

**REGIONAL TRADE COMMISSIONER**

*Motion*

**HON COL HOLT (South West)** [11.42 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house supports the establishment of a trade commissioner to better attract, coordinate and drive investment into regional Western Australia.

Perth is often described as the most isolated capital city in the world. Regional Western Australia has a connection to that capital city and is probably one of the most isolated and spread-out communities in the entire world, given the size and population of our state. Members would recognise that geographically that has definitely been the case, but I am sure that they would also realise that with the advancement of technology such as the internet and smart phones that we can carry around in our pockets, we are constantly connected to the global community. We now have 24-hour access to worldwide news and financial information from all over the world. We have 24-hour access to markets, commodities, retail, internet shopping and machinery all over the world. We also have the ability to buy food over the internet 24 hours a day just about anywhere in the world.

How connected we are with the global community came to bear when Osama bin Laden was finally captured and killed. Members will remember how that news leaked almost immediately. A guy from a Pakistan was in a village and he tweeted something about helicopters flying over his house. That tweet from somewhere in Pakistan alerted people that something was happening in that part of the world. His followers and his connections alerted the world to what was going on. To me, that demonstrates how much more connected we are to the world today than we have been in the past. Just as we are connected to those markets, there is potential now for people outside Australia to be connected to not only our markets, but also some of our commodities, produce and manufacturing. Everyone realises that technology alone does not make connections. We must have mechanisms, systems and relationships that help provide access and promote trade between communities so that those connections work properly. Internet access is one solution to some markets, but to many markets it is not. We must have some other sort of mechanism and human intervention to help it work.

About 20 months ago I was fortunate enough to go to India with a parliamentary delegation, which was about taking and celebrating the very fine produce that we have in Western Australia and showcasing it to India and Sri Lanka. Most of the produce was from the south west. The people whom we met on that trip can access products similar to what we produce in the south west of Australia, such as wine, shellfish and fresh fruit and vegetables; they can get that from all over the world. Why not access it from Western Australia? They can probably order it over the internet from here, but they can probably also order it over the internet from South Africa, Brazil or Canada. What do we need to do to help them access our markets in Western Australia, particularly in the south west, rather than others? That event was coordinated by the TradeStart export adviser, who is based in the south west. His name is Mat Lewis and many members would know him. He has done a great job to make those connections. He is the guy who really puts those things together to showcase that produce.

On that trip we also met quite a large number of Indian businessmen from very large businesses all the way down to small supermarket operators. Although the larger businesses have the ability and resources to find their own way around the Western Australian market, some of the smaller businesses do not. I remember speaking to a guy in Bangalore who owns a supermarket that really caters for the burgeoning middle class of India which wants fresh produce and is willing to pay for high quality produce. He basically said that he could sell as much fresh fruit and vegetables as he could get his hands on. This guy who runs a supermarket in Bangalore is an expat from South Africa and he wants as much access to fresh fruit and vegetables as he can. How does he access that stuff from Western Australia? Like I said, he could probably order it over the internet, but he has to worry about quality control and how to get the produce in. I was part of a parliamentary delegation and could point him in some direction of how to start that process, but it came to me that I really needed someone I could put him in touch with straightaway so that he could have those connections through the south west and work with those industries, create relationships and get the quality assurance to start that trade. Mat Lewis was an obvious point of contact, but he is one of only two TradeStart export advisers left in Western Australia. They were federally funded. There were nine of them all over the state, but now only two are left and Mat is one of those. Even his ability is limited to help this guy in the supermarket to fulfil his needs.

My view is that although the physical connection through the internet is one thing, we definitely have to have that human connection to put people together so that they can understand how they can access our markets. I am sure everyone in this place would know that our domestic fruit and vegetable markets are at the whim of a couple of big supermarket chains. When producers produce perishable items such as milk, oranges, mangoes and bananas, they really have to sell, and they have to sell at the price they are offered. If we create markets and other opportunities for these growers, there is more competition for produce in the marketplace and they get a better return. It makes the whole industry a lot more sustainable. We should be pursuing ways that we can

promote markets internationally. We know there are people out there now—communities, industries and companies—who are looking to interact in a global market to deliver produce to their countries.

I remember being in India talking to these guys about where the WA presence was in India to make the most of these opportunities, because South Africa had really made a push into supplying those markets in India. In my view, they were one of the competitors. Therefore, maybe we need to change some things that we do to help our businesses, especially the smaller and medium-sized businesses in regional Western Australia, to get the greatest economic potential that they can. We know that the Department of State Development plays a very important role in this, but it tends to work with the larger companies—the top end of town—as it should. The department tends to work with companies that come with big investment plans or existing companies that want to export, so there probably is a gap that we as a government should focus on to help those smaller and medium-sized businesses to play the same sort of role that State Development does. This motion suggests that we should investigate the establishment of a trade commissioner to take on that role, to be that connection and create that relationship network to start our export industries flowing to other countries. If other countries are interested in investing in Australia, the trade commissioner can work with those countries to get a better outcome for not only them but also our communities, producers and processors so that they can build and grow their businesses.

There was a news story recently about a Chinese businessman wanting to establish a powdered milk factory in the south west of Western Australia. I am sure that people in the local dairy industry saw that as a great opportunity to say, “We can produce more milk; we just need a better price for it.” At the moment, the price they are offered through the fresh milk domestic market is pretty limited; it is affected by the well-known milk price wars that have been going on for a year and a half. Confidence in that industry has certainly suffered because of it. If a businessman such as that came to a trade commissioner’s office and said, “I’d really like to explore this opportunity”, a trade commissioner with the right connections, the right placement in government and the right focus would certainly be able to help him focus that investment to get a good outcome for the businessman, who obviously wants to provide food for his home country, and a better outcome for our own local producers. The flow-on effects of that would be obvious to most people. It would affect not only dairy farming but also the additional support industries and, potentially, buy-local systems. If we can help drive some investment in those sorts of industries and others, I am sure that buy-local policies and local manufacturers will get a great deal out of it as well.

A trade commissioner would provide services to link potential investors from outside Australia to local opportunities and vice versa for local investors looking at potential opportunities overseas. I know of many companies that have tried it. It is hard work. They have to be committed to it, they have to invest in it and they commit a whole lot of resources to it. These companies do not always get the outcome that they would like, so we must ask how we as a government can facilitate that, because it will make our industries stronger. A trade commissioner would link local businesses with new investors. Maybe we do not have to do anything more than say, “Here’s a guy who wants to invest in milk. Here’s the industry. Here’s the organisation that can help you do that”; it is linking those. A trade commissioner could market WA as an attractive place to do business. I know that we have a network of officers from the WA office overseas who do a great job. But they are pretty limited in their reach in a pretty large world. Maybe there is a bit more we can do to say, “We’re here. We have a great potential to supply a whole range of commodities, food and produce to the world. How can we tap into the markets and the needs that you already have?” A local trade commissioner could facilitate more connections between local industry associations and state and federal departments. I am sure that the industry groups that are out there now working for industry would like a focus—one place to go to where they can discuss how they might pursue international opportunities.

A trade commissioner could advise our local businesses on how they might access countries and markets, and also how people from overseas who might be interested in investing in Western Australia might do so better. I remember on an Indian trip I met with a company that specialised in providing advice on how to get through all the red tape of Indian bureaucracy. Its role was to help people who wanted to do business in India and provide services to the Indian community to negotiate and navigate their way through the minefield of bureaucracy that exists in India. There are whole companies to do that. We probably have some companies similar to that in Western Australia, but maybe a trade commissioner could provide some independent advice or even just make those connections between companies and industries wishing to invest in Western Australia and help them map a way through.

It is not just restricted to large markets. I am sure most members would understand that from little things, big things grow. We have to take a first step before we can reach the heights of magnificence. I know of many companies who are ready and willing to export and create larger markets. One that comes to mind is a winegrower in the south west who operates generally in their own domestic market, wine sales at the cellar door, but also in the local market.

**HON MIA DAVIES (Agricultural)** [11.57 am]: I rise to support the motion for this house to support the establishment of a trade commissioner to better attract, coordinate and drive investment into regional Western Australia. The introduction of a trade commissioner would certainly assist both government and industry to maximise our state's potential. By global standards we are a small market. From either side of the ledger, particularly for a business or an industry that is looking to grow, it can be difficult to come into our market or for somebody existing in Western Australia who is looking to go the other way. Sometimes it is easy for a handful of big players to dominate our attention and potentially the support that government can provide.

Government should have a role in attracting and facilitating investment. We play a role in this space already. The Department of State Development works alongside projects of significance and certainly the Department of Regional Development and Lands also plays a role there. There are multiple departments in this space already. Our suggestion is that there is a gap. Feedback to us from the community and industry is that below that level of projects of state significance, there is a level of investment that requires better coordination to make sure we maximise the outcomes for not only the investor but also us as a state and the people who live here.

From my perspective as a member representing the Agricultural Region, this issue of foreign investment certainly comes up when we discuss the issue of foreign investment in the purchase of land in the agricultural supply chain. It is certainly something that has been debated at the federal and state level and even at local levels as well. I have to say that I do not necessarily share the concerns of some of my federal colleagues on this issue. In the industry that predominantly sustains my electorate it is certainly a conversation I have regularly with people in my travels.

The issue of foreign investment in agriculture fills many pages of our rural press and is discussed at field days, in pubs, at meetings and within the industry itself. I certainly do not think there has been a resolution to the issue that people are comfortable with just yet. However, there is no doubt that access to capital, particularly for investment in agriculture, is limited in Western Australia, and if we want the industry to continue to grow, we need to find ways of encouraging and attracting that investment. Although I acknowledge the concerns of the community, one of the questions I ask regularly of people while we are having this debate is whether they want the government telling them to whom they can sell their land. When the conversation gets to that point, the answer is emphatically no. However, I do think that there is a need for some better coordination and that we have a monitoring role to play to provide a good outcome for those people who come to Western Australia and seek to invest. For whatever reason they want to invest in Western Australia—whether it be to ensure their own food security needs or whether it be a corporation seeking to diversify its investment base—there are requirements on the state government to make sure that it is getting a good outcome and that anybody who comes to our state is also getting a good outcome.

I do not believe any government would ever put itself in the position of allowing foreign investors to turn up one day, simply buy all our land and leave us with nothing. That part of the debate is unrealistic. What we should be doing is coordinating and facilitating these potential investors. In terms of buying and selling land, currently potential investors seeking to buy land are dealing with real estate agents at a very local level. I am not talking about insignificant investments in some cases. Whether it be dairy, horticulture or broadacre farming, the operation of buying land involves an investor coming in and dealing with real estate agents at a very local level. The imperative of an estate agent is a commercial one, of course, but it is not necessarily the same imperative that a state government would seek. That says to me that we probably do have a role in this space and that we do need to make sure that both parties get the outcome they want. If people make investment decisions that result in their expectations not being met, if they invest in a climate in which they have not done their homework or if they are unaware of government regulations or some of the business imperatives, those issues also will not result in a good outcome for the state.

Our first point of contact, therefore, through a trade commissioner for investment at a particular level—there needs to be a cut-off at some point—would provide a shopfront for all those seeking to invest in our state. Having a trade commissioner is more about coordination and about a cooperative effort. We are not seeking to be in the space where the private sector operates but, rather, we are seeking to assist and enhance what is happening in that space. I am very clear, as I stated before, that our role is not in the space of telling individual landowners who they can or cannot sell their land to; nobody wants to be in that space. What we are saying is that we need to make sure that we monitor what is going on when people are investing. We acknowledge that, in whichever forum foreign investment is discussed, much-needed capital could enhance our state's economy and increase opportunities for local businesses, and in agriculture I see that as nothing but a positive thing.

A linking, information and marketing role for a trade commissioner would clearly assist those investors who are not investing at a scale that requires the assistance of the Department of State Development. The role would complement, not compete with or overlap, that assistance. I think there is also probably a role for us to enhance the role of our regional development commissions and also to link them together, as they are the agencies on the

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ground with a good understanding of business sense and of their local economies. All those roles could be linked together by this proposed trade commissioner. Whether investment is in agriculture, tourism, manufacturing or education, or new technologies such as renewable energies, research or art and culture, that one-stop-shop for potential investors or newcomers to our state would only enhance those opportunities. And of course the link would be, as Hon Col Holt spoke about earlier, outgoing as well as incoming so that we expect that businesses seeking to grow their own markets would use the trade commissioner as a resource to link in with the resources already dotted around the world.

I can only see this proposal as an opportunity to enhance and be of benefit to regional Western Australia, particularly to the agriculture sector. As that is the main sustaining business that runs the economy of my electorate, I am very keen to see this proposal explored further, and I thank Hon Col Holt for bringing this motion to the house.

**HON PHILIP GARDINER (Agricultural)** [12.05 pm]: I rise to talk to this motion. The case for a trade commissioner, as mentioned in the motion, rests really on our isolation from the main ambassadorial area of the country, which is Canberra, and consulates that the country has in Sydney or Melbourne. The fact that the trade attachés over east are on overseas ambassadorial posts means that their focus is on that part of the country. We could have a trade attaché here—a post box, if you like. That may be a useful thing but work could be done more and more satisfactorily through internet information as we go on in the future.

Trade attachés are mostly people who have a broad perspective of trade and relationships, especially those Australians who serve overseas in countries that trade with us. I have used those people a couple of times. They are overworked but they can identify a few faces or maybe a few firms and then it is up to us. We then have to have the drive, the focus, the energy and the money to bring some proposal to realisation.

Economic growth, as we know, depends on population and productivity. Productivity really comes about by making sure that we understand where our markets are and that we can exploit them. That is one of the major areas of productivity. Regional Western Australia has been stagnating for many, many years but now with investment going in through the royalties for regions program, liveability conditions are improving—not fast, because they all take time, but they are improving. In regional Western Australia it was fine for men in the past to go out into the regions and more readily endure the hardships of the activities in the industry of their choice. However, it is much more constraining to take their partner or wife and children into these areas. Liveability, therefore, is one of the first preconditions for people if we are to build and enhance industry in the regional parts of Western Australia.

Much of regional Western Australia is based around agriculture at the current time, and has been so historically. It is sustainable in the sense that food is required by everyone, but financial sustainability is quite a different thing. The basic philosophy is that the land stays, the players change. That is what happens. Because the risks in agriculture are so high, much higher than nearly every other industry because of the climatic factors, that means that people have deficits; they borrow, they build up their borrowings more and more until finally the bank does not want to lend to them anymore, and they sell and someone else comes in. That has been the philosophy and what has occurred within that philosophy of the land staying and the players changing. But when there is a value chain connection going all the way through, that is where the sustainability remarkably improves. Let us not underestimate how difficult that is. Basically in agriculture it is small business dealing with an end point in the value chain, large firms and others, which are big business. The countervailing power is totally lopsided. Therefore, the small business operator in agriculture has no way of really having commercial countervailing power unless he has a particular relationship with those at the other end of the value chain. I have had experience of this. Back in the late 1990s, one minister for agriculture, Monty House, very effectively built up an organisation in which different aspects of the agricultural industry were combined with aspects of the value chain. I was involved in the wool side. Through the funding assistance of the government through that minister, the focus became the Indian market. The Indian Woollen Mill's Federation—the large firms involved are now even larger firms—was invited to visit and was given a reception at Government House and so on. It became familiar with the discounted price for which Western Australian wool could be sold. As a result, one of the things that happened was the discount for wool that Western Australia was receiving on international markets changed. Eastern states people always talked our wool down because they thought it had inferior qualities. Now there is no discount for Western Australian wool. That was one of the benefits because India came into the market and bought it. The point I am getting to is that there was an opportunity for Western Australia to have a lot of small producers combine to directly export wool to India by taking out the other entities in the value chain and realising a much better margin. There were eight, nine or 10 local wool producers' groups scattered throughout Western Australia. We worked with them, had meetings with them and appointed people to manage it. The difficulty we had was not with the overseas market; rather, it was getting our own people to pull together to combine to exploit or to get the value advantage by having a different relationship with the end market. What happened? It collapsed. It proved to be harder to get our groups together than it was finding overseas buyers.

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What is needed to do that? We needed funding. The most important part of this motion is funding to get the expertise, especially from the private sector.

A public trade commissioner is totally insufficient to realise what we are talking about here in Hon Col Holt's motion. There must be funding and it must be thought through very carefully. The package of doing things is quite difficult. It must have laws that can be changed to allow what we need to do to ideally give the countervailing power of small business the ability to negotiate on an equal basis with the entities distant down the value chain. At the end of the day I was so embarrassed by that wool experience that I said that I would ship my wool to India. I was the only one to ship wool directly to India. It is a very sad story, because we failed Western Australia. We failed it because we did not have the money from the industry—it was not available—to provide a fulltime person to focus on dealing with all the implications of developing a value-chain pathway. That is what this motion must include if we are to be effective. But it is not only for that. Western Australia has a dairy industry. Hon Col Holt referred to one example. Our dairy industry produces fresh milk in a location that is the closest to Asia of any milk producing locations in the South East Asian region. It is a potentially wonderful opportunity if the tastes of South East Asia move towards fresh milk. The dairy industry has no money left to extract to use to get people and the expertise needed to deal with the different aspects of packaging it up and finding a distributor in Indonesia and Malaysia to make this thing work. The idea of building a lot of this in regional Western Australia is very, very important. It is not only for agriculture; a lot of new industries could go into WA, as has been referred to, through the use of the internet, because the internet now provides an opportunity to have industry in regional WA where it is mostly cheaper to operate; where there are often people to employ; and where it is enhanced and made possible. Internet selling now means that a producer does not have to be adjacent to his market to sell. The National Broadband Network is a very important prospect for regional Western Australia. It will allow us to do so many more things as long as pre-conditions of liveability and so on are in place.

**HON KATE DOUST (South Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [12.17 pm]: Having sat and listened to this debate, I am a bit confused. I looked at the motion and wondered why a member of the government—in fact, a president of his own political party—has come into this house and asked us to support the establishment of a trade commissioner when he, as a member of government and as president of his political party, is in the best position to talk to the Premier, who is the Minister for State Development. I do not know why he has not done that. I do not know why we are having this dog's breakfast of a debate this morning. It has been all over the shop. Hon Col Holt was talking about Osama Bin Laden and technology at about the time I came into the chamber. I was not too sure where he was going to go with that. We think the current trade offices—I will probably say a few nice things about the government in the next few minutes, so Hon Norman Moore can sit back and relax—

**Hon Norman Moore** interjected.

**Hon KATE DOUST:** I thought I would warm up for Hon Norman Moore.

Under Labor there were 15 trade offices; under this government, the number has been reduced to 10 in eight countries. Maybe the government needs to think about the future locations of trade offices that offer the best advantage for our state. Maybe it needs to revisit the key performance indicators set up for those individual trade offices. The answer I received yesterday about the KPIs expected of a trade office were slightly disappointing. After reading them, I thought we would be looking for a social events organiser and an activities organiser. They are not the sort of KPIs I would expect to be used. Perhaps those things need to be revisited to generate better outcomes for the state. That is up to the government; it needs to make that decision. If we get into government, we will probably look at that. When we get down to the nuts and bolts—National Party members have talked about small business, agriculture, technology and medicine; a whole array of different types of business activities—the trade offices are doing quite well.

I also visited India. I was impressed with the work that the trade officer in India, Mr Peter Forby, is doing. He is doing an outstanding job on behalf of the state. He has a diversity of different types of business from extremely large companies that could drop a billion dollars into our state potentially for a fertiliser company or other industries. When we visited Sri Lanka we looked at a broad array of different types of businesses under the one umbrella. There was excellent opportunity for interchange between Western Australia and those countries. Last week I had the good fortune to visit Surabaya and Malang. We visited some of the very small businesses that our trade officer is engaged with—small businesses that not only produce items that have the potential to come into our state and the potential to gain from our expertise in training and development, but also pick up on some of our agricultural products so that they can expand their businesses and their markets. I went to a particular business run by a very impressive woman in a village not far out of Surabaya. She imports Western Australian seed potato. I met with the potato farmers; they are doing an amazing job and are looking to expand their business. She grows mushrooms, value-adds, and exports those products. I am disappointed that we do not get

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that product because it was fabulous. She grows flowers and diversifies into a range of other businesses, and she has done that with the assistance of the Western Australian International Trade and Investment Office in Jakarta. She is just one example of the many people I met last week, the bulk of whom come to Western Australia on a regular basis. I met dairy farmers in Malang who come here a number of times a year. One young fellow said that he only gets to go to Pemberton. I said that he should let his dad come to Perth occasionally and see what we have to offer. In fact, most of the dairy farmers we met had studied here. They come here to learn how to do things better.

The offices we have are doing a good job. The government is trying to set up another tier of bureaucracy when trade should be driven by what the government wants. The Premier is responsible for this area. I do not know what discussions members opposite have had with him, the Department of State Development, or the respective desks that they have, and, quite frankly, I do not know whether this is just a stunt from the National Party. The National Party is a bit bipolar, because it cannot quite work out whether it is part of the government. The National Party members need to talk with the Premier and work out how this can be managed. It may not be perfect but our trade offices are working. My only criticism is that perhaps we need to work out where our other markets are. It is very disappointing to see the closure of the Malaysian trade office, and perhaps some of the doors to our educational opportunities being lost. We may need to look into other parts of northern Asia to see what sort of exchanges can be introduced there.

Hon Terry Redman put out a discussion paper on agriculture at the National Party conference. He is the Minister for Agriculture and Food; why is he not doing the work that Hon Kim Chance used to do when he was the minister responsible? Hon Kim Chance did an outstanding job of getting our products into the markets in Saudi Arabia and in others like Dubai. It is not good enough for a minister to talk about needing to up the ante on trade for our state. The question we have to ask—I am sure the government will be asking it—is why is the current minister not looking into other markets?

The National Party does not need to seek our approval on this matter; it is in government, so just go and do it. The National Party has pots of money. It has money that even the Liberal government cannot tap into. It does not know what to do with all of its money. Why is it not doing things to better address trade in its regions? It is a country-based party. It should be opening up those opportunities. National Party members opposite should not talk about opening up another layer of bureaucracy. They should be getting their minister into the cabinet room to talk to the Premier, who is responsible, about how to do it better. Obviously, things can always be done better, but quite frankly our trade offices, given the number of staff and their budgets, are doing the best job they possibly can. The returns are good. It would be good to get some information out of the government on how it measures those returns and how those outcomes could be improved. It is very difficult to get that information. At the end of the day, I am amused that the member opposite would essentially ask for this chamber's approval. It is like a small child seeking approval from its parents to do something. The National Party is not a small child; it is part of government because of a deal it has done, and it has been in that position for four years. National Party members should be able to go to cabinet and the Premier with this matter—it has better access than we do. I do not know why the member opposite is coming in here and talking up this matter now. Perhaps there is a press release that is ready to go. At the end of the day, she should be talking to the Premier; he is the bloke in charge of trade. Yes, there are things that could be done better, but things are going quite well on the whole.

The question arose last night that perhaps the National Party is trying to find ways to accommodate some of its colleagues. Perhaps Hon Brendon Grylls may not win his seat in the north west, and perhaps the party is trying to create some sort of job opportunity —

**Hon Sue Ellery:** Do you think he needs a job?

**Hon KATE DOUST:** He might need a job. I hope he will need another job, and not the one he is looking for.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** I like your confidence to be in the position to give out these jobs.

**Hon KATE DOUST:** Well I hope the minister is not. It is amusing. I know it is unusual for Hon Mia Davies to spend so much time in here, so we are pleased to hear from her today. However, I do not know why she is not using more appropriate avenues to get results. Quite frankly, she has not demonstrated or proven her case to this government on why we need to have a trade commissioner, and that is why she is now trying to talk up the issue. I am not too sure where we stand on the issue. I would like to see more trade offices set up and more opportunities for Western Australians in all sorts of areas to promote business—be it in the area of big or small business, education, medicine, the arts or whatever. That is a challenge for the government, and it is an interesting challenge for the Premier to work out how we can do things better. Perhaps there has not been enough public discussion in the community on how we can do this better in this space. Perhaps we need to have a broader debate on trade in WA, not just one about creating future jobs for the boys. That is what is so disappointing about the debate by the member opposite. I look forward to the government's response on this issue.

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Finance)** [12.25 pm]: I would like to respond to all the members who have spoken. I will do so briefly because I am really only a warm-up act for Hon Wendy Duncan, who will need some time in this debate, because I am sure she has a couple of things to say after that last contribution. I thought Hon Kate Doust was being a bit unfair on those who have spoken to the proposition. It is legitimate that members identify a need in the community and in the electorates they represent, and to raise those issues and thoughts for discussion during private members' business, and I congratulate them for bringing the matter forward. Perhaps the opposition might learn to be a little more charitable. Sundry arrangements are already in place to do the sorts of things that the member is speaking of, but that does not mean that there cannot be ways to identify the gaps—I think that was the term used by Hon Mia Davies—and strive to do better. This is particularly so as the dynamics of trade with our overseas trading partners changes, as other communities in our region and around the Indian Ocean rim develop, and as middle classes become more predominant in their home markets and look further afield, for example, for quality agricultural produce. Western Australia has an opportunity to step up and take advantage of these changes, and that is something that this government certainly wants to encourage. It is true that we have a number of Western Australian trade offices that communicate and assist with trade and investment into and out of regional Western Australia, and indeed the state.

Like other members, I have also been involved with the activities of some of our trade offices overseas. Simon Johnson was a very good representative in India a few years ago, and at that time Hon Ray Halligan and I explored a number of options in the south of India. We were looking for a market for what they referred to as "long apples"—what we typically call Red Delicious and other similar varieties. The problems were not about finding buyers, but about being able to produce them in the quantities required, and also about shipment. The product needed to arrive at its destination in a pristine condition—after having gone through sea freight and various quarantine and other processes—that the local market would want to pay a premium price for, which would then justify the trouble our growers and exporters had gone to. The devil is always in the detail. Nonetheless, the government has a range of operatives working across a number of agencies, including the Department of Agriculture and Food, but also the Department of Fisheries, the Department of Commerce, the Small Business Development Corporation, the Department of State Development and even the Department of Training and Workforce Development, and we always have got to improve that.

I did not intend to make a contribution today except to acknowledge the initiative of members in bringing forward these matters and to point out that these paths that they want to explore are in fact quite well trodden. However, that does not mean that they should not continue to be explored and that we cannot do better. I thank Hon Col Holt for his contribution today. I look forward to catching up with him. We will compare details of our travel logs—his and mine—to the India office. Remind me to tell the story about the restrooms in Kuala Lumpur airport!

Several members interjected.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Very good they are, but there was a particularly interesting time we had there!

Several members interjected.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Time prevents me from recounting that and other anecdotes, not to mention the need to preserve relevance.

**Hon Ljiljana Ravlich:** That is the only interesting thing you've said all year.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Perhaps if Hon Ljiljana Ravlich listened a bit more closely, she would learn a bit more!

To close and to give some idea of how successive members of this place have taken to this issue with enthusiasm, I recall that my predecessor in the South Metropolitan Region, Hon Clive Griffiths, who of course was 20 years in that chair, Madam Deputy President, was our Agent General in London for a number of years. I know that he was prominent in conceiving, organising and hosting trade fairs in regional parts of Britain—for example, in Birmingham I remember—to showcase Western Australian produce. There were not only wines and fruits—Hon Philip Gardiner knows what I am talking about—but there were our meats and a whole range of other wares. One of the problems encountered that time, of course, was the question of quantity, because if we had someone from a country the size of England, France or Germany say, "Yes, we like this wine you have produced; can you provide us with 600 000 cartons of the stuff?", perhaps some of our winemakers at that time were not quite large enough to meet that demand. Nonetheless, it is all about making up opportunities, so I appreciate the motives of those who have raised these matters. I am pleased to be able to reassure the house that the government is always looking for these opportunities, and, in fact, in my own portfolio capacity, I will be saying a bit more about that in due course.

Hon Kate Doust made her contribution. I can reassure her that, yes, with the changes sometimes in the numbers and locations of our trade offices, I hope that she will accept that *prima facie* as evidence that this government is

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indeed constantly assessing where we can best allocate our resources to get the best outcomes for the people of Western Australia. Perhaps to give further response to Hon Kate Doust, I might sit down and see whether other members want to have a say.

**HON LINDA SAVAGE (East Metropolitan)** [12.33 pm]: I have listened to this debate with interest and I thought I would make a few comments. I begin in response to the comments made by Hon Col Holt about India. I think India is a very important market for Western Australia. Earlier this year, I went to see a speaker at the Perth Writers Festival at UWA, Chetan Bhagat. He is a writer whose books have sold over six million copies in India, which I think is a good example of the scale of the markets that Western Australia has the potential to access, when we consider that he is a writer for a particular genre aimed at young Indians. Interestingly, as many members would know, 70 per cent of India's population is aged under 35 years and the average age of that country is 25. A bit later I will speak about what a market that creates for Australia, particularly in the area of education, and what people have had to say about that. India, as Hon Col Holt has said, is very important for Western Australia and I suppose a natural fit for us. We have a shared English heritage and political system, and we obviously have the English language, and speaking English the way westerners speak it is something that young Indians value extremely highly. We also have cricket in common. On occasions I have attended functions arranged by the Friends of India, and when the vice-president of India attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the connection through cricket was perhaps the most important. I cannot remember the name of the cricketer who was at the CHOGM reception, because I do not follow cricket —

**Hon Kate Doust:** Gilchrist.

**Hon LINDA SAVAGE:** I thank Hon Kate Doust. Adam Gilchrist was the cricketer at the CHOGM reception and he was the star attraction, until the vice-president arrived, and was photographed with virtually everyone in the room who could get near him.

Speaking about trade, I have also been invited to, and attended, functions organised by the Consulate-General of India in Western Australia, Mandarapu Subbarayudu, who came to Western Australia last year and has set up an office here. I have attended its dialogue on Indian–Western Australian opportunities for cooperation, which was chaired by the President of this chamber, Hon Barry House. Very interestingly, the presentations at that dialogue included one by Mr Peter Forby, who is a regional director at the WA trade office in Mumbai. I heard Hon Kate Doust refer to him, and I was very interested in the extent of the ties there and the work that is being done in Mumbai. If there is a lack of capacity in a country like India, we already have someone located there; therefore, we could build upon his work and his great knowledge of India, having lived there now for well over a decade. He was not the only one present at the dialogue—Mr Ian Whittaker, who is a senior trade adviser with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Western Australia, and Mr Sanjay Bhartia, who is the president of the Western Australian branch of the Australia India Business Council, were also there. Just looking at India, it seems to me that there is already a considerable number of ties and ways to build that market, and rather than moving to something more, we should be supporting what is there.

I also very much take the point that was made about technology and the capacity, now that we are so interconnected, for Australia, which itself is a very remote country, to take advantage of these connections. I have never felt Australia's remoteness more than in the periods I have lived in America and the extended periods I have lived in England. The whole of Australia is remote, so I would not like to overplay the idea that only WA is remote. But getting news out about Australia is obviously difficult in countries such as the United Kingdom. In fact, in 2006, when I lived in London for the year with my husband and one of my children, the only significant news from Australia that was reported in England was the death of Steve Irwin, which was reported along the lines that the country had collapsed in mass grief. So I think that is a challenge. But, on the other hand, Western Australia has an enormous advantage, because we are in the same time zone as much of Asia, including Beijing. I would never enter into the debate about daylight saving—that is a debate that I will stay well away from—but when I was in London, I had firsthand experience that if we wish to conduct business with Australia from London, Western Australia is far easier to conduct business with than are the other states, because even with the time difference between London and Western Australia, it is possible to have an early morning meeting, or a meeting later in the day; but with the time difference between London and Sydney, particularly if we add to that daylight saving, that is quite a challenge.

With regard to India and the things that we can do better and the things that India can offer, the area of education provides enormous opportunities when we consider the demographics of India and what Australia and India have in common. Essentially, what the keynote speaker at the writers' festival said was that young Indians aspire to be like young westerners in a whole range of areas, including education. They are looking to gain the skills that an education in Australia, and in a state such as Western Australia, can give to them.

A very important point that was made is that one of the things that the government of Western Australia can do is entice young Indians to come to this state. The point was made in discussion that there is a genuine, although I

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expect misrepresented, fear in India about the safety of students in Australia. That concern was particularly related to Melbourne. It did not seem to be such an issue for Western Australia. But we should look further at that, and also at the regional opportunities that young Indians can gain by coming to Western Australia.

The last thing I would like to say in the short time available to me is that when I attended the dialogue that was held in February this year on Indian–Western Australian opportunities for cooperation, what was notable was that only about 40 people were at that event. As someone commented, if that event had been a dialogue about opportunities to do business in China, there would probably have been hundreds of people at the event.

I agree with Hon Col Holt that India provides enormous opportunities for Western Australia. I would like to think that the Western Australian government, in its planning for trade, is developing strategies in that area.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.