

AUSTRALIAN SPACE AGENCY

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson) informed the Assembly that he was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton — Leader of the Opposition) [3.19 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the McGowan government for being asleep at the wheel in failing to develop a proposal for an Australian Space Agency to be based in Western Australia, putting at risk investment and jobs and the opportunity to further diversify the economy.

When the issue of space is raised, we hear a lot of giggling by members opposite, particularly the Premier, who thinks this is a frivolous issue. He does not know very much about it. When asked about the issue, he started babbling about John Glenn, *The Jetsons* and other issues. It is disgraceful. This is a huge opportunity for Western Australia to create tens of thousands of jobs. The commonwealth government, under its current leadership, over two years ago identified a proposal to build a space industry in Australia. The commonwealth put aside money in the 2016–17 budget to review the proposal and set up a committee headed by the former head of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Dr Megan Clark, and an expert review panel that undertook a review, which started on 1 July 2017. The case for a space agency is profound. Indeed, the federal government report identified an ability to triple the size of the domestic space industry to \$12 billion a year by 2030. The report also identified the skill base, infrastructure, types of research facilities and comparative advantages of places in Australia, including Western Australia. The report identified clearly that Western Australia has the infrastructure, skill base, geography, firms and types of investment to lead in that area.

Western Australian Senator Reynolds and I responded in a submission to that inquiry in August 2017, with a capability statement on Western Australia's space industry capability but the state government did nothing. It sat on its hands. In October 2017, again, Senator Reynolds worked to put together all the people who could have an interest in expanding the space industry in Western Australia—universities, private sector firms, mining firms and a whole range of them—and took many of them to Canberra to meet the decision-makers so they could understand the capabilities and potentials going forward. Even though the Minister for Science in this state says that he supports STEM research, he could not attend that meeting so the member for Thornlie went in his stead.

As time went by, the commonwealth government decided to confirm and expedite the development of the Australian space agency and put \$41 million for it in the last budget. The commonwealth government identified it would start the establishment of the space agency on 1 July 2018, in two weeks' time. All other states have been working on not only a capability statement—that should have been done a year ago—but also detailed bricks-and-mortar, money-behind-it proposals for their states. Some of them, particularly the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and the Northern Territory, have put together a consortium. That is a very competitive consortium. They have a lot of existing structures. They have put together a detailed proposal for the government and it will receive it when the process starts in two weeks' time, on 1 July. What has this government done? Just this week, it went out and put together a capability statement on Western Australia. It is a useful document put together by ACIL Allen Consulting, but it is a year late. The government has put no effort into working with the groups to put together a clear proposal on behalf of the various private sector groups —

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister, you will have your chance to speak.

Dr M.D. NAHAN: The private sector has been leading this with the leadership of Linda Reynolds putting together the groups at the universities, which identified where it would go. There is a very good proposal by Curtin University to lead it, next to the Pawsey Supercomputing Centre. The government has done nothing. It put out this report because it knew it was behind the game and did not want to deal with any of the issues. This is a hugely important industry for Western Australia and the government has not done anything. As a result, when the head of the space agency comes to Perth in the third week of July, the government will not have a proposal to put in front of him—none! Again, the estimates of this are—commonwealth money is behind it—that the location of the space agency has the potential to create 20 000 jobs. The government says that it is focused on job creation. Let us look at what this industry is: it is an area in which we have huge comparative advantage. The European Space Agency and a whole range of infrastructure facilities are here, we have huge investments and remote locations, and operations in the private and public sectors. We have the geographical benefit of clear skies and large areas free of noise of various types. Importantly, we have some of the largest investments in telescopes and large computers for operation in this area. Our comparative advantage and investments in this industry are profound.

We do not need a capability statement to indicate that. Indeed, that was indicated by others a year ago. The commonwealth has \$41 million to establish this agency and it wants clear proposals to advance the development of this industry and where it should be located from the various locations—the states, and not so much the head office that will employ 25 people, but, indeed, the science and the research behind it. What has this government done? It likes to talk about jobs but it has done absolutely nothing. When we asked the Premier about it, he obviously did not have a clue. He did not have a clue and he says he is the Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade. He did not have a clue that this is a major issue facing his state that he has to talk to the Prime Minister about. He did not understand it, he did not know it, he was not briefed on it and he definitely has not talked to the Prime Minister about this.

Are these guys for real? I might add that members opposite like to talk about STEM, and it is very important because the biggest challenge facing this state is where the new jobs will come from in the future. Where can we diversify our economy? We need to develop industries that pay high wages based on skills, technology and knowledge, and this industry fits perfectly. Instead, the minister is sitting back, doing nothing and allowing the other states to run away with it. No doubt, in a few months' time, when the minister loses the project through inaction, he will whine that Canberra did not take him up and carry it with him. They have been trying, but the minister has to try himself.

MR W.R. MARMION (Nedlands) [3.27 pm]: I rise to support this matter of public interest motion. This is a great opportunity for Western Australia. There are probably two major projects for which we have a comparative advantage over all other places in the world. One is lithium battery manufacturing and the other is a space agency base in Western Australia. Two opportunities have presented themselves to us. Very rarely does one get this. A space agency in Western Australia is a gift from heaven.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Mr Speaker, I am getting interjections from the Minister for Transport that I would rather not have.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Transport!

Mr W.R. MARMION: The Minister for Transport suggests that we only have clear skies.

Ms R. Saffioti: We only got clear skies this year. What happened when you were in government?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Transport! Minister for Tourism! Leader of the Opposition, I think you are on two calls, so I would be very careful.

Mr W.R. MARMION: This report was released by the Minister for Science earlier this week. I think the Chief Scientist, Peter Klinken, was involved and it was produced by ACIL Allen Consulting. It sets out a lot of the capabilities that we have and is a great start. However, unfortunately, all the other states have already done this work and have put forward plans to the commonwealth. When the minister responds to this MPI, I would like to hear what he has been doing apart from getting a report done that identifies all the things that we know make Western Australia a great place in which to develop a space agency headquarters.

In fact there is a section in the report that outlines all of the infrastructure. Indeed, we have history behind us. In the 1960s, Western Australia had the Talgarno tracking station on Anna Plains and the Carnarvon tracking station. The member for North West Central will probably talk about that shortly. We actually have all this amazing history and now we have sensational people at our universities and high-quality graduates. We have facilities such as the Pawsey centre, the Learmonth Solar Observatory and the Gravity Discovery Centre. There is an amazing amount of infrastructure including the Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory and the Square Kilometre Array, and all the researchers supporting those facilities at our universities and at hubs such as Technology Park Bentley.

We should have this space agency here in Western Australia. There should be no excuse at all. Western Australia should be on the front foot. I take my hat off—it is hard to do—to the Minister for Mines and Petroleum who mentioned in an answer today that \$5 million has been set aside for a cooperative research centre to support lithium battery manufacturing or the downstream processing around that. What has happened on this? What money has been put towards Western Australia getting a space agency based here? We need some money and resources. Where are the resources? What resources does the Western Australian Chief Scientist have? What money does he have to make sure we can put a reasonable proposal to the commonwealth? Has the government done a SWOT analysis? What is our opposition? Our opposition is obviously the other states. They are getting together. Some of them are acting as a consortium. We should be doing an analysis on Western Australia's strengths and the other states' weaknesses. We have to beat all our opponents, which are the other states. It may be that we do have

a weakness. If we have a weakness, it may mean we have to amalgamate with another state to put forward a winning proposal. The aim is to win. The sorts of jobs created by having space technology in Western Australia are the sorts of jobs that will diversify our economy and make our universities the leading universities in the world. Every single facet of engineering—physics and chemistry—is involved in space technology. I also take my hat off to the Minister for Education and Training who is promoting science in primary schools. That is terrific. Primary school students get those skills, they go to secondary school and on to university, and then they need a job. A space industry will provide them with those jobs to keep them in Western Australia. If we do not bring this space agency hub to Western Australia, it will go to another state. Those graduates will go to another state or overseas. We have to do something. The Minister for Science is sitting on his hands being lazy. He called me lazy once—I still remember that. Lazy—goodness me! Now he has worked out that as a minister he has to work pretty hard. He has to get off his bottom. He has to pick up the phone, write letters and engage with the commonwealth government to make this happen.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe) [3.33 pm]: I rise to support the motion —

Mr D.J. Kelly: Oh, here we go!

The SPEAKER: Minister for Science, I call you to order for the first time. You are continually interjecting.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I rise to support this motion. I listened with keen interest when the member for Baldvis talked about a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for lithium processing in this state. I congratulate the state government for supporting the further development of a lithium industry in this state based on the good work done by the previous government. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for this state. I know the government has done some work on this and that it has come up with a statement of capability. I am the newest member of this house. Before getting here, I had to go through a preselection process. The first part of doing that involved putting out my curriculum vitae. I can tell members of the chamber and Mr Speaker that I did not send it out and say, “Hey, I’m a great guy” and kick back. There is a lot to love! I did not kick back and say, “I’ve done my work. I’ve put out my curriculum vitae. It shows what a great person I am. You’re all going to support me in the preselection.” I will tell members what I did. I contacted every single person at that preselection. I spoke to them, I had chats with them and I followed up with them. When I was preselected and going for election, I did not just put out a curriculum vitae to the electorate or send a bit of a letter out; I knocked on every single house door I could and I went out to every railway station.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Members will learn something here. I went out to every single person I could possibly connect with, every single community group, to make sure that I could get elected. That is exactly the case here. A capability statement is a fine thing. I was reading the list. Western Australia has the Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory; the Square Kilometre Array; the long baseline radio telescope at Yarragadee; the Perth Observatory; the European Space Agency, which I will talk a little more about; the laser ranging station; and the Pawsey Supercomputing Centre, which is the envy of everyone. We also have Defence facilities in the state. Western Australia is unarguably the state best placed to host this centre. However, we have to do something. We have got some fantastic advantages.

Senator Linda Reynolds has an absolute passion for this project. In a bipartisan way, she worked with the state government to develop a proposal for this project. She has put her heart and soul into it. She shared openly with everyone to make sure that we get this opportunity for Western Australia. Dr Megan Clark, who will head up this space agency, which university did she go to? Some members may like to look it up. It is the University of Western Australia. She is a Western Australian. She is looking for a proposal from Western Australia that matches the proposals from the other states. New South Wales has put in a detailed, funded proposal to have this agency in New South Wales. Victoria has put out a detailed, funded proposal to have this agency in Victoria. The Northern Territory, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory have put in a joint proposal showing that they can share their facilities and also share this agency. Western Australia has to put forward a proposal.

I am really worried that this proposal is in fact a victim of politics. I know we are in the place of politics and I know the member for Perth likes to make great moment when I mention politics, but some things are above ordinary partisan politics—and this is one of them. We should be working together. Yesterday, Senator Linda Reynolds facilitated a meeting of 32 people at the commonwealth parliamentary offices. I understand that both the Western Australian Minister for Science and the Premier were invited to participate. That included 32 people who were the key stakeholders with the four main universities—the University of Western Australia, Curtin, Murdoch and Edith Cowan—and all the major industry players that were mentioned by previous speakers. That was a roundtable discussion designed to develop this proposal further. Where was a single member of the government and the minister who is charged with this important task for the state? They were not there—not present. I am really concerned that because Senator Reynolds had a different point of view from the minister on sharks, suddenly

the senator has been frozen out. I have spoken to the senator about this. It is very clear that this is a bipartisan approach by the federal senator to the federal Liberal minister —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Tourism, I call you to order for the second time.

Dr D.J. HONEY: This has been, and should have continued to be, a bipartisan approach to a federal Liberal government by a federal Liberal senator in conjunction with the state government to maximise the opportunity for this facility to be located in this state. Senator Reynolds told me that a brick wall has come up. Despite her best efforts to continue that bipartisan approach, it has stopped. The tragedy is that this is destroying a potential opportunity for this state.

Why is it important? It is important for jobs. Both sides of this house over the years have recognised the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in schools. They have recognised that in fact if we are going to have a modern industrial economy, we need students going through who are qualified in higher maths, science and physics. The truth is that at best we are seeing a stagnation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and we are seeing a drop. I happened to read the School Curriculum and Standards Authority's "STEM Education in Western Australian Schools: 2016 Update", which states that from 2010 to 2015 enrolment in higher maths dropped from 5.6 per cent to 4.3 per cent.

Mr D.J. Kelly: Two thousand and sixteen?

The SPEAKER: Minister!

Dr D.J. HONEY: It was 2015. The report was published in 2016. It was the latest one I could get at short notice, but the trend is the same. Enrolment in higher mathematics dropped. Chemistry, which is obviously an excellent profession, showed an increase, but that is the rock star effect! Physics has flatlined. Information and communications technology, which is another of the minister's responsibilities, dropped from five per cent to 3.3 per cent. These are substantial drops in participation in the STEM subjects. Why is that? Fewer students are doing those subjects because they do not see a future in the areas of science and technology. The Minister for Science and I are of a similar vintage and went through our development at the same sort of time. Members would all remember that space was exciting and it was an exciting time to be in science. When I was an undergraduate at the University of Western Australia, around 400 students were doing higher maths and the higher units in physics and chemistry at university. If members went there now, they would probably find about 100 kids enrolled in those core subjects. We have to do something collectively as a Parliament. The government and the minister that is charged with it must ensure that we develop those opportunities and those jobs. Nothing would be more exciting or give a bigger boost to STEM subjects and science in Western Australia than having a space agency in this state. As I said, doing the capability statement was good background work, but it is like me throwing my curriculum vitae out there. I might think that I am a fine fellow and that I am great, but the federal government, the minister and the head of the panel that is reviewing this is looking for a detailed proposal. The government has gone some way to that in lithium at least, with some idea of building a bigger agency, but that same approach has to be taken for this; that is, the government has to have a detailed proposal that goes forward. I am really interested in hearing the minister's response to this, but if we have taken this long simply to develop a capability statement, I find it hard to see that there will be any detailed proposal going forward. If we lose this, it will be because of our inactivity. The government will have lost it because of its inactivity. It might be good politics later on to say that the federal government is a bunch of so-and-sos because it did not give it to us. As outlined earlier, we have the best facilities in Australia to justify the allocation of the centre to Western Australia. However, if we do not promote that and present a larger business case to the federal government, we will not get this agency and that will be the fault of this government and this minister.

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Thornlie — Parliamentary Secretary) [3.43 pm]: I am very happy to speak against this motion. I acknowledge that it represents a breakdown in the bipartisanship we have seen until now on this proposal for a space agency to be located at least partly in Western Australia. Members opposite made reference to a delegation that I was a part of with the Chief Scientist, Professor Peter Klinken, and, indeed, Senator Reynolds. The delegation visited federal Parliament House on 16 October last year and met with several Liberal federal government ministers who were very keen to hear from us. Some of those ministers probably, in all fairness, saw us as a bit of a threat. Minister Pyne is a proud South Australian, but he gave us a very fair hearing and was keen to learn what Western Australia has to offer as a location for a national space agency. Minister Birmingham is another South Australian who gave us a very fair hearing. He was keen to understand the necessary attributes of Western Australia. Assistant Minister Andrews, Senator Brockman and others all met our delegation. The spirit of bipartisanship was not just at the political level. As members opposite have said, four universities were represented. The politics in this place can be ferocious, but we know that politics between universities can be doubly ferocious. Brett Biddington represented Edith Cowan University on the delegation. Professor Phil Bland represented

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Curtin University. He has done amazing work as a planetary geologist and has located meteorites that have crashed to earth right in the middle of Kati Thanda–Lake Eyre. Through various radioastronomy techniques he was able to track down a bit of rock that is 4.5 billion years old. Professor Peter Quinn and Professor Bruce Gardiner were on the delegation as well. Tom Goerke from the Cisco Innovation Centre was involved, as was Tim Walton, who is someone who is strongly connected with the Liberal Party. Dr Douglas Bock from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation was part of the very strong delegation to put forward the Western Australian case.

That spirit of bipartisanship has continued since October last year. In April, Senator Michaelia Cash and I gave opening addresses at an event for the Murchison Widefield Array at the Curtin HIVE. An event was also held by the Western Australian chapter of the Australian Information Industry Association at Herbert Smith Freehills, where it was pointed out that the space industry is globally worth something like \$420 billion annually. It is a wonderful opportunity for us but could be damagingly brought down by a negative and pointscore style of discussion. This is very much an issue that needs bipartisanship because so much is at stake. It needs bipartisanship because of its complexities. The amazingly complex radioastronomy work that Professor Stephen Tingay does is something that we can perhaps begin to get a sense of after a 15-minute briefing, but we will never have a full understanding of. Bipartisanship is essential if we are to move forward in understanding something as complex and job-rich as this might be.

Opportunities exist for us to be part of a space agency that will be involved in all sorts of communications technology involving the maintenance of satellites, data analytics, and the reception of data from satellites through something like the Pawsey Supercomputing Centre. Space situational awareness and the development of global navigation satellite systems will help us with things such as driverless vehicles so we will have multiple systems—not just the American GPS, but all sorts of others. That will all be brought together for super accurate navigational work.

We must make sure that we monitor space debris. I will touch again on the work that Professor Phil Bland does with his Desert Fireball Network that will help make sure that we know when a piece of space debris that might be only the size of a matchbox could crash into a billion-dollar satellite. If we know where that is, we can manoeuvre around it. Dealing with space junk is a really pressing issue, but one that is incredibly complex.

Lots of negotiations are going on here at all kinds of levels amongst scientific communities, universities and, of course, us as representatives of our democratic system. I think it is essential that we have a strong spirit of bipartisanship to make sure that we go forward strongly and that we are able to deal methodically and correctly with arguments that might be put up by other states. If we do that properly, we will be able to ensure that we have the strongest bid. The groundwork has to be done well and we have to present ourselves as a strong unified force to win this for Western Australia.

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Science) [3.50 pm]: I am very pleased to get on my feet to speak against this matter of public interest. I am very surprised to be facing an MPI on this issue of the space agency for a couple of reasons. Firstly, I am surprised because of what my friend beside me has touched on—that is, the bipartisanship there has been on this issue until today. I have attended a number of forums with Senator Reynolds, who is very keenly interested in the subject. We are from different parties, but until now, although there has been a bit of competitive tension, there has been a strong degree of bipartisanship. Together, we have tried to put a “team Western Australia” view on this issue. As the member for Thornlie indicated, in October he participated as my representative in a delegation with the Chief Scientist that was facilitated by Senator Reynolds. All the best minds of Western Australia went over to Canberra to talk about this issue and met with a number of federal ministers. There has been a degree of bipartisanship on this issue and I am really surprised that on the first day back for this sitting the opposition has broken that bipartisanship. In the media the other day the Leader of the Opposition talked about our bid for the space agency being uncompetitive. While all states out there all want a slice of this new industry, the Leader of the Opposition is out there talking this bid down—talking down Western Australia. That is the first point.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr D.J. KELLY: The other reason I am surprised that the opposition has taken up this issue in its MPI is that since we have been in government, and I dare say quite a bit longer than that, it has really shown no interest in the science portfolio whatsoever. When we came to government, the member for Churchlands had the science portfolio. There were no questions about the science portfolio from the member for Churchlands. The only questions we got about it were the generic ones from the member for Dawesville about how many pens and things had been purchased. There was not a question from the member for Churchlands. He was the shadow spokesperson for science and he asked no questions at all—no interest. In fact, when the member for Churchlands wanted a promotion—because we all know he has leadership aspirations—he wanted a portfolio that he considered to be

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more important and he quickly moved to the health portfolio. He could not dump the science portfolio quick enough, so the science portfolio went back to the member for Nedlands.

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister is clearly not talking to the MPI. He is talking about every other portfolio except this one, which is important to the state of Western Australia.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. He has talked about the shadow minister and he has also talked about the cooperation he has had with Senator Reynolds, so I think that is talking about the issue.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.J. KELLY: I say the content of this MPI surprises me because from the opposition's point of view having the science portfolio is a demotion. It is now with the member for Nedlands. Again, there has not been a question at all from the member for Nedlands, and I understand that. He is probably busy. He was too busy to show up to estimates when the science portfolio was up. The opposition could have asked questions about where we were at with the space agency; that was its opportunity to dig into the science portfolio and ask us questions about what is happening with the space agency. Not only was the shadow Minister for Science not at the estimates session, none of the other representatives were there, although I think the member for Cottesloe was. There was not a question on science, not a question on innovation and certainly not a question on the space agency that is now so important to the opposition. I find it very difficult to understand why the opposition has chosen this portfolio, this issue, for the MPI, when ever since we have been in government there has been no interest whatsoever in the science portfolio or the space agency. I suspect the only reason the opposition has put up this MPI today is that on Monday an article on the front page of *The West Australian* mentioned the good work that the state government is doing in promoting our space capability. The opposition saw that on the front page and thought it had better do something to try to drag the government down. I am surprised. I am disappointed that team WA is no longer supporting our efforts to win a slice of the new space agency, but, quite frankly, given the disinterest it has shown in this portfolio, it really does not surprise me.

I will look at the history of this matter. On 13 July 2017, Minister Sinodinos announced a review of Australia's space industry capability. That was the announcement he made in July 2017. That review was to be conducted by an expert reference group chaired by Dr Megan Clark, a Western Australian, as pointed out by the member for Cottesloe. There were 180 submissions received by that expert reference group. One of them was put in by the Leader of the Opposition. He said the Western Australian government did nothing. We put in a submission to that review, as requested by the federal government. The Leader of the Opposition is misrepresenting the house on this issue.

Dr M.D. Nahan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr D.J. KELLY: We put in a submission, as we were requested to by the federal government through the process it set up. I do not have the exact date, but I am told that around that time Alannah MacTiernan, the Minister for Agriculture and Food; Minister Assisting the Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade, attended a Council of Australian Governments Industry and Skills Council meeting representing the Premier. At that meeting there was some discussion about the space industry and this process at a national level, and it was clear to her that the other states had been looking at this issue for some time longer than from the announcement made by the federal government. When she queried what the Western Australian government had done on this issue, she was basically told that that the previous government, the Barnett Liberal government, had not been interested in this area at all.

Dr M.D. Nahan: That is a good source, a reliable source!

Mr D.J. KELLY: The Leader of the Opposition questions me on this issue. Look back at the science portfolio under the Barnett government.

Dr M.D. Nahan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr D.J. KELLY: In the first four years of the Barnett government there were three Ministers for Science—Buswell, Marmion and Day.

Dr M.D. Nahan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, I call you to order for the third time.

Mr D.J. KELLY: In the first four years of the Barnett government there were three ministers. There were Buswell—we know how badly that ended up—Marmion and Day. In the second four years of the Barnett government, the four years when Barnett said he lacked horsepower in the cabinet, he took on the science portfolio himself. The Premier looked around his cabinet and saw that no-one else had the horsepower to deal with this portfolio, so he took it on himself. He probably did that with good intentions, but the feedback I get from industry is that the Premier was too busy to deal with this portfolio, so industry did not see much of him. That is consistent

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with the feedback that Alannah MacTiernan got when she went to that COAG Industry and Skills Council meeting and was told that on the issue of space the Western Australian government really was missing in action.

I get back to last year. The federal government set up a process that we participated in. We put in a submission to the expert reference group chaired by Dr Megan Clark. The federal government conducted a number of industry roundtables that we participated in as a state government. In March, the review into Australia's space capability was submitted by the expert reference group to the federal government. Last month, Minister Cash released the report and the federal government responded to it. A few days before the federal budget, the federal government announced that a national space agency would kick off from 1 July this year. That is the first time the federal government made a decision that there would be a national space agency. It has said that it will be located in Canberra, at least for the first six to 12 months, and that Megan Clark, the person who chaired the expert reference group, will be the head of that agency while she scopes out what the agency will do. She will put it together. Included in that process, she will determine how it is structured and where it is located, and, as part of that, she will engage with the states. We have made it absolutely clear to her that we will be part of that process. As the federal government was going through the process being conducted by the expert reference group, we decided that the best thing we could do was to map Western Australia's space capability—and that resulted in the report released yesterday. My understanding is that that is the most comprehensive report of its kind done by any state. The Leader of the Opposition today has said that other states have already done it. I would have assumed if they have already done it, he would have tabled it today. My understanding is that the report that we have done is the most comprehensive statement of capability done by any state.

Dr D.J. Honey: It's not a proposal.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The interjection is that it is not a proposal. This shows that members opposite fundamentally misunderstand the federal government's process. It has not called for "bids", if you like. There is no formal "bidding" process. The federal government did not say, "If you want to be part of this space agency or want it located in your state, you should put in a bid by X date." That is not the process that the federal government has been engaged in. It set up an expert reference group, worked through Australia's space capabilities—what our strengths and weaknesses are. On the basis of that capability statement, it made a decision, announced prior to the budget, that there should be a national space agency. Through the budget, the federal government announced some money would be made available for that space agency, something like \$41 million over the next two to three years. About \$26 million of that is for the operation of the agency itself. There is then a \$15 million fund for industry projects. There has been no formal request for bids about how that \$15 million will be spent. The federal government said that the detail will be determined by Dr Megan Clark when she decides how the agency will be structured.

I am really surprised that the opposition has come in here and tried to trash Western Australia's interest in this area, because, although, as I have said, there has been a bit of competitive tension between Senator Reynolds and me at the various forums in WA we have attended because we both represent different parties, we have, by and large, tried to keep a lid on that so that we present a united front. Despite that, the Leader of the Opposition has come out and criticised our efforts describing our "bid", as he puts it, as being uncompetitive. I just wish members opposite would just chill for a minute about this issue and start working with us. Dr Megan Clark has in fact been in contact with the Western Australian government today. She wants to speak to the Premier this week, I understand, about this issue. She is currently overseas, but she wants to make telephone contact with the state government this week prior to a meeting later in July when she will go to all states to speak about her views on how the new agency should operate and she wants to hear from the states about what our input should be.

We have done the most comprehensive capability statement of any state. Other states have not put in formal bids, as indicated by the Leader of the Opposition. I do not know where he has got that from. If they have put stuff to the commonwealth, it has not been made public. I would be most interested: if the Leader of the Opposition has information that he thinks is relevant to this issue, he should share it with the state government. If he really is on team Western Australia on this issue, he should share that information with the state government rather than come in here today on a matter of public interest, because he did not have another issue that he could deal with, and work with us, not against us.

The other important aspect about the capability statement put out by the Western Australian government this week is that it demonstrates that we have a lot of the strengths that the federal government's report identified would be key elements of a national space agency. We are able, through that capability statement, to identify strengths that we have that match up with what the federal government has said would be its priorities for a national space agency. It is actually a very useful document, Leader of the Opposition.

In the last few minutes I want to address some comments made by members opposite in their contributions, which I have to say were not extensive. The Leader of the Opposition talked about the detailed proposals put in by other states. A number of states have signed a memorandum of understanding. The Leader of the Opposition described that as a consortia. It is not a consortia. All they have done is signed an MOU, a statement of principles, that they want to work together on this issue.

Dr M.D. Nahan: Have you seen it?

Mr D.J. KELLY: The Leader of the Opposition has asked whether I have seen it. Of course I have seen it! We did not immediately rush to sign it because of something that the Premier pointed out to the Leader of the Opposition when he asked about this during question time. We want the space agency to be based in Perth. The New South Wales government wants it to be based in New South Wales. The South Australian government wants it to be based in South Australia. I am not sure about the Northern Territory. But it seemed to me to be potentially counterproductive to sign an MOU with other states saying that we would be working together when we are competing for the agency to be located in each state.

Dr M.D. Nahan interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: The Leader of the Opposition has had his opportunity.

We are still looking at that MOU. We may sign it; we may not. We are still talking to those other states.

The Leader of the Opposition talked about the Curtin University proposal. That is a proposal that has been put up by Curtin University, which has some work to do to convince the other universities that its proposal should be top of the list in Western Australia. The costing for that proposal is I think worth in excess of \$100 million. The total funding that the federal government has made available for the Australian space agency is \$26 million to run the agency. That is for the staff, to keep the lights on, and to pay the electricity and phone bills. On top of that it has a \$15 million fund that it says is primarily to work out international partnerships around space. So with \$26 million for administration and the agency itself, and \$15 million for international partnerships, there is a bit of a funding gap if we as a state government say our number one priority is to support a \$100 million proposal from Curtin University.

Dr M.D. Nahan: Then why don't you put your money where your mouth is?

Mr D.J. KELLY: The Leader of the Opposition is now saying that we should provide the \$100 million. After having trashed the state's economy, he now thinks that we should be finding \$100 million. The Leader of the Opposition made some uninformed comments in his contribution. He talked about losing this project. This is not a single project, Leader of the Opposition. He really should come on board with us.

The member for Nedlands, now begrudgingly holding the science portfolio after having been demoted from health, said that we should have the space agency here in WA. The one thing that the Leader of the Opposition has been able to point to in saying that the former government did something on this issue is the submission to the federal expert reference group. That submission by the Leader of the Opposition does not state that the space agency should be located in Western Australia. All it submits is that there should be a significant footprint of that agency here in WA. The member for Nedlands needs to speak to the Leader of the Opposition. The one thing that he did was put in a submission on this issue to the federal government. The Leader of the Opposition did not ask for the agency to be based in Western Australia. He did not even ask. The member for Nedlands should get across his brief, speak to his leader and ensure that the opposition is speaking with one voice.

The member for Cottesloe gave us a very interesting contribution on this topic. He went into great length about what he did in his preselection process to get his curriculum vitae out there. I have previously said to the member for Cottesloe that members on this side of the house took a great interest in his preselection. He probably did not realise it at the time, but he had a lot of support from members on this side of the house to win that preselection. We were absolutely rapt when he won the preselection. He is the closest thing we will get to a Labor member for Cottesloe. I am happy to revisit his preselection. He speaks like a Labor member when he speaks about his electorate. He is very fond of talking about the battlers from Cottesloe. I am very happy to talk about his preselection process, but it really misses the point. In his contribution, he very interestingly went back and looked at the declining rates of participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics—STEM—in schools. I was interested that he quoted from a 2016 report.

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister has clearly gone off track from the topic of the matter of public interest.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms S.E. Winton): Thank you. It is not a point of order.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.J. KELLY: The member for Cottesloe quoted from a 2016 report on the declining rates of participation in STEM in schools. The member can correct me if I am wrong, but the figures the member quoted were from 2010 to 2015 and he identified the declining rate of students studying STEM. The member for Cottesloe probably does not realise that that was during the time his party was in government. The ears of the member's predecessor, the previous member for Cottesloe, as Minister for Science, would have been burning. The member probably missed it, but since we came into government, we have announced Western Australia's first science, technology, engineering and mathematics strategy. For the first part of that, there is \$3.3 million in the budget to provide additional professional development for teachers engaged in STEM to give them the confidence to inspire the next

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generation of students to take up STEM. Although the member's contribution was very interesting, I do not think it really helped members on his side of the house.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [4.14 pm]: Members opposite may be happy that they have the member for Cottesloe here in the chamber, but the sharks of Western Australia are extremely happy to have you as the Minister for Fisheries. You are known as the “great white dope” in that portfolio and you are now becoming the “space cadet” as the Minister for Science.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member knows to refer to the minister by his title or as the member for Bassendean. He should withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms S.E. Winton): Member for North West Central, please refer to members opposite appropriately.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I take back calling the minister a space cadet.

Debate Resumed

Mr V.A. CATANIA: However, it is relevant to today, because the inaction of this government is costing us the opportunity to have a space agency based in Western Australia. I will refer to our history as part of the space race. I will talk about my electorate of North West Central and Carnarvon, which played a major role in making sure that man could travel into space and land on the moon back in the 1960s. I will also refer to what we have been able to achieve and what the previous government was able to achieve more recently—the Square Kilometre Array.

Mr D.J. Kelly: That was the Carpenter government.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We were able to put funds into the SKA to ensure that it is leading the way in the midwest, in Western Australia and in Australia. Here we are. The space cadet—sorry; the Minister for Science—said, and I think it has just come out, that the reason that the government is not actively seeking to have the space agency based in Western Australia is that it may have to make a contribution to be part of a space agency. That is quite clear. As I said, Carnarvon, the Murchison and regional Western Australia are playing a major role in space exploration, yet the minister is pushing, if there is to be anything here for the space agency, for it to be in Perth.

Perhaps the conspiracy is that the McGowan Labor government is not pushing for the space agency because it does not want to contribute to it and it does not want it to be in regional Western Australia. What does that mean? It may have to put some money into regional Western Australia. People may have to move to regional Western Australia. It is quite clear that this minister and this McGowan Labor government does not want this space agency. The minister talked about a bipartisan approach and not asking questions, but I cannot remember a question about science, water or forestry from the minister when he was in opposition. Those are some of the portfolios for which he is now responsible. Obviously, he is not concerned about trying to ensure that we get the space agency here for Western Australia or about having it in the regions. Why not Carnarvon, Meekatharra or Cue? Why not the Murchison? Why not Geraldton? I am sure that the member for Geraldton would support that.

We have a very good record in the regions. It is perfect for us to have a space agency. It is about not only the geography, but also our expertise in Western Australia and the new frontier of going into space. When it comes to exploration in the resources sector, what minerals could be in the moon or Mars? Has the member for Thornlie ever seen Marvin the Martian? He is playing that role: “Yes, yes, yes, space cadet. We will start talking about this space agency, but we will not push for it.” It is going to cost the state money to make money and have that investment. It is about not only having a geographic location, but also what we can offer as a state with our expertise in agriculture and the resources sector. When we explore Mars and the moon in the future, how can we use the expertise that Western Australia has and what part can Western Australia play in the new space race? Clearly, the minister and the McGowan Labor government do not want to see investment in Western Australia's regions because they know they will have to make a contribution. That is what this is all about. It is about making sure this is the right thing for Australia, the right thing for the world and the right thing for Western Australia and the people of regional Western Australia by supporting a space agency being built here.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: You are a space cadet. You are the “great white dope”. Minister, actually do something for Western Australia.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: A standing order deals directly with imputation of reputation. The member for North West Central has done this twice; he should withdraw those comments.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms S.E. Winton): Member, can I ask you to withdraw.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I withdraw the space cadet comment.

Several members interjected.

Extract from Hansard
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p3168h-3177a

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Mr V.A. CATANIA: I was quoting something!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think the Leader of the House asked the member to withdraw two statements; he withdrew only one of the statements.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I was quoting something.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Can I ask the member to withdraw both comments, please?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I withdraw.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Ms S.E. Winton) casting her vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (16)

Mr I.C. Blayney
Mr V.A. Catania
Ms M.J. Davies
Mrs L.M. Harvey

Dr D.J. Honey
Mr P. Katsambanis
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup
Mr R.S. Love

Mr W.R. Marmion
Mr J.E. McGrath
Dr M.D. Nahan
Mr D.C. Nalder

Mr K. O'Donnell
Mr D.T. Redman
Mr P.J. Rundle
Mr A. Krsticevic (*Teller*)

Noes (37)

Ms L.L. Baker
Dr A.D. Buti
Mr J.N. Carey
Mr R.H. Cook
Mr M.J. Folkard
Ms J.M. Freeman
Ms E. Hamilton
Mr T.J. Healy
Mr M. Hughes
Mr W.J. Johnston

Mr D.J. Kelly
Mr F.M. Logan
Mr M. McGowan
Ms S.F. McGurk
Mr K.J.J. Michel
Mr S.A. Millman
Mr Y. Mubarakai
Mr M.P. Murray
Mrs L.M. O'Malley
Mr P. Papalia

Mr S.J. Price
Mr D.T. Punch
Mr J.R. Quigley
Ms M.M. Quirk
Mrs M.H. Roberts
Ms C.M. Rowe
Ms R. Saffioti
Ms A. Sanderson
Ms J.J. Shaw
Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski

Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr P.C. Tinley
Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms S.E. Winton
Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr D.R. Michael (*Teller*)

Pairs

Mr S.K. L'Estrange
Ms L. Mettam

Mrs R.M.J. Clarke
Ms J. Farrer

Question thus negatived.