say that as a member for the South West Region, during the course of the last government, I received a number of phone calls from people who were employed in the then Department of Agriculture and Food who were highly stressed about the massive job cuts and complete hacking that was done in that department under the former government. When members walked around and talked to industry and commented on research and development, most people responded by saying, "What research and development? There's none happening."

I think we need to keep this in context. There were serious dysfunctions within that department as a result of those massive job losses before we took government. The minister has had to work with that as well as bring the departments together into a new department. That is not an easy job when the minister is already dealing with massive dysfunction. It is not at all surprising that the process of restructuring causes concern among staff. This is

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

not the only department in which those concerns among staff are expressed. We are all human; we all like certainty. When there is uncertainty around, not all of us cope with it very well. The minister has acknowledged that the leadership in the department could have done a better job. Perhaps more measures should have been put in place, given the level of dysfunction that resulted from the previous government's cuts. She went about and organised an extensive capability review to identify the base need in the department and where the issues were. Having done that, the minister was able to go through the budget process, put together a business plan and argue for additional funding to be made available to the department. Critically, she also overturned the trajectory of the previous government, which was to further cut the staffing numbers in that department to 1 300. The minister has turned that around and has an agreement for 1 580 staff. That is a significant benefit that will help consolidate that department and fill those massive gaps that were made during the former government. We saw a massive brain drain and loss of corporate knowledge from the Department of Agriculture and Food under the previous government. Those things do come to the fore when going through a restructuring exercise. Once the minister had the information that she needed and some assurance from the budget process, she was able to talk to the unions and reassure them that these measures were now committed to by the government and she was now able to turn things around. I think that needs to be acknowledged.

The minister has acknowledged the concerns of staff members in that agency and through that restructure. The motion in this house calls on the minister to take immediate action to stem job losses, but she has already done that and she has told the house that she has done that. She is dealing with the emotional and mental health concerns of the department's staff and she has given a commitment to do so in a very timely manner. Although the motion moved by Hon Colin de Grussa has a lot of merit, he has now had an answer from the minister that says, "Look, I'm onto it. I'm getting this job done. I've dealt with stemming the job losses. I'm dealing with the other issues." Therefore, it is appropriate for the house to pass a motion that acknowledges the work that has been done and actually reflects the current situation. It is for those reasons that I urge members of the house to support the amendment.

HON AARON STONEHOUSE (South Metropolitan) [2.39 pm]: I listened to Hon Adele Farina make the case that the issues raised in the motion have already been addressed, but I do not know that that is necessarily the case. I admit that primary industries and regional development is certainly not my area of expertise, but instead of debating the validity of the motion or the validity of the amendment proposed by the minister, I would rather rest my argument on the comments I made last week when we dealt with a very similar situation. If somebody is going to essentially hijack a member's motion on notice, they might as well just vote down the original motion and put forward their own. I do not mind somebody making minor amendments, or perhaps even drastic amendments, but if they think they have the numbers to amend the motion, presumably they have the numbers to vote it down and propose their own motion and then pass it. It think it is a rather nasty habit for the house to fall into—hijacking opponents' motions on notice, notice of which is given weeks in advance so that members can prepare for them, for what seems to be little more than political pointscoreing. Last week, the opposition and a few crossbenchers hijacked a government motion. This week it is the government hijacking a Nationals WA motion. On that basis, I will not support the amendment. I really hope that we do not get into the habit of continually hijacking each other's motions just for sport.

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [2.41 pm]: I agree with the President's comments on this matter. We hope that this does not become a habit or a normal procedure in Parliament. I did not agree with what happened last week and I certainly do not agree with the amendment to this motion. This is a house of debate. A member puts up a motion and we debate it. When a member puts forward an amendment that seeks to change the whole meaning of the motion, it is not in the spirit of the procedures of this place and it will not achieve much. It is very unproductive for Parliament to continue this practice. We will not support the amendment to the motion.

Amendment put and negatived.

Motion Resumed

HON DIANE EVERS (South West) [2.42 pm]: I would like to bring our focus back to the department of agriculture in particular. Yes, three agencies were amalgamated into the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, but the department of agriculture is the one that has been really hurt and needs to be supported. I have heard all the arguments, but I would like to say that it has been two years now. The minister has said that the government recognised that there was a problem. I recognised the problem long before the change of government. The cuts started happening around 2008 or 2009 and things just got worse. What was not recognised was just how bad it was, so when this government came in with its machinery-of-government changes and the voluntary targeted separation scheme, it should have excluded the ag department. It should have said no, because this organisation has seen enough change, this organisation has been depleted and this organisation does not have a research and development department like it had in the past.

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Built into the forward estimates were further cuts. We had to do that capability review and we found a business case to turn it around. We had to do that in any event.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Absolutely, and I appreciate that. All I am saying is that it has been two years now and it seems to me that it is possible that something could have been done a bit sooner.

I do not have much trouble with the motion. It is just recognising that it took a long time. Two years is a long time. Just last week somebody mentioned to me how stressful it still is at the department. I am fully aware of what the minister has said, but she needs to send an immediate message to all the staff —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: We have. I went out after the budget and spoke to them all.

Hon DIANE EVERS: All right. The word just has not got out there or things have not changed enough yet. There is still work to do. I feel for this organisation. I worked closely with the staff when I was in the natural resource management industry. They had built up some research capability. Salinity is one example. Work was done on that issue until about 2008. It was the biggest issue of our time for many people, and then nothing happened. I fully set that on the shoulders of the government that was in power between 2008 and 2017. It should not have happened.

To go back to what I was planning to say, the massive task of putting these three agencies together seems to have failed to recognise the cultural differences between the agencies. The regional development department dealt with large projects and big-ticket items with long time frames into the future. It was a different scope for regional development to look at. The fisheries department dealt with compliance, licensing and resource management of our fisheries industries. It had its nice little task. It knew what it was doing and that was good. Then we had the Department of Agriculture and Food, which had been devastated by cuts, the loss of focus on research and development and the loss of attention to science. It was not good. Some years before that, the then Department of Agriculture and Food was not allowed to use the term “climate change”; it had to refer to “climate variability”.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: But you’re supporting these people. We’re trying to turn this around.

Hon DIANE EVERS: This is a very reasonable motion.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: But it doesn’t recognise —

Hon DIANE EVERS: It does not recognise what was there at the start in 2017.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: It doesn’t recognise what we have done to turn this around.

Hon DIANE EVERS: It does not. It would be great to put forward another motion to that effect.

We need to move forward from here very quickly and recognise that there has been a slowness about what we have been doing. I really want to support the efforts of this government to make change, to put some focus back on research and development and to put some people back in there. That is what we need to do. I do not think that everyone in this government understands well enough how important the agriculture department is to Western Australia. There needs to be more focus on it and it needs to happen much more quickly. There are still problems with those cultural issues that I spoke about. A lot still has to change within the ag department, and I hope that the capability review has revealed the stagnant thought that guides a lot of the decisions. Agriculture is changing, just like the climate is changing, and we need to adapt to it. There are some old thinkers—people who like the status quo and would like to stay where they are, but the status quo is no longer possible. We are changing things, and it has to begin in the ag department, on the ground, in the soil, with the animals and with the crops we are growing. I know that 90 per cent of our exports come from the mining sector. That is fine. Agriculture is a small part of our exports, but mining exports fluctuate and that sends us into a tailspin from time to time. We could make agriculture strong and keep it strong and grow and develop it. Not only would we provide our own food, but also it would be part of the export market.

To go back to the staff, there are some good people there but some good people are no longer there. We should get some of those good people back working on the science and doing the research that we need so that we can protect our farming industries, support our farms and farmers, and learn how to deal with climate change. We have to recognise that the amount of rainfall is reducing. Seasons are changing. They do not seem to start at the same time as they used to. We have unpredictable frosts, hailstorms and thunderstorms—sometimes in the middle of summer and sometimes at times of the year when they are not expected. Things are changing, but we are sitting in this place debating how many people we are going to have there, when it is about not just how many people are there, but who is there and what their mental health is like. It is unfortunate, unfair and poor. I would not doubt that bullying and aggression were involved and that all kinds of negative things were happening within the Department of Agriculture and Food that kept people uncertain, unsure and unable, possibly to the point that they left. I would like all the things that the minister has said she has planned to be implemented today, not tomorrow.

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

We need to get started on it. If their mental health needs support, get in there and do something. I do not have all the answers, but I know that our ag department is vital to our future, and we really need to work with those staff.

There are undercurrents, and sometimes over-currents, of debate in this house about whether the government or private industry should be building research capacity. There is a difficulty with agriculture, because the government can act as a not-for-profit in a way. We are not trying to profit in financial terms; we are trying to get improvements in regional agricultural systems and communities. There is a much different motivation than that for people doing research within the ag department. When research is done by private industry, the government often partly funds that research, but private industry owns the research. It must make a profit off that research because that is how our laws are set up. The guiding principle is that they need a return to shareholders. Private industry may not work in agricultural research, and that is why that research needs to stay in-house, but we need to work with universities and develop things for our farmers in the agriculture department. It is not rocket science, but it is definitely not something that we want to sell out to private industry. No doubt plenty of technological and industrial developments have resulted from government involvement with private industry. That does not mean that we need to compete with private industry, but there are matters that private industry does not really get value from, such as solving salinity problems. That is not its issue, because it will always take money to solve it. Private industry does not get value out of controlling feral animals, because private industry wants to keep selling us the materials that we need to do it. Private industry is not there to solve these issues; it is just trying to make a profit off them. The ag department must be the one that is trying to solve these issues.

I have no trouble with the machinery-of-government change that puts regional development and fisheries in with agriculture. I am really pleased that efforts have been made to figure out how to integrate these areas. However, there are very strong cultural differences between those areas, and it might take a decade to get through them by focusing on agriculture and the landscape. As I have said many times before, I note that the minister is a very strong supporter of regenerative agriculture, and I am happy to see that she will be speaking at the regenerative agriculture conference on 11 September. I hope a lot of farmers have a look at this and go to the conference, even if they are not certain of it. They should go and have a listen, hear what people are talking about, and see whether anyone can learn and share things. That is how we will solve some of these issues, and our ag department is well placed to distribute that information on a large scale. As I said, it is not rocket science; it is just taking one step at a time.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change came out with a report only last week that describes how a lot of the climate change effects that we are noticing could be relieved by good farming practices. Some of those would fall under regenerative agriculture—getting that carbon locked up in the soil. I understand there has been a report recently on methane from cattle being dependent on what they are eating, and seeing really good results in reducing methane that is produced by cattle. Bringing in rotational grazing helps the soil. So many different options are being taken up by a lot of very smart farmers. I am very pleased to see that, but if the ag department gets behind these in a strong way, we will see more of it happening, and that is where we need to be heading.

A bit of the talk today has been about the natural resource management grants, and I would like to say a few words about that. I know that the federal government has dropped this like a hand grenade, saying it does not want to have anything to do with it, but we really have to get something happening there. A huge pool of volunteer labour is available in those NRM communities, and if we can put in funding to get some programs happening, or continue and build on the programs that we have, a lot of people will want to get involved and do some work. However it takes some funding to coordinate and bring on the projects. We have reams and reams of management plans from the decade when we did have funding, after the sale of Telstra, and those managements plans are probably, for the most part, still relevant. They will probably have to be updated for climate change, because we have moved on from where we were 20 years ago. Those NRM groups are crying out. As I said before, and I will keep saying it, we have royalties for regions funding, and we are still trying to figure out what to do once we have built all the swimming pools and rollerskating rinks and planted all the petunias. Please consider putting a significant proportion, on an annual basis, from royalties for regions into NRM, and make it sit there.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: We did make big commitment at the last election.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Yes, but I would like a larger commitment. That is all I am asking for. There are a lot of people out there and there is a lot of work to be done. As I said, there is a lot of free labour with all these volunteers who could get involved so that we could start to address some of the issues that have been ongoing for so long.

In conclusion, on the motion as it is written, I recognise that it has been a long time. We note the effects that the machinery-of-government changes have had on the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. The motion calls on the Premier and the Minister for Regional Development to immediately take action to stem job losses and mental health concerns within DPIRD. I am really pleased to hear that that is happening. Stemming

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boyde; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

job losses is not the whole thing; we need to start increasing the number of jobs, and that is exactly what the minister has said she is doing. That is fantastic; it is almost like the motion is working already.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: We promised the day that we got into government that we would rebuild the research function.

Hon DIANE EVERS: That is wonderful, because it was left in a terrible mess, and it still has not recovered. Every day that the minister is working towards getting it into better shape is a good day, because our future is there. It is the future for our regional areas, our exports, our health and our climate. There is a lot there.

HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA) [2.57 pm]: I thank my colleague Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing this motion to the house today. There has been a lot of focus, in particular, on the effects of the machinery-of-government changes on the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, as there should be. The survey results show that a lot of staff are under an enormous amount of stress. Bringing this motion to the house today, in their defence, is highlighting how they feel about the fair work environment. If steps are being taken by the government to improve that, I support them, and I am glad to hear about the processes being undertaken. As Hon Diane Evers said, I understand from speaking last week with someone working within the department that there is still concern about the stress levels within the department. It is a timely motion, and something that needs to be continuously monitored. If we do not highlight these issues in the house, we are just relying on the hope that someone at some point will address those issues. The results of the surveys were concerning enough to bring this motion to the house to shine a bit of light on the issues and to try to assist the staff of the department to work out, with government, a way to get through the stressful situation that some of them find themselves in. I am not surprised to hear that some staff still find the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development a stressful environment, and that is underpinned by the September 2017 media release of the Treasurer, Hon Ben Wyatt, which set out the 2017–18 state budget. He said —

The 2017–18 State Budget includes a number of wide-ranging reforms that, once implemented, will deliver lasting reform to the public sector at a lower cost to taxpayers.

The previously announced Service Priority Review will examine the functions, operations and culture of the Western Australian public sector. Its goal is to drive lasting reform of service delivery, accountability and efficiency.

Those words hang over public sector employees, who wonder what more accountability, service reform and efficiencies are yet to be driven. A level of confidence has not returned to the public sector. In previous debates in this house on the machinery-of-government changes, that fact was highlighted by many members in their concerns about the impacts on staff. On 8 November last year, it became really clear how much of a budget cut the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is having to work with during questioning by my colleague Hon Martin Aldridge. The Minister for Regional Development admitted to a \$60 million reduction in the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's expenditure, including \$45.4 million in an underspend on projects and a \$6.8 million reduction in salaries. That is an enormous reduction in the operations of any department. I question how any department could possibly satisfactorily implement lasting reform of service delivery, accountability and efficiency under such budgetary constraints and pressure. How can that happen when a department faces such budgetary constraint? It is no wonder that concerns still exist.

From a regional development perspective, I will highlight the opportunities that are being missed in regional Western Australia. I will also highlight DPIRD's strategic intent document of 2018–21, which includes the values of the department. It reads —

We value **relationships**

We are **resilient**

We are **responsive**

We focus on **results**

Those are nice motherhood statements, and I am sure that DPIRD staff want to deliver on the values set out on the department's website, but that is very difficult to do when the working environment does not allow for it.

We have seen time and again with each state budget the erosion of the royalties for regions program. Royalties for regions has been eroded by \$1.6 billion. That money has been used for government subsidies otherwise funded by consolidated revenue, including \$1.1 billion in Water Corporation subsidies, \$160 million for orange school buses and \$35.2 million for regional educational assistants. Royalties for regions funding is volatile because the income flowing into it is a result of the resource assets of the state, such as iron ore, which flow into that program. It is

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

a volatile program. Funding essential government services in regional areas from the royalties for regions fund puts those essential government services at risk, which is a concern for regional people. It also highlights the concern of regional people that this government is not pushing a regional development agenda, which is evidenced by the \$319 million underspend in regional areas. I question whether the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development has a regional agenda. Does one exist given the underspend, an erosion of the royalties for regions program and the lost opportunities to potentially partner with private business investors and business to expand on development opportunities in regional areas? Investors are waiting to partner with the government—I have talked about this previously—so that they can access the resources of regional areas, particularly in agriculture. The government does not have to bear the whole cost of regional development, particularly in agriculture. Private investors are waiting to invest and build up our agricultural sector, which, in turn, will deliver regional development. It would be fantastic if those working in regional development and agriculture could work together. We have not seen that happen, but I hope we see it.

I particularly join other members of this house in supporting paragraph (c) of the motion, which calls on the Premier and the Minister for Regional Department to immediately take action to stem job losses and address the mental health concerns of DPIRD's employees. That is particularly important but in doing so they should address some of the opportunities missed by those working in regional development.

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural) [3.06 pm] — in reply: I go back to the original intent of the motion. I brought the motion on for debate because I care very deeply about the people who work in the department. Like many of us here, I am human and I regard the mental health of fellow humans as incredibly important. It is clear that the machinery-of-government changes have caused stress and pressure for Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development staff, which has resulted in adverse health outcomes, and that is not acceptable.

I thank all the members who made a contribution on this motion, no matter what side of the chamber they are on. It is important to hear from all sides and all persuasions. The intent of my motion was to focus on people in the public service because they are the ones who make our public service work. The public sector is not a machine nor is it a collection of parts. Rather, it is a collection of people and they need to be supported and encouraged through whatever changes a government implements to ensure that when the changes happen, their issues and concerns are addressed.

Hon Tjorn Sibma referred to the implementation of some of the changes in the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development—25 per cent integration after 16 months and proposals for integrations that were supposed to happen in the middle of this year that have now been pushed back to the end of the year. The time line is pushed out and that in turn is creating stress and pressure on the people involved, as evidenced by the Community and Public Sector Union—Civil Service Association of WA survey and the research of Professor Teo from Edith Cowan University. The changes that are being implemented are creating uncertainty and leading to adverse health effects for those working in the department. I have obviously moved this motion for a discussion of those issues. I am encouraged by some of the things that the minister has said, but it is disappointing that it has taken until 2019 for a lot of these things to be recognised and brought to the fore. As I said earlier in the debate, change engenders concerns and issues.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: It is not hard for those managing the change. They should be aware that the stresses and pressures that will be created by the change can lead to adverse outcomes. Somebody should have been responsible for monitoring that so that it would not have taken until 2019 for people to have a chance to have their say on this. The other thing that annoys me about those on the other side is that in many debates in this place they lack the courage to accept responsibility for the decisions the government makes. The machinery-of-government change was nobody else's decision. It was a decision of the Labor Party.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Members and minister, just because you yell across the chamber at each other does not make you sound any more articulate or intelligent. The member has only another minute or so left. Please let him finish in silence.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: As I was saying, the government needs to own responsibility for its decisions. The machinery-of-government change was not a policy of any other party. It is a Labor Party policy that has created these issues, and it needs to be owned by the government. The government continues to fail to accept responsibility for its own decisions and continues to blame someone else. How can people in society teach their kids to accept responsibility for their own actions when the government of the day will not even do it itself? It is ridiculous. I rest

Extract from *Hansard*
[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 14 August 2019]
p5449c-5465a

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Robin Chapple; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Peter Collier;
President; Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Kyle McGinn; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Aaron
Stonehouse; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Diane Evers

my remarks there and encourage members to support this good motion to ensure that the people of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and others affected by the machinery-of-government changes have their case heard and that these adverse health outcomes do not continue.

Division

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (16)

Hon Jacqui Boydell
Hon Tim Clifford
Hon Peter Collier
Hon Colin de Grussa

Hon Diane Evers
Hon Donna Faragher
Hon Nick Goiran
Hon Colin Holt

Hon Rick Mazza
Hon Michael Mischin
Hon Simon O'Brien
Hon Robin Scott

Hon Tjorn Sibma
Hon Charles Smith
Hon Colin Tincknell
Hon Ken Baston (*Teller*)

Noes (10)

Hon Alanna Clohesy
Hon Sue Ellery
Hon Adele Farina

Hon Laurie Graham
Hon Alannah MacTiernan
Hon Kyle McGinn

Hon Martin Pritchard
Hon Samantha Rowe
Hon Dr Sally Talbot

Hon Pierre Yang (*Teller*)

Pairs

Hon Jim Chown
Hon Martin Aldridge
Hon Dr Steve Thomas

Hon Darren West
Hon Stephen Dawson
Hon Matthew Swinbourn

Question thus passed.

The PRESIDENT: Members, I might just say that that division was a result of people perhaps needing to use their voice appropriately at certain times and not at others.