

HOUSING — REGIONS — SHORTAGE

99. Hon COLIN TINCKNELL to the Minister for Regional Development:

I have had reports that some regional areas have such a shortage of accommodation that the regions cannot function. I refer to road crews not being able to temporarily locate to undertake road maintenance, harvest teams being unable to work, regional businesses that can find staff but cannot house them, and professionals such as doctors and teachers having to relocate up to one and a half hours away. Although the more critical aspects of the housing shortage relate to families who are living in cars, couch surfing or living in tents, what is the government doing about the strategy to invest in vibrant regional communities that facilitate investment and community work so that houses become available, given the huge iron ore royalty-driven surpluses?

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question. Of course we acknowledge that given the way in which our economy has grown over the last six months to a year, we certainly are now seeing housing stress. I think the member would have heard the numbers read out by the Leader of the House earlier about the low level of building approvals that had occurred for a number of years. Obviously, the key is to get more houses into the market. I am pleased to say that we are seeing a real acceleration in many country areas. Just looking at the member's electorate, for example, in the City of Albany in the last six months compared with the previous six months, we have seen a 200 per cent increase in building approvals from 72 to 219, Busselton has gone from 166 to 362, and Bunbury from 59 to 85. We really are seeing a boom, and we are out there with our \$440 million stimulus package, which includes lots of incentives for people to build. We also have the \$176 million Regional Land Booster package. That is making land available for industrial, commercial and residential purposes in regional areas. We are not necessarily getting full market recovery for that. DevelopmentWA receives funding from the consolidated account to do that. In places like the Pilbara, we are seeing more vacant land sales occur because we have been able to bring the land price down with our \$176 million package. We are seeing land sales increase. We also have the \$200 million North-West Aboriginal Housing Fund. In places like Exmouth and Kalbarri, we have committed to making land available. I understand that my good friend Hon Kyle McGinn will follow up on our election commitment in Exmouth to make land available for special housing for worker accommodation. We are looking at how we can replicate that in towns like Shark Bay. We have a massive targeted maintenance program for regional, social and remote government housing projects. I am told that around 200 homes in the great southern, for example, are going to be upgraded as part of that. We have \$97 million to build new social housing in regional Western Australia and \$141 million to refurbish social housing. A great deal of money has been put in to stimulate the production of new houses and release more land at a cheaper price and invest heavily into social housing.