

GREAT SOUTHERN REGION — GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE

Motion

HON COL HOLT (South West — Parliamentary Secretary) [2.16 pm]: I move —

That this Council commends the Liberal–National government on recognising the importance of the great southern region of Western Australia and applauds the work done by this government to support the communities of that region.

Hon Ken Travers: Can you elect to say, “If I do say so myself”?

Hon COL HOLT: Hon Ken Travers can do whatever he likes; he can move an amendment if he likes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Alanna Clohesy): Order!

Hon COL HOLT: I start by acknowledging that the great southern engenders a fairly narrow debate. I realise already that there may not be many speakers from either side who are interested in this motion. I am sure there will not be too many opposite. The great southern covers two political regions—the South West and the Agricultural Regions—so other members might like to make a contribution to this motion. The great southern region covers 39 000 square kilometres, including some of the off-shore islands, and comprises just 1.5 per cent of the state's total area. If we think about it, 1.5 per cent does not seem to be a large slice of the state but it is incredibly important to the state. The great southern is probably one of the state's best-kept secrets. Hon Alyssa Hayden must get to Albany. Maybe she could walk all the way to Albany from Kalamunda on the Bibbulmun Track. I think the record for walking the track is about 17 days.

Hon Ken Travers: We'll give her a pair for as long as she needs!

Hon COL HOLT: She might be able to fit it in through the winter recess next year!

Hon Ken Travers will know Gary Muir in Walpole.

Hon Ken Travers: They are very famous.

Hon COL HOLT: They are a very, very big family.

Hon Ken Travers: I knew of their reputation before I even got to this place.

Hon COL HOLT: Yes, you would have; they do have a reputation. A guy called Gary Muir in Walpole runs WOW Wilderness tours. He is an outstanding character.

Hon Ken Travers: Famous in the tourism industry.

Hon COL HOLT: He is very famous in the tourism industry and very, very passionate. I think he broke the record of travelling the Bibbulmun Track as fast as he could to raise funds for a charity. I am pretty sure he did the 700-kilometre track in something like 17 days; he almost ran it. All he had was a CamelBak backpack and some sticks and some people meeting him along the way. It was quite an incredible feat. He will probably not mind me saying this: Gary is an unusual person. He is very passionate. He has a habit that no matter where he is on a Thursday night, he has to camp out.

Hon Ken Travers: He takes the whole community out when he's back at home in Walpole.

Hon COL HOLT: Sometimes he does that. He will take his swag and sleep in the paddock on his farm every Thursday night. I remember when he did the Bibbulmun challenge and rocked up to Walpole on a Thursday night. I reckon the first thing I would want to do after walking 620 kilometres of 700 kilometres is sleep in my own bed, but he did not. He stuck to his routine and slept out in the open again on that Thursday night. He then took another day to finish walking to Albany. It was quite an incredible feat. I have become a little distracted, so my apologies for that.

Hon Alyssa Hayden: It was a good story.

Hon COL HOLT: Yes, it was.

Residents in the great southern enjoy a fantastic lifestyle. I have spent a lot of time there. The economy and the backbone of industry in the great southern are based mainly on primary production. It has an amazing amount of natural beauty, fantastic food, great biodiversity values, great tourism opportunities and a viticulture industry. Albany is the largest regional centre and a very important port for regional Western Australia. Woodchips are exported from the port and it is a major port for Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd to take grain out of WA. When I lived in Narrogin between 1995 and 2002, and when the time came for my daughter to go to high school, I said, “Righto, it's time to pack up the family and head somewhere else.” I had been in Narrogin for seven years but my heritage is part gypsy—I think I have inherited more than most of my family.

Hon Ken Travers: That's why things go missing in the chamber!

Hon COL HOLT: Pardon?

Hon Ken Travers: Nothing.

Hon COL HOLT: I hope that was not captured in *Hansard*, whatever it was.

I said, "Righto, I'm pretty keen to move; how about we move to Albany?" Albany was attractive due to its great educational and schooling opportunities and work environment. I had an opportunity to be employed and transferred through my job, but I could not get my wife over the line. The main reason for that was she does not like the four seasons in one day during summer, which was a bit of a drag. She prefers the warm weather. A lot of people here who have been to Albany know that swimming in the Southern Ocean is like swimming in Esperance. It has the greatest beaches in the world, but people just do not go into the water because it is absolutely freezing. Albany is the same. It has a magnificent coastline but the water is absolutely cold. I know the locals are used to it and that they swim all year round, but I just could not convince my wife to move to Albany. For the many people who move to Albany and who establish their lives there, it is very difficult to get them to move because they really enjoy the lifestyle.

I want to now talk about how the motion recognises the importance of communities in that region and the work of the government to grow and bring amenity to that region. I will cover a few key themes, the first of which is tourism, which was covered a little bit by Hon Alyssa Hayden when she talked about the environment. The first subject is the Torndirrup National Park upgrade. I was there early in 2016—I cannot remember the exact date—and it now has a magnificent facility so that people with disabilities and in wheelchairs can see The Gap and the Natural Bridge with greater ease. It is absolutely incredible. The Department of Parks and Wildlife, which oversaw the project, did a magnificent job, and the builders should be absolutely congratulated for creating a magnificent facility that showcases the south coast.

I was down there again more recently for another event. When people visit the south coast, they see not only how beautiful and rugged the south coast is, but also how dangerous it is. Within Torndirrup National Park is Salmon Holes. People know about the notorious nature of Salmon Holes. I am probably going to get these figures wrong, but in the last decade four people have been washed off the rocks. It is probably a greater number than that—the number is probably 13 people in the last 30 years, or something like that. Everyone goes there. No matter how much people are educated about how dangerous it is, people still fish there at certain times of the year to catch salmon. They actually do not need to go on the rocks, but they do and it is from there that people are swept off. The government has installed anchor points and safety rings for people to hook onto, so that if they do get washed off, they can be brought back in. Nathan Drew was a young man who lost his life off those rocks and his family established the Nathan Drew Foundation, which puts buoyancy vests in every fishing shop in Albany for people to use. Unfortunately, the message is not getting through. The best way a person can save their life when fishing on dangerous rocks and coastlines is to wear a buoyancy vest, because it will keep them up in the water and keep them alive. The marine rescue volunteers in Albany do a fantastic job. Recently a new marine rescue boat was unveiled, which is funded by Lotterywest and which recognises the great work those volunteers do in the community. The guy who runs it is called Chris Johns and he is frustrated with the ignorance of a lot of fishermen who go fishing without taking precautions. His goal in life is to not turn rescue operations into recovery operations, and that is why buoyancy vests are so important. I was in Albany last month to unveil an emergency telephone that is similar to those found on the side of freeways. The telephone was installed on the rocks by the Department of Parks and Wildlife. If anyone gets washed off the rocks and someone is around, they can make a call on that phone, which goes straight to 000, and potentially can cut response times by 15 minutes, which could be the difference between life and death. That is another investment by this government to ensure that visitors or locals going to those areas—we know we cannot stop them—receive a good response time in an emergency.

I want to talk about the National Anzac Centre. In November 2014 we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the departure of the fleet that took the Anzacs to Gallipoli and in 2015 we celebrated the Anzac centenary. Albany was the staging post for the fleet that left Albany. As part of that celebration, the National Anzac Centre was opened. It was funded a great deal by this state government; some money came from the federal government, but \$9 million of the \$12 million project came from the Western Australian government. I really encourage members to go there and experience it. I have said this in this place before. The National Anzac Centre has won numerous tourism awards. Last year Lonely Planet listed it in the top 26 new experiences in the world, which is a fantastic recommendation. TripAdvisor also rates it as the number one thing to do in the great southern. It is right. Visitor numbers to the National Anzac Centre have already exceeded expectations. In the first year it had over 100 000 visitors. The budget was for about 62 000, but it has had over 100 000 visitors. The work done around the Anzac centre, the Padre White Lookout and the Light Horse memorial is incredible. I encourage all members to attend an Anzac Day dawn service on the Mount. It is quite incredible. Looking out to the east as the sun

comes up over the bay is an incredible experience. It gets cold, but it is an incredible experience and I encourage everyone to go there. After the service, people come back for smoko, a gunfire breakfast and a bit of rum later on.

In my mind, Albany and the National Anzac Centre are probably, and should be, among the important attractions for people with an interest in Australian war history and should rate it up there with the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, which is quite special. In a sense, it should rate up there with sites such as Gallipoli, Tobruk, Villers-Bretonneux, Darwin—where the bombing raids occurred—and Isurava on the Kokoda Trail. Those are the sorts of destinations that a student of war history would put on their list to visit. In my view, the departure of the first fleet of Anzac troops nearly 102 years ago put Albany on the map. The footage and coverage of that day that we saw when we celebrated 100 years since the departure of the fleet was an incredible advertisement for the south coast and the Albany community. It was some of the greatest footage I have ever seen of the area, and it would have driven people to say, “My God! Look what Western Australia, the south coast of Western Australia and Albany has to offer.” It was a fantastic advertisement.

Hon Alyssa Hayden: It is a great attraction for our cruise ship industry, too.

Hon COL HOLT: Yes, cruise ships go there regularly, and the community gets behind that industry. It really supports it. It will be good to see more cruise ships in that area, with some of the changes that are proposed for gambling on cruise ships.

Hon Alyssa Hayden: A great minister made those changes.

Hon COL HOLT: Very good! I thank the member for that; it was one of my last actions, I think.

Hon Peter Katsambanis: There are a lot to choose from.

Hon COL HOLT: That is right, member.

I will refer to some of the other tourism attractions down there. One of the government’s challenges with tourism is diversifying our economy to make the most of tourist attractions. Sometimes it is the case of the chicken and the egg: do we build it and they will come or do we wait for them to come and then build the facilities to cater for them? Both scenarios have a role to play and that is why the government has invested in Torndirrup National Park, the National Anzac Centre and the Castle Rock skywalk in Porongurup National Park, which is another outstanding example of giving visitors a new experience around what is one of our great natural beauties. The government has also invested in Discovery Bay’s biodiversity park and trail. Discovery Bay is the new name for the old Albany whaling station. Again, this is a major tourist attraction on the south coast. I have been there a number of times. It is always adding something new to experience. It is an attraction that has developed in the last five to seven years with investment from the state government for the Discovery Bay trails and biodiversity park, in partnership with the Jaycees Community Foundation, which owns the facility, and the City of Albany, which has got involved to make sure that Albany becomes part of the state’s attractions. The City of Albany certainly wants more in the tourism space because it knows if it can get people to come to town for events or to look at its sights, that brings outside money into the community and drives employment and sustainability. That is why the government has also invested in regional tourism events.

The government knows that events attract people and a wide range of diverse events are happening in the great southern, including the Southern Art and Craft Trail, which from memory starts in Frankland and goes all the way through to Albany, through Cranbrook, Jerramungup and Bremer Bay; and the Hidden Treasures Bloom Festival. One of my favourite events is the Grapes and Gallops Festival at Mt Barker, which combines a race-day event with the food and wine that the Plantagenet region has to offer. I was there last year and I would say that about 4 000 people attended from throughout the region, as well as a whole heap of people from Perth and other parts of the state who came down for grapes and gallops. It only has four to six race meetings a year, depending on how the track is maintained in the off-season. Grapes and gallops is the most important event in that town and, as I said, it attracts a large number of people. This event is funded through the royalties for regions program to attract people to the south coast and the great southern so they can enjoy what the region has to offer and to bring money into the region.

Also, more recently, the world has discovered—it has probably been known for a long time—the attractions of Bremer Canyon off Bremer Bay. This will become a world-class tourism attraction. I probably will not go out there. I do not like boats at all, and it is too far off the coast, where the swells can be pretty treacherous. I will wait for the footage to come back. What is happening at Bremer Canyon with the killer whales is quite incredible.

Hon Alyssa Hayden: I will take you out!

Hon COL HOLT: The parliamentary secretary can go there, but I will not be swimming with those whales. Has Hon Paul Brown done it?

Hon Paul Brown interjected.

Hon COL HOLT: It is going to be a world-class attraction that will put Bremer Bay and the great southern on the map worldwide.

Another event is the Taste Great Southern Food and Wine Festival, which has been going for a number of years now. It is a food and wine celebration that takes in the region—Albany, Denmark, Mt Barker, Frankland and the Porongurups. Whenever I think of those names in the great southern, it brings to mind the great wines they produce. That event is held over 18 days, celebrating the food and wine culture in the great southern. It is run over three weekends and its aim is to attract visitors to showcase the great southern area. Its popularity is building every year. There is investment by the state government through the events program to support a local community organisation and a local tourism organisation to showcase what the great southern has to offer. It is about partnerships. The state government cannot do everything. We want people to value and take ownership of these events at a local level. The Taste Great Southern Food and Wine Festival brings all those components together in a great way, and I encourage more people to go down there to experience it. I will move on from tourism, although I am sure that there are a thousand things to add, and maybe some other speakers will add to that list.

One of the major pushes since this government came into being has been to improve telecommunications throughout regional Western Australia. The regional telecommunications program part 1 was about improving mobile phone coverage on highways around Western Australia, recognising that, in some of those locations, if there was a car accident or someone broke down or was in trouble, they could be many hours away from getting coverage to make a phone call to get assistance or an emergency response. The state government has built around 113 mobile phone towers throughout the state in the first round of this program, and another round has already started. That is another \$45 million of investment in this state from this government, leveraged with about \$10 million from the Feds to improve blackspot coverage. We got a good slice of that in Western Australia, which was well done by the Minister for Commerce.

Hon Michael Mischin: There's another one opening up in a couple of days out at Boorabbin.

Hon COL HOLT: Yes, and Boorabbin is one of the national highway blackspots that we need to fill. More and more towers are going up in the great southern. Some of the topography in that region presents a challenge for mobile communications, but the more towers we have, the better coverage will be. If the towers are not already at Albany west, they are coming—actually, I remember the Minister for Commerce coming down to open it.

Hon Michael Mischin: It was a great day.

Hon COL HOLT: It was. We had emergency services and police at that opening, all recognising the importance of mobile communication towers, because their operations rely on them.

Hon Michael Mischin: I think we have expanded capacity by over 33 per cent—something that was long overdue.

Hon COL HOLT: Absolutely. New services have been activated in Cranbrook West, Nyabing and Ongerup North, and another 27 sites will be identified and provided with mobile phone towers in the near future. One of those will be Porongurup, which is incredibly important. The new towers will cover a lot of the state forest such as at Porongurup and Two People's Bay. Three or four years ago there was a tragedy at Two People's Bay when a firefighter lost her life. One of the reasons for that was communication, so anything we can do to improve communication in emergencies is absolutely a priority. I think there is a challenge with some of the battery backups at the mobile phone towers. I think we need to improve some of those expectations. If we lose power to those mobile phone towers, we have backup batteries, but I think we need to push that further. With some of the advances in lithium and storage batteries, I think we can do much better. We should extend the life of those batteries in those emergencies to at least 24 hours, if not 48 hours, until the immediate danger has passed and some crews can get out there to start a generator or fix the powerline to the tower. They are some of the challenges that we need to take on in the future.

One of the challenges I saw when we came to government was around delivering amenities and central services in regional Western Australia. We have made many speeches about that in this place, recognising the importance of improving amenities and services, and none more so than in the field of health. That challenge goes across this state; we need to meet the needs of the community in health outcomes in regional Western Australia just as much as we need to do so in metropolitan Perth. There has been a great investment through the Southern Inland Health Initiative to address some of the inadequacies of doctor provision. Work has been done to attract doctors to live and provide their services in regional towns. We now have some 24-hour hospitals in the regions that were not there 10 years ago, which is a great outcome for those people living there. Northam comes immediately to mind, but we have also done a range of upgrades and built new hospitals in regional Western Australia and the great southern is no different.

I was there in May 2013 when the new Albany Community Hospice opened. That project had been waiting in the wings for far too long. It was finally built and opened and the people of Albany are now enjoying the services that hospice has to offer. Right now Katanning District Hospital is also going through a refurbishment to ensure that those services continue to be provided in the great southern region, and Katanning is an incredibly important social and service hub for the great southern region. Porongurup, Lake Grace, Dumbleyung, Gnowangerup, Tambellup, Broomehill, Woodanilling and Kojonup all see Katanning as a hub for providing those essential services such as hospitals. The investment in the Katanning District Hospital was way overdue. Just like most country hospitals, it had not had much done to it in 20 or 30 years. I have seen a lot of them—thankfully, not as a patient but from visiting them—and the recent investment in them has been quite outstanding. I think most, if not all, country hospitals in the southern region have had some sort of investment from this state government for refurbishment and an improvement in services. That includes things such as emergency telehealth, which has been a major breakthrough in the sense of how it is used in regional Western Australia. There are many, many examples of telehealth making diagnoses in life-threatening situations and the right call has been made at the right time to send an ambulance or the Royal Flying Doctor Service and get people into a stable position. I also know of many routine occasions when people at a local regional level have been able to hook up via the internet to a specialist in Perth and have their check-ups done. Sometimes they have a nurse or a nurse practitioner on site with them to do the observations and send them through to the specialist so that they do not have to always travel to Perth or the nearest hospital. They do not have to travel from other places to a hospital to get a check-up or the all clear; they can do it through telehealth. That has been a major step forward for health in regional Western Australia.

Another important project in the Albany region is the Albany Community Hospice. People who know the history of that will know that it is quite incredible. A community organisation established the hospice so that people could use that service in the last days and months of their lives. It has done an incredible job. The facility was rather run-down. When the new hospital was built, there was an opportunity to raise funds and get government investment through royalties for regions to build a new hospice, on site, near the hospital, near where the doctors are practising every day. That is a brand-new facility and environment for the community of Albany. Again, that outcome was delivered through a partnership between state government and a well-respected local community group that does a lot of work in that space.

The other project that I have also been involved in is Hawthorn House, which is a service to help people with Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's Australia WA was renting an old house in the middle of Albany and the lease was coming to an end; the person who owned it wanted to take it back and develop it and sell it, so it had no home to go to. Through working with the Great Southern Development Commission down there, which does a fantastic job, Alzheimer's Australia WA sourced funding from the state government and local fundraising to build a purpose-built Alzheimer's wellbeing centre on the outskirts of Albany. I have visited it on a number of occasions and the environment it has created is a credit to it and it complements the other services being provided within Albany to meet the health needs of the local community.

Albany and the great southern have an ageing population. That is no secret to anybody in this place, I would not have thought, as Western Australia has an ageing population and community. Alzheimer's disease and hospice care will increase over the coming years as baby boomers such as I get older and more people require those services. It is fantastic that these local community groups can leverage funding out of the state government based on the really good outcomes that they have achieved in the past so that they can continue to deliver those services.

The second rescue helicopter was launched, from memory, in January this year. It is based in Bunbury. Its role is to provide an emergency response around the south west and the great southern. It is a commitment that this government made a while ago and has delivered. It is a \$30 million project approximately, and it is the second emergency helicopter based in regional Western Australia. The crews are based locally to respond to emergencies. I was at the official launch and I met a farmer from Kojonup by the name of Kevin Gale. He was one of the first people to use, unfortunately or fortunately, that service. He was out in a paddock in Kojonup doing some farm work, but I suspect he was using a chainsaw to cut some firewood and almost cut off his own arm. If it was not for the response time of the helicopter to get there, he probably would not be with us today and he would not have been there on that day to tell his story about how important the emergency helicopter was to his life, as I am sure it will be to many more families and people into the future.

Again this government has provided another great commitment to provide a second helicopter service for the growing regions of the south west and the great southern. We cannot get away from the fact that it will be used often for road traffic trauma, farming and industrial accidents, and potentially people who go missing from taking a wrong turn off the Bibbulmun Track and who need to be found.

Hon Alyssa Hayden: That is a bit silly. There is only one track.

Hon COL HOLT: There are plenty of side tracks. People just need to look out for the little Waugal sign.

That was a great commitment by this government. Today there was commentary on the road traffic toll in regional Western Australia being double that of Perth. We have debated this topic often in this house but we have not got the magic answer yet. There are issues with the construction of roads and the behaviour of people on those roads, including not wearing seatbelts, drink-driving and speeding. A range of issues need to be addressed and we need to work harder in that space. At least we have a helicopter to help with some of those near-fatal accidents on our highways in the great southern.

I am running out of time but there are a few more things I want to talk about. One topic is education in the great southern, specifically Albany, and the investment by this government into the TAFE sector at the Albany campus of the Great Southern Institute of Technology, and the new science block built at the Albany campus of the University of Western Australia.

Hon Peter Collier: What about Yakamia Primary School in Albany?

Hon COL HOLT: I will let the Minister for Education get on his feet to talk about the schools down there.

This government has made a great investment into schools and upper education in Albany. I have always thought that Albany should be promoted as the university town of Western Australia. We should invest into it to attract not only local students and students from the hinterland as far out as Lake Grace, Kalgoorlie, Esperance and Manjimup, but also international students. Albany has a great marine study complex that attracts many international students. I do not think we have quite got there in terms of cracking the nut and creating a true tertiary regional centre, and we need to build momentum. Student numbers are going up on the back of an increase in the number of study areas being offered, but I know that UWA has struggled to deliver services in Albany away from its main campus. My message to it would be to hang in there and keep doing what it is doing to attract students to start their university and tertiary education in Albany.

We are currently investing in two different types of student accommodation, which will be another great advantage to students who study in the great southern. I know there is real attraction for students to study in Perth. When you are a country kid, as I was, you always want to go to Perth to experience the bright lights and city life and run amok away from the community. There is still that propensity for some country kids to want to study in Perth for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it is about wanting to explore the lifestyle and sometimes it is about what courses are on offer and the educational opportunities. We have to offer more options in Albany and in regional tertiary education to take away those reasons to not want to study in Albany. We have made a great start in Albany and the additional investment from this government has helped things on their way with all the improvements to facilities. I think that some of the student accommodation will be finished in 2018. It is a \$19 million commitment to a project to make those things come together. The proposed accommodation comprises 20 units opposite the UWA Albany centre in the historic Norman House precinct. Stage 2 will involve the construction of a 40-bed accommodation facility on the old Albany primary school site on Serpentine Road, which is right in the middle of town. It will consist of 40 units, so potentially 40 students will live right in the middle of Albany. They will add a great deal of vibrancy to that town and it might be just enough to add some momentum to creating a university town-type feel found in many European and American cities and over east where some universities are located in regional cities. I would certainly like to see more investment in that area to make Albany the premier university town in Western Australia.

I have a few minutes left to talk about some of the creative regions. The great southern is a very creative place. Albany is renowned for its artists, musicians and activities in the arts field. This government has invested about \$24 million in the Royalties for Regions Creative Regions program that supports activities in Albany and the great southern, including support for the ongoing management of Albany Entertainment Centre, a great facility for Albany that is used very often. I would not like to say how often it is used but because of its beauty and great acoustics it attracts many international artists. There is almost always a full house when a new stage show or musician comes to Albany. The creative regions fund has five streams, which includes upgrades to regional venues. The Albany Entertainment Centre and other theatres in the Albany precinct and the great southern have had the benefit of that funding to improve lighting, acoustics and seating so that people get the most out of the experience and come back time and again to use the facilities and enjoy the experience. Grassroots funding also goes into increasing the skills of local groups as well as regionally based arts groups and organisations that do a lot of the hard lifting and provide volunteer hours. Through their arts activities they add a great deal of vibrancy to and are the fabric of the community. This government has invested in them to improve and grow that area, especially in the great southern and places like Albany and Denmark, which have a real reputation in the arts. This investment will build on that reputation and keep it going. People who provide the service will get a lot more out of it and really enjoy the experience, and then they will promote their activities to the broader community in the great southern.

The program also boosts regional touring and is targeted at some of the bigger organisations like the West Australian Symphony Orchestra, the West Australian Ballet, the Black Swan State Theatre Company and the West Australian Youth Orchestra. Other funding is also available to help take people who perform in Perth but who would not necessarily perform in regional Western Australia, out to regional centres like Albany. Western Australia is not the biggest state in the world, but it might be the second biggest—someone might correct me on that—so the distance provides some unique challenges to the provision of international acts into regional Western Australia. It is hard enough to get these acts across the Nullarbor to Perth, the most isolated city in the world. How do we provide the same opportunities for people in regional Western Australia? The creative regions regional touring boost addresses exactly that problem of getting international acts out to regional Western Australia. In the last few years the idea of simulcasts has been implemented. Orchestras that have performed in Western Australia have been simulcast out into the regions using places like the Albany Entertainment Centre that seats 600 people and the community resource centre network that might fit 15 people in a room. I know that they hold wine and cheese nights in places like the Bridgetown Community Resource Centre that receive the simulcast so that regional Western Australians are exposed to that experience as well.

I will wrap up, Madam Deputy President, because I know you have been riveted by my contribution so far today. Thank you for not interrupting me. I hope there will be contribution from others around the chamber recognising the investment this government has put into the great southern to support those communities that already do some amazing things, based on the amazing natural attributes they have, including the agricultural assets and the natural beauty. The outcome is around getting more people to live in the great southern region, because if there are more people requiring services, businesses will open up and employment opportunities increase. We should be trying to augment the area through government investment to attract more people into regional Western Australia and into the great southern, which is an absolutely marvellous place to live and raise a family, and to work and grow old in.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral) [3.02 pm]: Madam Deputy President —

Hon Jim Chown: He's not missing in action!

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: No, I am here. It will not be a surprise to members that the opposition will not support this motion to commend the Liberal–National government. We do not believe that the Liberal–National government should be congratulated for delivering anything to the great southern region of the state, which is one of the few regions in the state that is not in my electorate. However, I am pleased to say that the hardworking member for Albany, Peter Watson, invited me to Albany a couple of weeks ago. It is always a pleasure to visit Albany, albeit it is a cold place on certain days of the year. The weather was cold but of course the reception we got was very warm. Simone McGurk, the shadow Minister for Community Services, and I spent a couple of days with Peter Watson. I had the pleasure of meeting people from a range of organisations in the disability, mental health and child protection space who deliver fantastic services and look after some of the most disadvantaged or underprivileged people in the great southern region. I place on the record that I appreciate the work of the Community Living Association that delivers vital services to people with disability in Albany and of Wanslea Family Services and its regional manager, Moray McSevich, who spoke to me about the challenges that organisation faces in child protection. I met with the Albany women's refuge—I will come back to that in a second; the Albany Halfway House Association; the CEO of Headspace in Albany, Andrew Wenzel; and also Richmond Wellbeing, and I visited its fellowship house. It is fair to say that all of those organisations do tremendous work to deliver vital services to people in the great southern. However, many of the people I met with from those organisations spoke about their frustrations and some of the challenges they face at the moment.

One issue in particular that was raised was housing. I note that the former Minister for Housing who has just spoken did not touch on the issue of housing in his speech about the great southern, and that is probably because the situation is dismal down there. The waiting lists for social housing are long. The organisations that help people fleeing from domestic violence struggle to access housing for those who have had to leave home. The priority list has not been reduced over the past few years; in fact, priority lists around the state continue to grow. That is an unfortunate position to be in. When I was in Albany, I heard that a large number of public housing homes had been demolished and there was no sign of them being rebuilt. The waiting list for maintenance of Homeswest or social housing continues to grow. In fact, one person described the waiting list as farcical; people were waiting so long to have important things done to their houses that they were at the end of their tether. There is a lack of crisis housing for victims of domestic violence and those affected by mental health issues and homelessness. One organisation we met with raised the issue of people living in cars. That is an appalling indictment on the state. That is not happening in just the great southern, but I will keep my comments to the great southern this afternoon.

Another issue that was raised with me was roads. The Liberal–National government has failed to fix this problem in the great southern region. The government has not progressed the ring-road in eight years. It was also

raised that the top roundabout in town was an accident waiting to happen. They are two big areas that could have been addressed over the past few years, but they have not. Another issued raised with me was the frustration at the leadership of the Albany port not being in town anymore and the fact that it is now run out of West Perth. People also raised with me concerns about the great southern TAFE and that jobs and courses have been cut over the past few years. Of course, the great southern TAFE is now being run out of Bunbury.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.