

VISION FOR AGRICULTURE POLICY

Motion

HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural) [11.24 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house notes the importance of the Western Australian agricultural industry to our regional communities and our state economy and calls on the state government to implement the policy measures outlined in the Nationals “Vision for Agriculture” to support this industry by investing in research and development, land and water, getting produce to market, investment and trade, and skills.

It is great that today we are discussing two motions in the chamber that affect regional communities and regional people. This motion is of great importance to me and my constituents in the Agricultural Region, and I am sure all the regions in Western Australia. In speaking to the motion, I would like to firstly talk about the development of agriculture in Western Australia since colonisation and about some of the challenges and opportunities the industry faces. I will then speak about some of the solutions that my party colleagues and I took to the last election, particularly the ways we can address some of those challenges and maximise opportunities for the future of the industry.

Shortly after colonisation in Western Australia, much of the land around the Swan River Colony was deemed to be unsuitable for agriculture. As Hon Paul Brown said in his inaugural speech, it was not long until exploration occurred over the Darling Scarp, which led to the establishment of the first inland town in York in 1831. Shortly after, this area became successful livestock country and much of the Avon Valley was developed over the following years. Sheep farming, the most successful early agricultural pursuit, expanded into the Pilbara in the 1860s and the Gascoyne in the midwest in the 1870s. By the end of 1886, there was estimated to be more than two million sheep in Western Australia, producing the bulk of the colony’s exports. At this time the grain industry was beginning to take shape. At the end of 1886, over 84 000 acres were under crop. This was the beginning of a huge increase in crop production in Western Australia. WA soon expanded its agricultural industry to include dairy, horticulture, orchards and many other pursuits. With an agricultural economy that was heavily livestock oriented at the time, grains being predominantly grown in the eastern states, WA first became a major producer of grain towards the end of 1905. The increase in agricultural production that Western Australia experienced at this time coincided with the discovery of gold in Kalgoorlie and the subsequent gold rush in the late 1800s. There are countless other examples over the past 100 years when mining has boomed and agriculture has continued to be the quiet achiever in our economy.

Throughout the early 1900s, agriculture and mining underpinned the Australian economy, as they do today. At a recent meeting in Merredin, which many of my colleagues and I attended, almost 1 000 farmers and members of the agricultural community turned up to detail some of the concerns they had with the industry and discuss some of the difficulties they are facing. The focus of this and other recent meetings was the impact of successive bad seasons and some of the challenges that farmers face as a result. The member for Central Wheatbelt, Mia Davies, mentioned in the other place earlier this year that the debate around supporting our farmers had become about drought policy and was too focused on transactional subsidies, loans and grants. This is a particularly important point because being purely reactionary in these circumstances could have dire consequences for the future of the industry. Hon Ken Baston said in response to a question on notice recently that about 40 farmers are having difficulty accessing finance this season and probably would not be planting a crop. To put that in perspective, that is about one per cent of the grain growing industry. While we should recognise that, we should not lose sight of the other 99 per cent of the industry, some of whom are still in hardship but who are looking towards future opportunities. Drought policy has traditionally been viewed as an emergency strategy rather than as a strategy to deal with the ongoing problem that the drying climate is becoming. This is an opportunity to support the agricultural sector to make sure that it can sustain, diversify and expand to meet not only our needs, but also those of our neighbours to the north.

The Liberal and National Parties were criticised by members opposite during the election and as recently as during a debate last evening. Both the Liberal Party and the National Party are independent political parties working together in an alliance government. I acknowledge that the Liberal Party also launched an agriculture policy during the campaign and that some elements of this platform reflect similar views to our vision for agriculture. Reducing regulatory burdens and improving property rights are among some of the initiatives in the Liberal Party platform that should in my view form part of the government’s post-election platform for the industry. I see this as a strength, not a weakness, of the alliance government; a contest of ideas; and now the challenge to implement a policy that reflects the best of both parties.

Agriculture has been the backbone of regional communities for more than a century. If farmers are doing well, they spend money in their local towns, shops and dealerships. This creates more jobs, attracts more people, keeps

Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West

the sporting clubs going and creates a vibrant, regional community. Alongside the impediments facing the WA agriculture sector, there is also vast opportunity in almost every direction. As the economies of countries such as China and India continue to grow, massive opportunities exist to increase or even double our agricultural output over coming years. These opportunities could see our exports increase from roughly \$6 billion to \$12 billion or even beyond, provided we can continue to export the high-quality produce with which WA has become synonymous. It is the aim of the Nationals to allow our farmers to capitalise on the opportunities presented by investing heavily in infrastructure and research. This investment spread over five areas, which I will outline today briefly, will help our farmers to do exactly what they have been doing for more than 100 years: adapt to changing conditions and produce world-class food.

The five areas outlined in our \$300 million pre-election commitment are research and development; land and water; getting produce to market; investment and trade; and skills. I will briefly touch on each this morning and will begin with research and development. With the need for the agriculture sector to be constantly evolving, high-class research and development is essential to respond to the challenges of a changing environment and for us to remain a leader in the sector. This involves not only scientific research to develop new crop varieties, new technology and new farming practices, but also better understandings of economic and market research to work out what our customers want, examination and prediction of market trends, and identification of market opportunities and ways to make farmers more profitable.

WA has taken the lead for innovation in the grains sector. We intend to enable our farmers and researchers to go further. Our vision will inject \$20 million into grassroots grower groups allowing them to capitalise on research opportunities. In my view that vision is best targeted at these grower groups, as they are at the grassroots level and understand most clearly the priorities for their industry. WA is Australia's biggest grain producer and is therefore best equipped to develop greater technology to complement that fact. This \$40 million investment will enable our farmers to change farming practices to ensure the increase in quality and the output that farmers are seeking. Research and development is all well and good on its own; however, without the appropriate measures to properly manage risk, it might not come to much. This is why the policy will provide \$10 million to help growers and researchers better understand and manage risk. This comes in the form of increasing the weather station network and increasing the number of Yield Prophet sites. This is a point that insurance companies have raised with the government when looking at more comprehensive insurance schemes for WA growers. In *The Weekend West* last Saturday an article by Brad Thompson, titled "Farmers urge action as time runs out on crop insurance", references the Nationals (WA) promised royalties for regions funding for two Doppler radars during the election campaign, and states —

Senior TCC —

TCC is The Climate Corporation —

executives Dave Friedberg and Andy Leventhal met farmers, politicians, industry leaders and government officials during a recent trip to WA. TCC's yield-based insurance product relies heavily on technology, including radar coverage which allows paddock-by-paddock weather analysis.

It is important that the foresight that went into the development of this policy, primarily by Minister Redman and Minister Grylls and the rest of the National Party candidates across the state, predicted the need for government to play a greater role in providing some of this data to insurance companies, and as late as last Saturday in *The Weekend West* we saw that call echoed once again. This policy will allow that to happen. In the Agricultural Region it will provide another \$10 million for a sheep industry development centre in Katanning; outside the Agricultural Region, a further \$15 million for the northern beef industry development centre in the Kimberley and \$5 million to establish an organic foods industry research centre in Bunbury. Some of the other aspects of the policy include land and water.

As I mentioned earlier, our state's ability to increase agricultural production over fewer hectares has been a feature of agriculture for the last three decades. In order for this to continue, we need to be able to more effectively use our often underutilised water supplies in the north, and to adapt our often constrained water supplies in the south with the drying climate. Achievements in the last term of this government, including the Ord stage 2 development in the Kimberley, several mining-based agricultural projects, expansion of the Carnarvon irrigation area in the Gascoyne food bowl initiative and exploration of the development of recycled water in the Peel region, have all contributed to the beginnings of more efficient water use in WA. Getting produce to market is an important element of the platform. The markets that exist outside Australia are too important to allow the lack of infrastructure and inefficiencies to prevent maximisation of the opportunities that accompany them.

Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West

There has been a lot of debate recently about the state of infrastructure in regional WA and the most cost-effective way to get our produce to market. This policy will allow an immediate infrastructure audit to be done across the agricultural sector and identify bottlenecks that are preventing further exports from WA to the world.

An amount of \$75 million has been allocated to the infrastructure investment fund to help us start to address some of those bottlenecks in our transport systems, seaports, airports and packaging facilities.

WA has always been an export state; 80 per cent of our agricultural commodities are currently shipped overseas. Our domestic market is relatively small, meaning that the only way to increase the size of our agriculture sector is to sell more overseas. WA has a reputation for delivering top-quality fresh produce to our international customers, and this is why we propose a \$7 million fund to develop brand WA to sell to the world. One of WA's strongest selling points is our relative freedom from pests and diseases. This policy intends to maintain and strengthen that reputation by providing \$20 million to bolster the state's biosecurity measures.

In skills, we intend to invest a further \$10 million to provide a transformation of Muresk Institute. This is in addition to the \$10 million already invested in Muresk by royalties for regions in the previous term of government. We will also fund a program to boost the skills of people already employed in the sector, including free business diagnostics checks, industry workshops and business adviser support. This \$20 million program will enable people already employed within the agriculture sector to get the desired outcomes for their businesses. The former Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Terry Redman, and the Minister for Regional Development, Hon Brendon Grylls, launched the Nationals' vision for agriculture in January this year. In launching it, Mr Grylls said —

“15 years ago no-one could have predicted how the mining and resources sector would revolutionise the regional economy.

“With the right investment, agriculture can achieve the same sort of transformation we have seen in mining and resources, which will benefit regional communities and the entire state.

“As The Nationals look forward to 2020 we see agriculture as the next investment boom in regional WA.

Mr Redman went on to say —

“Asia's economic growth and quest for food security provides WA agriculture with a unique opportunity.

“We have the opportunity to use *Royalties for Regions* to help attract the domestic and international investment in agriculture that creates regional jobs and can build on the mining sector to create diversity in our economy.

“To make that happen we need to invest in the right areas to make the biggest difference.”

Agriculture is set to be the next boom industry, and with this set of policy initiatives we as a government can help it to flourish to meet not only our needs, but also the growing needs of our Asian neighbours. The Nationals have been on the front foot in supporting growth in our agriculture sector after releasing this policy earlier this year. With the right policy in place, we can enable current and future farmers to meet the challenges associated with a changing climate and an increasing global demand.

I look forward to working with the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Ken Baston, and I congratulate him on his appointment. I am sure he has similar optimism for the sector and I look forward to working with him during this term.

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Agriculture and Food) [11.40 am]: I want to hear from the opposition!

Hon Ken Travers: You're the government. He's pleading with you to give him an answer, not me.

Hon KEN BASTON: I am pleased to see this motion. I had only one little concern with it and that was that it calls on the state government; I remind the mover that he is a part of the state government.

It is very important that we have this opportunity to discuss the issues and debate the merits of the National Party's policy. We are very much in an alliance now with our policy. The budget has not come down yet and many discussions about what we should do are now taking place. I will touch on a couple of Liberal Party policies that blend in with the National Party policies in the alliance. Some of those issues were put up by the Liberal Party during the election campaign. We had \$20 million for agricultural science, research and development to ensure we could tackle some of the challenges faced by our farmers, such as managing frost risk with new wheat varieties. We are doing significant work at Merredin, I am told by my department, and working

Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West

on drought-tolerant canola. I was pleased to be in Esperance last week to look at these types of trials being carried out.

The department supports some of the best and brightest researchers. It is important for agriculture to continue to be funded. Some of those funds of course in the \$20 million will be matched by universities and the Grains Research and Development Corporation so that every dollar gets the maximum value out of it. There is \$20 million for the biosecurity fund. As I said, we have not brought down the budget yet. However, the \$20 million biosecurity fund boosts the \$50 million already spent by the department each year. That is a large part of its budget. One-third of its budget is in biosecurity. This keeps out the pests and diseases that threaten our farming sector. We are very lucky in Western Australia in the sense that we are quite isolated; there is a large mass of land on which nothing is grown. Some say that Hon Norman Moore would have put a channel down there as well to keep us totally pest-free, but that is another story.

Hon Ken Travers: Are you talking about human pests now?

Hon KEN BASTON: I was. Biosecurity is very important. When I first became minister, I had a meeting with Joe Ludwig, the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and we talked about the importance of biosecurity. If the state were to have a foot and mouth disease outbreak, it would be an absolute disaster. If we look at what happened in the United Kingdom with mad cow disease, we see that it was not a disaster for the farmers; the disaster was that people stopped going to the UK and it had a massive effect on its tourist industry and billions of dollars were lost. Biosecurity in Western Australia is very important so that we can enter into safe food marketing throughout the world. If wheat stem rust disease, Ug99, penetrated our crops, it would wipe out the entire crop. I have also seen the damage that can be done by dogs in the southern rangelands. Of course that has virtually wiped out the small stock units. While I was in Esperance I also had the opportunity to look at the proposed east of Esperance dog fence continuation from Ravensthorpe right around to protect the agricultural area.

We also put in \$1.5 million for specialised food centres. Members must not forget that the department covers not only agriculture, but agriculture and food. It is very much the department of food. There are about 1 000 food production businesses in Western Australia which employ some 19 500 workers. More than half of WA's small and medium-scale food production operations, such as abattoirs, are regionally based, which is very important. This funding will go to those centres in regional WA with the aim to build the links to help them with production and to tap into specialist support, which can be costly and difficult to access for people living in regional areas. Food manufacturing represents 14 per cent of the state's manufacturing sector. It includes everything from dairies and bakeries to wineries and abattoirs. In 2011–12 our wine industry was worth some \$35 million in exports. That is another reason to protect our biosecurity. The dairy industry in Western Australia represents only four per cent of the total dairy industry of Australia, but it is still very important and has huge opportunities. Just recently members would have seen that the state's largest dairy was in financial difficulties, but not because of production in its dairy; it was because of its owner back in New Zealand. The production is done through a contract with Brownes Dairy. I have asked for a briefing on that to bring me up to speed.

There is also funding of \$715 000 for Buy West Eat Best. That has been going for a while now and we will certainly continue to market that. The funding will protect that logo. That campaign was launched in 2008, and I think it is very valuable and I will certainly build on that. An amount of \$20 million for research and development was also mentioned. It is extremely important to keep abreast of modern crops et cetera and any threats to agriculture. While I was down in Esperance I went out to Grass Patch and looked at canola trials. The inspection of that certainly made me aware of the pride of both the department officers and the farmers. The farmers were having the trials on their land and so the results probably meant a bit more to them than just reading them in the local production magazines.

I now move to the Nationals' election promises funded from the state royalties for regions fund. As the minister I am working with the Treasurer and the Minister for Regional Development to finalise the funding that agriculture will receive in the upcoming budget. At the end of the day agriculture will be funded by the taxpayers of Western Australia, and the farmers of our state will be impressed by the comprehensive breadth of policies and funding we will inject into agriculture in the state. I believe we should be growing markets, growing profitability, growing productivity and growing people. Funds will go into grains and livestock research; marketing development; training for risk management; water for food potential; and marketing Western Australia's agriculture. Over the next four years the sector can expect to see more than \$300 million of new money invested in agriculture either through my department or other government departments. As minister I welcome money into agriculture from any other government department and I will do my best to put agriculture on a pedestal.

Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West

Just briefly, I will say that one of the exciting things about agriculture is that 60 per cent of the world's population is in the same time zone as Western Australia. For the last 10 years the resources sector has been dealing with what has been called the boom, which has probably laid off a bit now, but a lot of those companies are very much into food—companies such as Mitsui and Mitsubishi—so we can actually ride on the coat-tails of the resources sector to increase our exports from Western Australia and increase prices and productivity for the farmers of Western Australia and, more importantly, for Western Australia, full stop.

HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan) [11.50 am]: I welcome this motion being moved in this chamber today. I completely and utterly, without reservation, concur with the first part of the motion, which is about the importance of the Western Australian agricultural industry to our regional communities and our state economy. I also think that many of the initiatives that are outlined in the National Party's vision for agriculture are very worthy—particularly the investment of \$75 million in infrastructure. I believe that the National Party now actually supports that money being used to fund the tier 3 rail network, and I welcome the party coming on board in respect of that.

Hon Col Holt interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: The member was here for the last Parliament, when members were always having a go at me for even raising the topic! Come on!

What I find really quite extraordinary about this motion, something that I have never seen before, is that a government member felt compelled to come into the chamber to plead with the government to implement the promises he made at the last election. What an extraordinary situation! This is a plea from a government backbencher for the government to actually implement its own election commitments. The motion also highlights the absolute hypocrisy and dishonesty of the way in which this government operates. Whether the National Party likes it or not, this is a coalition government. Under the Westminster system, once the National Party agrees to form a government with the Liberal Party, it is a coalition government. The question is: is it a coalition with a coalition agreement, or a coalition without a coalition agreement? It is, in fact, a coalition without a coalition agreement. What does that mean? Come election time, what does it mean if there is no coalition agreement? It means that at least some government members will have to stand in this place and acknowledge that they lied to the people because their election promises will not be implemented. I think National Party members are beginning to realise that it is National Party election promises that will not be implemented. National Party members are going to have to go out to their electorates and say, "We lied because we can't actually deliver the promises that we made." The Liberal Party cannot even deliver its own promises; its fully funded, fully costed plan has unravelled within weeks of being elected, because it overcommitted. It cannot afford its fully funded, fully costed plan, and it never made provision for the commitments made by the National Party, so the National Party is now in the position of having to plead. The Liberal Party is already breaking its own promises; we see on a daily basis the government slugging taxpayers and the public of Western Australia to try to find more money to fund the Liberal Party's promises; how on earth is it going to find the money to fund the National Party's promises?

The government has set up an arrangement that guarantees that, come every election, the coalition parties will overcommit and then, after the election, some government members will have to admit that they have broken their commitments to the people of Western Australia. That is what this motion confirms today, and the National Party is left in the situation of having to plead in this chamber. The only option it has is to show some strength and start standing up to the Liberal Party, and see whether the Liberal Party thinks it is important to have the numbers in this chamber; I will look forward to that over the next four years.

There is another thing I find quite extraordinary about the National Party's policy, and I think it needs to be talked about. The National Party is telling us about its vision for agriculture, but who was the Minister for Agriculture and Food for the past four years? It was a member of the National Party, was it not, Hon Nigel Hallett? Yes, I thought it was. So what happened over the past four years with a National Party member as the Minister for Agriculture and Food? Let us have a quick look at the total budget allocation for agriculture in 2007–08, the last full year of the last Labor government. The total allocation was \$175 million. In fact, over a number of years that figure was projected to go to \$214 million and \$219 million, a lot of that going into a capital works program. Now let us look at the budget allocation for the Department of Agriculture and Food for 2012–13. What is the total allocation? It is down to \$155 million. A National Party Minister for Agriculture and Food sat there and allowed the agriculture budget to be slashed and burnt.

Let us look at some of that slashing and burning. How was it done? It was done by cutting jobs in the agricultural sector. Under the watch of the National Party minister, in 2010–11 there were 142 voluntary redundancies in the Department of Agriculture and Food; I suspect that, after today, there may even be some more. About half of those 142 redundancies were in regional Western Australia. When I pick up the National Party's policy vision

Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West

and read about the importance of having people in regional WA spending money in local shops and machinery dealerships that create more jobs, I have to ask: why did the National Party strip so many jobs out of regional Western Australia?

I remember when I used to work for Hon Ian Taylor, we used to get panned if even one government job left the Agricultural Region, so we made sure it did not happen. Under the National Party's watch, some 75-odd jobs went from regional Western Australia—from the National Party's own heartland! That is money that could have been spent in schools and shops to keep the economy going. That was the National Party's record in history, but then it came to the election campaign and said, "Let's make it all better, because we failed over the last four years", but then it goes into a dodgy arrangement with the Liberal Party and cannot deliver on its promises anyway, so what was the point?

Let us have a look at another of the things in the National Party policy document—a very worthwhile idea, I think: the idea of investing \$5 million in the establishment of an organic food industry research centre in Bunbury. What is the biggest threat to the organic food industry in Western Australia? It is genetically modified food. Members should go and ask Steve Marsh what the biggest threat is to his organic food status, and he will tell them it is GM food. Who oversaw the introduction of GM food in Western Australia as Minister for Agriculture and Food? A member of the National Party.

Hon Jim Chown: It was a Liberal policy.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: All government members can take credit for that; I do not mind! They can all put their hands up; feel free! I am sorry to offend Hon Jim Chown. Government members are all guilty, but it was a National Party Minister for Agriculture and Food. He could have stopped the Liberal Party's evil if he had wanted to, but he chose not to!

What is the point of establishing an organic food industry research centre if the government is going to do one thing with the left hand and another thing with the right that will cause damage to that industry?

Let us move on. I am sure members all enjoy me taking the piss —

Several members interjected.

Withdrawal of Remark

Hon KEN TRAVERS: My apologies! I withdraw!

Hon PHIL EDMAN: That is offensive.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I only got one letter out, and I do apologise!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Adele Farina): Members, on that point of order, yes, it is offensive language, and I think the member has apologised, so can we move on.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I do not just withdraw, I also apologise; I am making that clear.

Debate Resumed

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Let us move to another National Party policy commitment: a further \$20 million funding commitment to boost grains research and development. Maybe members of the National Party could tell me what particular areas they would like to see researched. What about lupin breeding? Should we invest more money in that? Should we invest more money in barley breeding? Canola breeding? Should we invest it in herbicide resistance development? Should we invest it in weather stations? I raise those points because those are all areas that were reviewed and then cut; they had resource allocations taken away from them by—who was the Minister for Agriculture and Food again? A National Party minister! The National Party oversaw those areas having their funding cut during the last government, and now it has the audacity to come out with a policy that says, "What we should do is reinstate what we cut". It got no agreement from the Liberal Party before the election on what it was going to implement, so it has now overseen all these cuts and realised that it has got it wrong and wants to have the cuts re-implemented, but has no ability to do so. What a nonsense!

I thank Hon Martin Aldridge very much for bringing this motion into this house, because we do need to get on with it. Although I have spoken in a bit of a light-hearted manner, there are a lot of serious issues in the agricultural industry in Western Australia. The agricultural industry is doing it tough and it needs to be given some assistance. One of the reasons it is doing it tough is the success of the mining industry and the effect that has had on the Australian dollar. I hope the government will focus on dealing with the important issues affecting the agricultural industry. I hope that the \$30 million assistance package that the commonwealth government has put on the table will get out to farmers. But it is the ultimate hypocrisy for the National Party, having implemented a range of measures that hurt the industry, to try to pretend that it is the saviour of the industry.

Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West

HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral) [12 noon]: I am glad Hon Ken Travers has a copy of our election policy, “Vision for Agriculture”. That is a fantastic policy document that will provide the member with many hours of great reading. I look forward to the budget being handed down, and I applaud the Liberal–National government for its investment in agriculture.

When we talk about agriculture, the first area that comes to mind is the wheatbelt and grain and broadacre farming. But in the Mining and Pastoral Region, there are many other opportunities for development, particularly in the Kimberley, the Pilbara and the Gascoyne, that are not traditionally considered when we talk about agriculture. I want to talk about some of those projects.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Adele Farina): Order, members! Hon Jacqui Boydell has the call. Members who want to undertake private conversations should leave the chamber to do so, because their voices are audible.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Thank you, Madam Deputy President.

Under the leadership of the former Minister for Agriculture and Food, Terry Redman, there has been huge investment in the Kimberley and the Pilbara, and in the Gascoyne through the food bowl initiative. I look forward to working with the new Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Ken Baston, as a person who comes from the pastoral industry and from the area that I come from, and as a fellow member for Mining and Pastoral Region. I look forward to delivering on our agriculture policy and to the investment by this Liberal–National government in agriculture.

In May this year, the Premier, and the Minister for Regional Development, Hon Brendon Grylls, announced that Kimberley Agricultural Investment would be the preferred proponent for the development of the next stage of the Ord stage 2 project. That is an absolutely fantastic project, and I encourage members to go to the Kimberley and to Kununurra to inspect that development. It is unbelievable. I was in the Ord two weeks ago. The irrigation channel is now only six kilometres from the Northern Territory border. It is difficult to picture the scope of that investment and the opportunities that it will provide to the people in that area. There is a real sense of optimism in Kununurra and for the Miriung–Gajerrong people in particular. The project is providing many opportunities for Indigenous employment. It is incredible to see the number of people who are working on the project. It is fantastic to be a member of this government and to be involved with the minister in forwarding that project.

As I said, the Premier and Brendon Grylls confirmed in May that KAI was the preferred proponent to lease land and create a further 13 400 hectares of irrigated farmland in the Ord–East Kimberley expansion project. KAI proposes to invest more than \$700 million to further extend that absolutely unbelievable project for regional Western Australia. That investment will create new agricultural land and help develop export industries in the region. KAI proposes to spend \$450 million on the construction of a sugar mill, and \$50 million on improvements to Wyndham port. It also proposes to spend \$200 million on farm infrastructure developments, which I am sure Hon Ken Travers will definitely think is a good thing that we should be doing. The agreement between the government and KAI is set to deliver the biggest agricultural investment in Australia’s north in more than 40 years. That sort of investment has been promised to the people of the Kimberley for a very long time and it will be fantastic to see that occur. That area of our state is now seeing a level of investment that it has never seen before. This project will create further opportunities for the Miriung–Gajerrong people and for the local community in general. It demonstrates what can be delivered—for the first time in 40 years—when all levels of government, and traditional owners and the private sector, work together. That is truly an amazing project. I hope that members will get a chance at some stage to see that vision that is occurring in the north of this state.

There is a definite feeling of optimism in agriculture. There has been a lot of talk about the negative side of agriculture. I want to see the agricultural industry, and us as leaders in the agricultural communities, embrace the investment and interest that is coming from the private sector, and that will be coming, I hope, from the federal government post-September, and engage in positive talk about agriculture that will attract people to come into the industry and stay in the industry. It is dining and mining together that will forward the development of Western Australia. The interest that is being shown by our Asian partners in agriculture is phenomenal. There is definitely investment in the mining and resource industry. But I know from talking to people who are looking to invest in Western Australia and Australia that they are interested in agriculture. So we are at a real crossroads, and this Liberal–National government is best positioned to deal with the private sector investors who want to invest in regional Western Australia.

I now want to talk about some projects that are taking place under this government. The Nationals have assisted Rio Tinto in progressing its Hamersley agriculture project. Through that project, billions of litres of excess fresh water from its Pilbara mine site are being used to grow hay. I can tell members that it is phenomenal to see in the middle of the Pilbara such a massive production of hay, and it is a fantastic use of that dewatering project. Gogo Station in the Fitzroy Valley has diversified into irrigated agriculture. The Woodie Woodie mine in the Pilbara is

Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West

solving a wastewater problem by using mine dewatering to grow crops. The Nationals have provided funding to help build a new irrigation pipeline, and we have allocated \$25 million to the Gascoyne food bowl project to expand the Carnarvon irrigation area.

When we talk about agriculture, we traditionally think of grain growing. But agriculture is also about a pet project of mine, horticulture. Carnarvon and the Gascoyne area are well known for their horticultural production. So I want to spend a bit of talk talking about that, and I know that I am going to run out of time.

The Gascoyne food bowl initiative is a key water-based regional initiative that seeks to expand horticulture production in the Carnarvon area to provide food security for the state and supply export markets. A sustainable supply of water is essential for this expansion and for the economic future of the horticulture industry in that area; hence the investment. The Carnarvon flood mitigation stage 2 project will help to mitigate the regional scale impacts of major river flooding in the Carnarvon area, which we saw a few years ago. Unfortunately, my parents were affected by that. There was major devastation in the area.

As a bit of background, Carnarvon is a key area for the increase in food production, particularly horticultural produce, given its warm climate, available water supplies, fertile soils and developed infrastructure in the area. I think it is a great project. It incorporates increased arable land for horticultural produce and increased investment in the northern bore fields. The Gascoyne irrigation pipeline project, which I alluded to earlier, and the flood mitigation works are also now almost complete.

Again, I look forward to working with the Minister for Agriculture and Food in further developing areas of the state, and I thank my colleagues.

HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.10 pm]: As the Minister for Agriculture and Food has stated previously, I think this is the first time in some 92 years that we have had a Liberal Minister for Agriculture and Food after a run of National and Country Party people. I look forward to what the minister intends to do for agriculture in this state. He certainly would have the backing of a major part of the government and certainly the Premier, which is quite unique in agriculture from a ministry perspective.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon JIM CHOWN: I do not often agree with Hon Ken Travers, but I, too, am very surprised at this motion. It is very unusual for a member of the government to put forward such a motion pursuing a particular outcome that they went into an election campaign with. I find it embarrassing from a government perspective. Certainly, it undermines the Minister for Agriculture and Food as a Liberal member of the government.

Hon Ken Travers: I knew we'd have to agree on something!

Hon JIM CHOWN: We are in agreeance; thank you.

I assume that this comes from a lack of experience and knowledge as a new member. As Hon Martin Aldridge has opened this door, I am prepared to walk through it. A number of great initiatives of the past four years were Liberal Party policies enacted by the then Minister for Agriculture and Food, who happened to be a National, Hon Terry Redman. I will go through a few of them. The Labor Party tried for seven years to implement its policy on the Muchea saleyards, and we did it in one year with expenditure of \$54 million. We moved the saleyards from Midland to Muchea. It was a significant undertaking. The saleyards were eventually sold and those moneys were redirected through the agricultural system, and I will get to that in a moment. The Labor Party spent seven years prevaricating about whether the saleyards would be in Northam or Muchea. This government made a decision, and the saleyards were completed and are now operating and take up to a million head of stock on an annual basis. They are a significant part of the agricultural area.

The Katanning saleyards are interesting. I attended a briefing in the Liberal Party room in about 2010, and the then Minister for Agriculture and Food wanted to move the Katanning saleyards down the road to Arthur River. I was the only Liberal member at that briefing; I think Hon Col Holt may have been there as well. The intention of the then minister was to privatise the saleyards in this state. I walked out of that briefing in absolute disgust; I was angry about it. I consequently took the Premier down to Katanning to discuss the issue at a local level. Through my efforts, the outcome of those meetings with the local community prevented private enterprise from taking over the state's saleyards, and they operate as such today. I also got \$21 million of state money to ensure that those saleyards remained in the Katanning area.

Hon Ken Travers: Was that the leftover money from Midland?

Hon JIM CHOWN: Some of it was, yes.

Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West

Hon Paul Brown: Plus royalties for regions.

Hon JIM CHOWN: None of it was royalties for regions—not one cent. On that particular point, as the honourable member has raised it, let me make something very clear: royalties for regions money is public money and it is administered by Treasury. As this door has been opened, I am once again prepared to go through it. The Country Age Pension Fuel Card is administered by the Department of Transport—a Liberal ministry.

Hon Jacqui Boydell: Was it your idea?

Hon JIM CHOWN: The country local government fund is administered by the Department of Local Government.

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

Hon JIM CHOWN: What I am saying is that it is all public money.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Jim Chown has the call.

Hon JIM CHOWN: In the Katanning situation, in 2004 the Shire of Katanning did an independent study to see what the saleyards were worth locally. That independent study came up with a figure of \$15 million to \$20 million in local business spin-offs for the saleyards to reside in Katanning. The saleyards will be opened there sometime later this year. They are state-of-the-art saleyards. They have been built locally by the local community through the shire. The price in the end will be about \$27 million or \$28 million, which is a fair bit less than the \$54 million for the Muchea saleyards. That is another issue we can address in this house—why private enterprise can do something almost as well at half the price. But that is an issue for another day.

One of the other agriculture policies that have been mentioned today was the Ord stage 2 project, which is well underway. It was funded publicly by this government. It was a Liberal agriculture policy going into the 2008 election.

Hon Ken Travers: What is the cost–benefit ratio for the Ord?

Hon JIM CHOWN: Let us not go there!

Genetically modified canola was another agriculture policy of the Liberals in 2008. It has been a fantastic policy. For the information of members opposite, as a crop, GM canola is probably one of the most environmentally secure forms of farming today.

Hon Kate Doust: Tell that to Steve Marsh.

Hon JIM CHOWN: As I have said before, let us see the outcome of the court case. I predict here and now that if that court case gets a decent hearing in 12 to 18 months, Mr Marsh will lose and so will his supporters.

Hon Ken Travers: And you think that's a good thing?

Hon JIM CHOWN: Absolutely.

Hon Ken Travers: So you support people being able to pollute other people's farms and not having to pay compensation?

Hon JIM CHOWN: The question is pollution, and I will leave that judgement up to the Supreme Court of this state. The member has hit the nail on the head. I suggest that he read the latest judgement on the affidavit that was served to stop Mr Baxter putting his crop in to see what the judge said on that matter.

In the recent election campaign, the Liberal Party went forward with a very sound commitment. It was not a \$300 million commitment to the electorate, but its implementation—we hope soon after the budget announcements in August—by a Liberal Minister for Agriculture and Food was received extremely well by the rural press and everybody I have met. Hon Jacqui Boydell mentioned that she comes from the pastoral industry. Under Liberal policy, this government intends to address the issue of pastoral tenure and take all necessary steps to ensure that pastoral leases set to expire in Western Australia on 30 June 2015 are renewed; that future annual rent determinations take into account the economic circumstances of the industry, including any regional differences in those circumstances, and enable the Valuer-General to apply a rate or rates accordingly; and that lease-monitoring requirements imposed on pastoral lessees are suitable and practicable and not unjustifiably onerous. This issue has been boiling along for the past four years. Hon Brendon Grylls had carriage of this issue. I am aware that he would not attend a number of meetings that took place to address this issue. This Liberal government and this Liberal minister are prepared to implement these policies; the minister comes from the Mining and Pastoral Region and will ensure that this is addressed. This was also ongoing under the Carpenter and Gallop Labor governments; it was never appropriately addressed. There are not many pastoralists left out

Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West

there. In my opinion, they are very responsible land leaseholders. If they were not there, feral animals would be overtaking our natural habitat and certainly our natural vegetation. It is very important that these people have the ability to have some continuity with their leases. I could go right through the whole policy, but I am sure that opposition and National Party members have read it backwards and forwards. They probably agree, to themselves, that this is an outstanding agriculture policy. One of the issues in this policy, and it has been mentioned here today, is the lack of funding for research and development. Research and development in agriculture, especially in one of the driest areas in the world, is absolutely essential. We have set aside, I think, \$40 million in the form of grants to allow universities —

[Member's time expired.]

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural) [12.21 pm]: I would like to speak on this motion as well. It is a very honourable motion. It is good that it has been brought forward into the Parliament. Of course, we would all agree that we need to invest more in agriculture. It is obviously an industry very close to my heart. It is how I have made a living; a good enough living to send children away to boarding school, apparently! We need to put more money into agriculture. However, my concern with this motion is that having gone to the electorate with what the National Party would do if it won government—the \$300 million vision for agriculture, which is very commendable and very good—we now find ourselves, only months into the new government, with a motion that, if I read it correctly, calls on the state government to implement those policy measures. The motion calls on the state government to implement a policy that a government party put up as an election commitment so that the voters would vote for that government party to get them into government. It has all become a little confusing! It comes to what I was referring to last night; we have two sets of policies. The people in my electorate are starting to become a little confused as to what is policy, what is hot air, what is on, what is not on, whether we will actually get these things and whether we will not get them. They are fair and reasonable concerns of the electorate. Whilst I support that we should call on the state government to implement the measures outlined in this policy—I think that is a tremendous idea—the reality is that the budget is very tight. The Liberal Party, as opposed to the National Party, has its own set of priorities.

I am sorry that I missed much of the debate because I was meeting with people from the Regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry WA. They are a bit cranky with us, too.

Hon Jim Chown: I have to see them at two o'clock! What have you done?

Hon DARREN WEST: They will like Hon Jim Chown.

I missed some of what has been said here, but I think people across the agricultural region, and obviously in my electorate, would be unanimous in agreeing that this motion is a good one. I am just wondering how it might ever see the light of day. I will just run through a couple of these points, because there is a bit of “do as I say and not as I do”. Time is nicking on. Investment in research and development has been going for a while and we need more; that is great. Investing in land and water; terrific. Getting produce to market; we have a tier 3 rail network out there that will close in October. How will we get produce to market without a tier 3 rail network, which just needs a few dollars put into it to keep trucks off roads? I said enough on that during the campaign. I do not understand why, if it is in the National Party's vision, we will not have that. Investing in investment and trade—great, but what about skills? The Muresk Institute, as I understand it, has three students in it. An amount of \$10 million has been invested in it and I think we are down to three students. That is hardly a glowing investment in skills. We have a bit of “do as I say and not as I do”, but I think it is a good motion.

Several members interjected.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.