

**Division 18: Pilbara Development Commission, \$371 000 —**

**The CHAIRMAN:** The member for Gosnells has a question.

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** My question relates to the fifth dot point on page 213 about the need for economic diversification in the area. Recognising that much of that region is occupied by pastoral lease country, can the minister outline how much effort has gone towards the preparation of Indigenous land use agreements that would be necessary to accommodate issues around future acts provisions in the Native Title Act?

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** Before I ask Terry Hill, the acting chief executive of the Pilbara Development Commission, to make a comment, I will say that one of the strategies under the development commission has been to try to diversify the economy. It is an area that is obviously very heavily focused on the resource sector, with one of the biggest natural gas assets just offshore and, of course, all the iron ore assets that come from inland. It is interesting to note that in 2017, when the Gorgon and Wheatstone projects come onstream, that region will have the capacity to be responsible for 40 per cent of the nation's exports. It is therefore really interesting to note just how important it is to not only Western Australia, but also the whole nation. The notion of trying to diversify the economy with a very strong focus on resources is somewhat difficult. One of the initiatives that has been worked up and is now being rolled out is the Pilbara Hinterland Agricultural Development Initiative, which looks at the agricultural potential around mine dewatering. As the member knows, a lot of the iron ore mines need to go deeper. When they get to the watertable, it has to be dewatered to access the iron ore. I am familiar with the Rio Tinto mine next to Mt Bruce —

[12.10 pm]

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** The Marandoo mine.

**Mr D.T. REDMAN:** Marandoo has to dewater something like 35 gigalitres a year, which is a substantial amount of water, when it is in peak production. It produces a very high grade ore, so it is blended with other sources of ore, which is important for the company economically. It has 17 per cent of pivot irrigators now, with 20 gigalitres a year out of that 35 gigalitres going onto that project and producing hay for that region, which helps the local economy and supports the pastoral industry. The Woodie Woodie mine is another pilot project that is part of that diversification opportunity, but I will leave a bit for Terry Hill to talk about because, as a past executive director of agriculture, he will be very keen to talk about this. He might also elaborate on some of the relationships with the Indigenous people, as the member highlighted in the last part of his question.

**Mr T. Hill:** Thanks, minister, and thanks for the question. I will take a step back to the previous question about the blueprints. The Pilbara blueprint has been out for public comment, and that closed earlier this week. The blueprints are for the Pilbara, so although the development commission is taking the lead, it is about the Pilbara, and I will get to the diversification. We held workshops in Perth and in four major regional centres that had a fantastic uptake by people in the community. The community has a very strong view about this and some of the taglines were that it would like to be seen as a town with a mine, rather than a mining town. A strong community and business view in the region is that we need to think about that as we move forward. In terms of economic development, there has been interest in a range of diversification options. The minister talked about the Pilbara Hinterland Agricultural Development Initiative, which is a project that in the first stage has looked at and tried to understand the mine dewatering opportunity, and Rio Tinto has two significant projects in that area. A research project is also looking at plant species that could become weedy so that we can manage any environmental risk of moving that kind of agriculture into the region. A review of that project at the moment is looking at the next stages.

In terms of diversification, the issue is broader. Members would be aware that the Pilbara is one of two places on the planet with the highest level of solar radiation. The region is seeing a lot of interest at the moment from companies wanting to feed off the back of the mining and energy infrastructure and opportunities for large-scale energy export from solar energy. One company has been talking to us about using solar energy to generate hydrogen energy and exporting that overseas, so it is all about feeding off those natural advantages of the Pilbara. We have not invested significant funds in that yet. We are still very much in the blueprint to strategy to roll-out stage, and those opportunities will appear. However, we have had good representation from Indigenous corporations through the blueprint process, and they have requested that the chair and the chief executive officer meet with them specifically to talk about how they interact with that visionary process for the future of the Pilbara, and we are arranging meetings to develop that at the moment. We have had great input. I am relatively new to the role—I have been in it for about 16 weeks—but I was quite surprised at the high aspirations in the Pilbara.

**The appropriation was recommended.**