

TRANSIENT WORKER ACCOMMODATION POLICY

Motion

HON DAVE GRILLS (Mining and Pastoral) [11.56 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house supports the adoption of a state transient worker accommodation policy to enable the transformation of regional communities into thriving and sustainable population centres.

The matter I bring before the house today has been the subject of increased public discussion in recent times. It is a matter of significance for the entire state, not merely the many regional and remote communities and those employed in the resources sector. This matter cuts across wide demographic groups and has profound economic and social implications. Indeed, it will invariably shape the direction of Western Australia's development.

My contribution today calls on this house to genuinely consider the development of a policy to deal with the matter of transient workforce accommodation across regional Western Australia with the aim of providing clarity, consistency and transparency to industry, project proponents, local government and regional communities. I move this motion today in response to the lack of a broader state government policy position and methodology to deal with approvals for transient workforce accommodation. This policy vacuum has given rise to uncertainty in the resources sector and broader businesses operating in regional Western Australia. Local governments and various state agencies have come up with separate and often conflicting planning policies, which are having a detrimental effect on all stakeholders. It is peculiar, indeed, that successive state governments have seemingly been unable or unwilling to articulate a clear and coordinated statewide strategy to deal with the issue of transient worker accommodation. That is not to imply that this matter has not been under careful consideration for some time by a number of members present in this place. My National colleagues and I have long expressed our desire to see the resource sector shift from a fly in, fly out trend in favour of permanently accommodating its workforce in existing rural communities. My colleague Hon Jacqui Boydell will speak further on communities, such as Onslow, in her contribution.

As members will be aware, it has been our stated aim to develop regional Western Australia to ensure that regional communities from Esperance to Kununurra are attractive places to work, live and invest. The "State Planning Strategy 2050" has forecast that Western Australia's population will, on current trends, expand to at least 4.4 million and possibly more than double to 5.6 million in 2056. We want regional Western Australia to accommodate its share of that projected growth and ease the pressure on the already congested metropolitan area.

We most certainly want to avoid a scenario in which millions more people are concentrated in the Perth metropolitan and Peel areas whilst regional communities are left to stagnate or even decline. In a vast state there are a number of compelling reasons to pursue the decentralisation of our population away from the metropolitan area into regional towns and rural areas. The Nationals WA understand the great potential of regional Western Australia. That potential has been understood by generations who have lived, worked and raised families in regional WA. Now, for the first time I believe in the state's history, we have a funding vehicle that is able to help realise the dreams and aspirations of those living in our regions. That funding vehicle is royalties for regions—a state-building program that is finally addressing the long backlog of necessary regional community infrastructure and paving the way for a better future.

Through royalties for regions we have invested heavily in regional planning and development initiatives such as Pilbara Cities, SuperTowns, regional revitalisation programs and the country local government fund. Pilbara Cities is a particularly exciting and bold initiative to grow Karratha and Port Hedland into cities of 50 000 people and the population of Newman to 15 000 people by 2035; with other Pilbara towns growing into more attractive and sustainable communities. In order to make Pilbara Cities a reality, more than \$1 billion in royalties for regions funding has been committed to relevant local and state government agencies across the key focus areas of infrastructure coordination, land availability and development, community projects and engagement, and economic diversification. There are over 100 projects underway in the regions as part of the initiative delivering housing, infrastructure upgrades, health and education facilities, and business development.

Ever since European settlement of Western Australia, the north of this state has loomed as a zone of great untapped potential. By developing modern, liveable cities in the Pilbara and Kimberley we will be in a position to truly harness the potential that lies in the north. A great deal of effort, time and resources have been invested in regional development initiatives such as the Pilbara Cities project. However, I fear this hard work in the Pilbara, Kimberley, Goldfields and elsewhere in the state to build sustainable regional communities is being undermined by the lack of a coherent policy in relation to transient worker accommodation. One has to only look at Karratha to find an example of operational fly in, fly out workers being used to the detriment of regional development. Why is Gap Ridge Village, originally set up in 2007 to accommodate construction workers, still in

Hon Dave Grills; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Mark Lewis; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Phil Edman; Hon Col Holt

operation? Why has the operational workforce at that site not been integrated into the Karratha community? Why can some of those workers not be permanently housed in Karratha? The lack of a clear state government policy on transient workforce accommodation means that we have situations across the state in which donga camps are being used to accommodate operational fly in, fly out workers at the expense of nearby communities.

Before I continue, allow me to make a few qualifications. I am not opposed to the use of fly in, fly out workers per se. It is a given that it will always exist in some form, whether we like it or not. I recognise that the use of a fly in, fly out workforce is often necessary during the construction phase of a resources project. The use of fly in, fly out workers beyond the construction phase may also be warranted for resource operations located in extremely remote areas where there are no existing communities. However, I firmly believe that in the case of operational projects located near existing regional communities every effort should be made to integrate and accommodate the workforce into that local community. Operational fly in, fly out workers should be the exception, although I fear they may have become the rule. Using operational fly in, fly out workers housed in separate donga accommodation on a long-term basis would not be acceptable in Perth, Mandurah or Bunbury. Nor should it be acceptable anywhere else in the state where there are residential communities in the vicinity.

In its 2013 report on its inquiry into the use of fly in, fly out workers, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia made a number of important recommendations aimed at building stronger regional communities alongside the resources industry. Committee chair and then member for New England, Tony Windsor, noted in the report —

Policy makers must develop a policy mix that ensures the FIFO/DIDO work practice does not become the dominant practice, as it could lead to a hollowing out of established regional towns, particularly those inland.

He went on to state —

There are simple and practical measures that can be put in place to provide more incentive for FIFO/DIDO workers to become residential workers but foremost, governments at all levels must acknowledge that, for some communities—particularly those traditional resource communities, FIFO/DIDO is a cancer.

Mr Windsor also noted that corporate employment choices had become the regional Australia policy of many governments as they lacked their own policies on the issue of transitional worker accommodation.

The aim of this motion is not only to provide certainty and clarity around the transitional worker accommodation approvals process, but also to ensure that we have a policy in place that complements rather than undermines our regional development initiatives. We support community integration and giving fly in, fly out workers meaningful options to be accommodated residentially. We want them to be able to settle permanently in the community in which they work. We want workers to be able to live normal lives and to be housed with their families and loved ones. We want resource workers to settle into our regional communities and become part of the local social fabric. We want them to contribute to local regional economies. We want them to join sporting clubs, send their kids to local schools and invest in the communities in which they work. Although we support the continued development of the resources industry as a key economic driver for the state, this must be done by enhancing rather than at the expense of regional WA. The resources industry is not temporary. Although it does have peak times of prices, production and investment, it is nonetheless a sustainable industry that will be a contributor to the Western Australian economy in the long-term future.

Given that the resources industry is here for the long haul, I see no reason ongoing operational workers should be housed in temporary donga-type accommodation. I see no reason our regional communities should not benefit from the resources on their doorstep, and be given an opportunity to service the long-term needs of the resources industry. As it stands, a number of our regional communities are, dare I say, hardly getting a good deal. As the Standing Committee on Regional Australia noted in its 2013 report, the fly in, fly out workforce exists as a so-called shadow population that is serviced by a regional community without an equitable contribution to the local government's finances in terms of rate payments or state or federal government grants based on head of population. Many local governments reported to the inquiry that they were carrying the economic burden of fly in, fly out workers through the provision of local government services and infrastructure without adequate compensation for those costs. Local governments reported shortages of community infrastructure and services; rail and road infrastructure; town services, including water, road and sewerage infrastructure; airport infrastructure, including airstrip infrastructure; and telecommunications infrastructure.

In 2012, AEC Group released the findings of an economic impact assessment of the Pilbara fly in, fly out workforce that analysed the expenditure patterns of fly in, fly out versus residential workers in the Pilbara region. Commissioned by the Pilbara Regional Council, the report had some interesting findings. Based on an

Hon Dave Grills; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Mark Lewis; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Phil Edman; Hon Col Holt

estimate of 33 100 fly in, fly out workers in the region in 2011–12, the economic contribution through expenditure at local businesses of the fly in, fly out workforce was estimated to be \$339 million in output, \$180 million in gross value add and \$123 million in wages and salaries. In stark contrast, had those 33 000-plus workers been residents in the Pilbara, the local economy would have benefitted from \$2.126 billion in output; \$1.087 billion in gross value add and \$709 million in wages and salaries. This highlights rather aptly the need to ensure regional communities get a better deal from the resources wealth generated on their patch. There is a need to differentiate between construction and operational fly in, fly out workers, and approvals for the construction of transient worker accommodation camps need a demonstrated plan for operational workforce accommodation that resource companies are held to. Furthermore, time limits need to be placed on approvals for transient worker accommodation to allow for review once a resources project has moved from the construction to operation phase. These measures will come about only through the formulation and adoption of a clear and coordinated state government policy on transient worker accommodation. Such a policy framework would clear up the current state of confusion surrounding the transient worker accommodation approvals process and provide much-needed certainty to both resource companies and regional communities, thereby allowing them to plan for the future with a higher degree of accuracy. A state government policy on transient worker accommodation would allow resource companies to take some of the unpredictability out of long-term workforce planning. It would also give local governments and local businesses in regional communities the ability to invest confidently in their future. Most importantly, it would provide a better outcome for regional WA.

HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan) [12.10 pm]: I want to make some comments on behalf of the Labor Party, and my colleague Hon Stephen Dawson will also make some comments if time permits. We are happy to support the motion being put forward about the need to develop a statewide policy for how we deal with transient worker accommodation—transient workers being more commonly referred to as fly in, fly out workers. A number of things have occurred in recent times that give this side of the house some cause for concern. I note Hon Dave Grills' comments and agree with him that the policy would need to develop appropriate responses depending on the circumstances. It is not simply a matter of saying that every worker should be resident of a regional area and there should be no fly in, fly out workers. As the member has pointed out, the peak of mining construction is a time that, if it is not appropriately managed, can have massive impacts on the cost of housing in those areas. In the case of an extremely remote mine, it would have to be questioned whether it is in anybody's interest to build a whole new town. If there were a mine that could underpin a town with a population of 20 000 that will be there for 40 or 50 years, it may be appropriate. It is worth noting that in the early days of Pilbara mining there were towns such as Shay Gap that no longer exist.

Hon Col Holt: There was Goldsworthy as well.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Yes. A number of towns were established and subsequently removed as the life of the mine ended. Of course, in the eastern goldfields, many towns were established to service mines that were later removed. Any policy that is developed would need to take account of respective circumstances, and the economics, of where it is appropriate and where it is not.

On the other hand, there are towns like Collie. It is absolutely appropriate that the people who work in the coalmines around Collie should live in Collie as the local community and support that town. Of course, the other town that has been the subject of debate in recent times is Onslow and the circumstances there. The government at the time was given a commitment that there would be a resident workforce in Onslow. The company responsible has now reneged on that agreement and the current government has caved in to that. It is a sad indictment on the current Liberal–National government that it was not prepared to stand up on that issue. In fact, this current government has caved in on a number of matters of local content as well. I do not think the government has stood up for the interests of Western Australia to ensure we get our fair share. We are not just fighting Canberra for our fair share; we also need to ensure that we get our fair share in construction. We need to make sure that on an ongoing basis regional towns in Western Australia get their fair share of the economic benefits arising out of projects. It is a sad, sad day that the current government has caved in to companies and allowed what I mentioned to occur. I suspect that my friends in the National Party will say that it was not them. However, they are the ones who made the Premier the Premier and he made the decision. The National Party made that decision when it made the current Premier the Premier, and it cannot renege and walk away from that.

It is also fantastic to note that, clearly, the issues that the Labor Party has been raising now for some time on this matter must be resonating in the community. As one of my tests, besides opinion polling, I use the fact that the National Party starts raising the same issues that the Labor Party has raised. I note that tier 3 rail is another issue on which the National Party has now got on board. When the National Party starts raising the same issues that the Labor Party has raised, it is a clear sign that the things we have been saying are resonating in the communities it represents. We note that the government splits when the National Party realises that the issues the Labor Party has been taking up on behalf of communities in regional Western Australia start to resonate and

Hon Dave Grills; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Mark Lewis; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Phil Edman; Hon Col Holt

have an impact. It is a shame that the National Party is not involved in the debate a bit earlier so we can cut these issues off at the pass. The earlier debate today is a classic case. If the National Party had been as strong on opposing forced local government amalgamation three years ago when it went through cabinet, we may not be in the complete shemozzle we are in today. But, I digress. There is an important need to ensure that we are getting that work.

The other thing I hope would be included in any policy is the health and safety oversight of FIFO camps and ensuring those issues are addressed. As I understand it, there is no government policy or code of conduct, and when issues about the safety of these workers are raised, neither WorkSafe nor the Department of Mines and Petroleum see it as their responsibility. That is an area that we need to work on with the mining industry to make sure it is done in a constructive way. I am sure that the vast majority of the mining industry puts a lot of time and effort into developing its own internal policies, but I think it would be good to develop, as part of any transient worker accommodation policy, some general statewide government policy around the health and safety implications for workers.

The other thing that should be fundamentally part of any policy is the choice for the individual worker about where they want to live, whether as a part of a resident workforce or a fly in, fly out workforce. In recent times I have heard reports that in some parts of the Pilbara people who live in towns there are being dismissed and replaced by FIFO workers or that people are being encouraged to move away from their local communities—again on the current government’s watch—back to Perth to become a FIFO worker. Those people want to stay in those regional towns. I have only been provided with anecdotal evidence at this stage, but if that is in any way true, it is, again, a significant issue that, hopefully, any policy would seek to address. It would be shocking for that to occur.

I have made the points I wanted to make in this debate today. We welcome the opportunity to have a constructive debate on this issue.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Members, the question is that the motion be agreed to. Hon Stephen Dawson.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Hon Mark Lewis should get the call.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Sorry, Hon Mark Lewis, I did not see you; I apologise.

HON MARK LEWIS (Mining and Pastoral) [12.17 pm]: I am usually last!

I would like to contribute to the debate on this motion and I thank Hon Dave Grills for bringing it to the house. Temporary workers’ accommodation is an issue, and to give some scale, in a meeting with the now City of Karratha I was told that there are in the vicinity of 13 000 beds for TWA. That was during the boil of the construction industry. The city’s planning dictates that there should be about 5 000 beds. There is a huge discrepancy between 13 000 beds and 5 000 beds, so this is a serious issue. I agree that we need a policy statement across government, although I am not too sure that it should be the responsibility of only the state government, and I will go to that later. I also think shires have a big role to play; for example, Karratha is taking a very, very proactive approach to this because obviously there are some significant issues there. This goes to the issue of not only fly in, fly out workers but also competition, because some of these TWA camps are now opening up for tourists and competing with local accommodation businesses. We can imagine the tension in some of those areas and we have to deal with this issue. I note that the Karratha city council has attempted to develop a TWA policy and it is out now for public consultation; it is worth reading. That policy aims to manage the tension between the competing uses, as well as the FIFO issue more generally. Another issue sits off to the side of that—that is, the amount of accommodation in industrial areas in towns; caravans in backyards and that sort of thing, but predominantly a lot of temporary workers’ accommodation is in industrial estates. I notice that the Shire of Ashburton has recently put its foot down to some degree to try to tidy this issue up. Obviously a lot of health and safety issues are involved with temporary backyard accommodation. It is not only the camps, it is also the ragtag bits of accommodation that have grown up around the towns.

As I said, this is not only a state government issue. Obviously, local governments have the power to influence the outcome, and they are starting to get on top of it, but I agree that the state government needs to have an overarching policy.

One issue that has not yet been discussed, but is one of the key drivers behind the origin of temporary accommodation and FIFO itself, is the fringe benefit tax arrangements. I would like to place on the table here that fringe benefit tax arrangements need to be modified. It is acknowledged generally that once the FBT came into the game we saw a shift by mining companies towards FIFO. That needs to be looked at. On a number of occasions I have written to the federal Minister for Finance and other people involved in this issue. If all members, in regional Western Australia at least, but hopefully more generally, can get on the backs of the federal ministers responsible for this area, we would be better for it. We need to transition back to non-FBT arrangements, under which companies put staff into these towns. That can only help. I thought I would introduce

Hon Dave Grills; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Mark Lewis; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Phil Edman; Hon Col Holt

that concept into the debate. I acknowledge Hon Dave Grills for bringing this motion into the house, and I support his endeavours.

HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral) [12.23 pm]: I thank Hon Dave Grills for moving this motion in the house today. It is a very important discussion for us to be having, particularly for regional members, but also from a state development perspective. It is important that we look to the future development of our regional communities, because that is distinctively and intrinsically linked to the development of our state. It is exceptionally important that we discuss this issue today. I want to go back to some of the comments of Hon Ken Travers on the National Party's position on issues such as grain on rail and transient worker accommodation. Our position has been exceptionally clear. The National Party introduced royalties for regions in 2008. We have had a clear focus on regional development.

We have been consistent in that position, as we have been on local government, and I would suggest that members opposite stop riding on the coat-tails of the National Party, and pick up on the issues that we know have been important to us, and which we will continue to represent.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! Settle down; Hansard will be having difficulty following the debate.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Thank you, Madam Deputy President.

We will continue to consistently represent and bring to this house and the other place issues that are important to regional Western Australia and Western Australia as a whole. The other comment I would make on the contribution of Hon Ken Travers is on the anecdotal evidence of residentially based jobs being made FIFO at the moment. We are hearing that anecdotally as well, and that indicates that we need the resource industries to be on board with the state government in developing a statewide TWA policy. Government cannot do that alone; the resource industries must be on board with that vision, and understand that a residentially based workforce is actually assisting their workforce in the areas of mental health and occupational health and safety standards, and is therefore creating a more productive workforce. It is important that resource industries have a conversation within their industries about how they support their workforces, and then build upon the residentially based workforce. We would like to see that happen.

The philosophy of the National Party around this area is quite simple. If a residentially based workforce is living in regional town centres, those employees and their families automatically become intrinsically linked to their communities. They attend sporting events, and they build community spirit and an environment that attracts other families and individuals, and potential small-business operators and employers, to that community, building a more vibrant regional town centre. That is a pretty straightforward philosophy; a residentially based workforce is the way forward in regional Western Australia, and it is an opportunity for families to stay together, which is extremely important for children, parents and extended families. In regional Western Australia, particularly in the north of the state, in the Pilbara, there are limited opportunities for extended families. People do not have their grandparents around for babysitting, or to interact with their grandchildren, because it has been long considered a transient environment. This Liberal–National government has started to change that. We have a long way to go but, as I said earlier, the state government cannot do it alone. Industry must be on board in creating an environment that allows for a residentially based workforce.

Referring to stakeholder engagement, local government is engaged along with government agencies, and the responsible ministers for state development, regional development and mines. We all have a key role to play in moving forward with a residentially based workforce. The idea behind Hon Dave Grills bringing this motion to the house today is to have a discussion in the house about how important it is to the members of this house that we start that dialogue. We then have a way of, hopefully, engaging with the resource industries in particular. One of the reasons we are talking about this in the house today is the recent decision surrounding Chevron's TWA in Onslow. That has really brought this issue to a head for Western Australia, and unfortunately it has also revealed a lack of cohesion around this issue. I do not think that the people of Onslow or the Shire of Ashburton are particularly happy with that lack of cohesion and lack of focus, direction and support. I know that my National Party colleagues and I have been quite vocal about the fact that we have not agreed with that decision, under which the TWA is based 25 kilometres from the town site. The people of the Shire of Ashburton, and Onslow in particular, now feel that they have lost an opportunity. They have lost something that they thought was agreed to in the course of negotiating this development opportunity for Onslow. As members in this house, we need to continue to consult with the people of Onslow around how we can make sure that the local community is given the opportunity to engage with a global organisation like Chevron, which can provide so many different opportunities for families and the people who live there. I hope that we can continue to have that conversation. Chevron could change its mind. The Premier might change his mind and determine that the

Hon Dave Grills; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Mark Lewis; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Phil Edman; Hon Col Holt

community development aspirations for Onslow are more important than allowing that transient worker accommodation to be located 25 kilometres from the centre of town.

Another issue I bring to the house today was raised a couple of weeks ago when we talked about university deregulation and, hopefully, into the future regional Western Australia will have a regional university in one of our larger centres. That will never happen if the government continues to allow transient worker accommodation only 25 kays out from town centres in regional communities. We need to build critical mass into regional communities, which will attract greater educational opportunities for our children. It will also make it easier for families to make the decision to stay in regional communities instead of making the move to Perth or deciding that the mum and children will live in Perth and dad will be fly in, fly out, which breaks apart families. The government should provide the opportunity to keep families together, building a community spirit with their children and extended family, and growing regional Western Australia. We fail as a government if we do not take that opportunity and learn from the planning mistakes of the past in the Pilbara, where in the past towns such as Port Hedland and Karratha were considered to be mining towns only and the government did not have to invest in those towns because no-one was going to live there past 40 years. That has proven to be incorrect. Karratha is a thriving community; it has recently been deemed the City of Karratha. Port Hedland has the opportunity to develop further. As a government, we need to take the opportunity to move the industry to a residentially based workforce. That will develop the regional areas of Western Australia and overall will deliver greater state development opportunities for the state of the Western Australia. I thank Hon Dave Grills for bringing the motion to the house today and the contributions so far from other members, and I look forward to the contributions of other members on this really important issue.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral) [12.32 pm]: I, too, want to congratulate Hon Dave Grills on bringing this motion to the house. This is private members' business and the opposition has spoken on the issue earlier, so I will not take up all the time I have this afternoon, which will give other members the opportunity to make some comments.

I want to say at the outset, as a regional member of Parliament representing the region that has the greatest number of transient worker accommodation in the state, that I have a strong interest in this issue. I have seen the negative effects of a fly in, fly out workforce, and I believe that every effort should be made to integrate workforces into local communities. The reality is that we cannot force workers to live in the regions if they do not want to. Certainly in the north west at various times of year the weather can be unpleasant, to say the least, and many families do not want to live there. I do not think that companies make an effort to give workers the choice. If an effort was made by companies and they did give the workforce a choice, we would see many more people choosing to live in the regions. I listened to Hon Dave Grills' comments earlier on and support the idea that we should encourage workers to live in the regions. I also like the idea of providing incentives for workers to live in our regional areas. I, too, want to see regional communities flourish. I want to see kids in our communities so the schools can continue to grow. I want to see volunteer groups being in a position to attract volunteers. At the moment, the sad reality, particularly in many communities in the Pilbara and Kimberley, is that non-government organisations struggle to get volunteers. People are working 12-hour days and are too tired to get involved, or they are working at mining jobs and living in transient workers accommodation and do not get to come into town and participate in the local community. That is one of the downsides of a FIFO workforce. Our sports teams, our schools, and our community organisations suffer.

I do not know the causes of the high number of deaths amongst the FIFO population at the moment, but my heart tells me that if some of these workers were going home at the end of the day to spend time with their families and kids, we may not be seeing such a high number of suicides in this industry. That is anecdotal and I have no facts to base that on. The number of suicides in the FIFO workforce is high, and I think that if they were able to talk to their families at the end of the day, perhaps it would be not as high.

I, too, want to raise the issue of transient worker accommodation at Onslow and the fact that the Premier has decided to overturn and weasel out of a deal with the Shire of Ashburton for worker accommodation in that town. It was my pleasure, probably a few months ago now, to attend a community meeting in Onslow. There was a huge level of concern at that meeting about the Premier's decision to allow Chevron not to build a workers' village in town. I told the meeting that I was very disappointed in the Premier's decision. I said that in my book, a deal is a deal and if somebody promises to do that and it is part of the agreement with a company to allow them to build their project, then it should have to stick with its part of the deal. Onslow residents have put up with a great deal over the past few years, with higher costs, and high rents and house prices. They expected to get a return from this project, but they will not get a return. Local businesses had a right to expect to get a return from that project, and they, too, look like missing out. There is absolutely no guarantee that local businesses will benefit from this project at all.

Hon Dave Grills; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Mark Lewis; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Phil Edman; Hon Col Holt

The other point is that Chevron had the opportunity to make its case to the Premier and say, “Hey, we don’t want to do this anymore. We made this deal, but we don’t want to do it anymore.” The community of Onslow did not get that same chance to make its case. This is wrong and I will continue to raise this issue.

Another thing that has come to my attention in the last few days relates to a question I asked a couple of weeks ago about the Ashburton North strategic industrial area. The response was that one of the conditions for allowing Chevron to house its operational workforce at the ANSIA was to allow third-party access to any unutilised capacity within the ANSIA accommodation facility on commercial terms. Chevron is getting the opportunity not only to break a deal and base its workforce 25 kilometres away from the town, and the town misses out, but also to on-sell vacant accommodation in that ANSIA site. That is a travesty and it concerns me. Chevron should not be able to do that, because, again, local businesses suffer. The local caravan park will suffer, and local accommodation facilities will suffer, not only in Onslow but in other areas, because this issue will arise in Karratha and Port Hedland too. Recently the City of Karratha raised with me its concerns about transient worker accommodation, and last night the Town of Port Hedland had a meeting in relation to its transient workforce accommodation. It, too, is concerned; it wants a policy and is crying out for some government leadership in this area.

I will conclude my remarks shortly, but I turn now to a policy document produced by the Pilbara Development Commission dated 12 March 2012, titled “Transient Worker Accommodation in the Pilbara—Final Draft”. It is a final draft, and I could not find a finalised copy that has been produced since then, so I assume that no action has been taken on it. The document states at page 6 —

The Western Australian Government does not yet have overarching legislation or policy regarding Transient Worker Accommodation and most State Agreements do not require consideration of legacy benefits for Pilbara communities from major resources projects. Currently the establishment of a TWA is considered in the context of environmental and/or heritage management, alongside the mining company requirements.

I am running out of time, so I will not quote further from this document, but it goes on to effectively say that the Town of Port Hedland needs and is looking for a policy and that Pilbara local governments are looking for a policy. We do need a policy in this area and we need to make sure that local communities are benefiting from these projects. We need to make sure that —

Hon Col Holt interjected.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It is a few years until the next election, so I am not going to tell the member what we are going to promise for the next election, but I absolutely hope that Hon Col Holt and members on that side will bring forward a policy soon, because this needs to be fixed.

On that note, Madam Deputy President, I will conclude my remarks.

HON PHIL EDMAN (South Metropolitan) [12.41 pm]: I would like to congratulate Hon Dave Grills for bringing this motion to the house and giving me the opportunity to speak about a research trip I went on a few months ago at the invitation of the chief executive officer of the Shire of Ashburton, Neil Hartley. On 27 August I flew to Paraburdoo and was greeted by Neil, who showed me around this important region. I actually stayed in a donga there and made my lunch in the mess room with the mine workers. This mine site is owned by Rio Tinto; I spoke to a lot of the workers, and they all seemed pretty happy. I was not going up there to check if they had any synthetic drugs or anything like that, but just to find out whether they were depressed or suicidal, which is a very important issue. But they all seemed pretty happy because they were based in the town, and I can tell members that there is a good pub there. The Paraburdoo pub does the best sizzling garlic prawns I have had anywhere in Australia!

Hon Liz Behjat: Did you get a photo?

Hon PHIL EDMAN: No, I do not have a photo of me eating that, Hon Liz Behjat!

The next day we made the long trip to Onslow, where I was greeted by a representative of Chevron, who took me to see the Wheatstone project, which I had never seen before, and I have to say I was pretty impressed by the vastness of the project. I would like to thank Chevron for taking the time to take me out to that site. I think it was only about 15 or 20 kilometres away from the town—it was not a very long drive—but a lot of work is going on up there.

I then met with Geoff Herbert, president of the Onslow Chamber of Commerce. He explained to me how the Wheatstone project had impacted on Onslow, transforming it from a peaceful seaside holiday town to a growing and busy mining hub. I then met with the president of the Shire of Ashburton, Kerry White, and I noted her

Hon Dave Grills; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Mark Lewis; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Phil Edman; Hon Col Holt

passion for the town of Onslow. She raised with me her concerns over a workers' accommodation deal that had been made with Chevron for the Wheatstone development. It was the first time I had ever been to Onslow, and it has a great little five-star restaurant, right on the beachfront; it is incredible. Good pub, as well! We have to give these sorts of things a plug; it is very good for tourism!

After researching this issue I found some documents that illustrate the accommodation promise that was made by Chevron. Paragraph 7.9.1 of the "Shire of Ashburton Town Planning Scheme No. 7" reads, in part —

No subdivision or development may occur within the ANSIA unless the land is zoned in accordance with the Ashburton North Strategic Industrial Area Structure Plan ...

The Chevron Australia workforce management deed was agreed between the Shire of Ashburton and Chevron in June 2012 in line with condition 23 of the ANSIA structure plan, which provides that transient workforce accommodation is construction workers only, and that operational workforces are not to reside in the Ashburton North strategic industrial area. Chevron also agreed on page 83 of the same document that, in accordance with condition 7 of the "Wheatstone Development Plan", the Wheatstone transient workforce will only be used to the housing of the Wheatstone project construction workforce. The finalisation of this agreement and details of its enactment can be seen in the "Wheatstone Development Plan", prepared by Chevron adopted by the Shire of Ashburton on 20 June 2012. The plan was endorsed by the Western Australian Planning Commission on 11 October 2012; I am happy to table any of these documents, if anybody requests them. It is provided on page 33 of that document that there is no opportunity for the operations workforce to establish at the Ashburton North strategic industrial area. The project will operate from 2015 to at least 2037, hence the operational phases will have a more profound impact on local and wider economies than will the construction phase. The workers were to be housed in Onslow to avoid a "two town" situation and to put to use the large-scale infrastructure developments in the town. Just looking at all these documents, it looks like there were documents in place and that that was supposed to happen.

The town of Onslow is a very pretty town, and if members have not visited it, I think they should. It would be lovely for a holiday, and I believe it is very good for fishing and diving; I have not done that up there but I would like to. One restaurant I went to was absolutely brilliant. A lot of investment has been poured into the town; there are three-storey buildings and a big new discovery park funded by our own GESB. A lot of businesses, including our own super fund, have invested in the town. I consider Chevron to have reneged on what it was supposed to do, because now most of the workers are going to be based at Wheatstone, so hopefully all that infrastructure will not go to waste.

At the end of the day, I would like to see the parties put this aside. I would hate to see the Shire of Ashburton take Chevron to court because I think it would be a very expensive process. Perhaps Chevron and the community can negotiate this issue and find a way forward with all parties involved, and maybe Chevron could reconsider how many of its workers could be based in the town of Onslow—not just for the sake of Onslow, but also in the interests of economic sustainability. This town has a huge future and that should be considered first and foremost. Chevron seriously needs to reconsider the fact that it has reneged on these agreements.

HON COL HOLT (South West — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.48 pm]: I thank Hon Dave Grills for bringing an important motion to the house. We talk a lot in this place about issues relating to metropolitan Perth, and rightly so, considering 75 per cent of the state's population lives in the metropolitan area and 25 per cent in the regions, which means that 75 per cent of members of Parliament represent the metropolitan area and 25 per cent represent regional Western Australia. I guess that is the division of time that we spend talking about regional issues versus city issues. We talk about congestion, public transport challenges, housing challenges, urban sprawl and metropolitan service delivery, and I know that the government absolutely wants to have more people living in regional Western Australia, and there are some very good reasons for that. Our population is going to increase, and we should be doing whatever we can to ensure that our population increase in regional Western Australia is higher than that of Perth, which could help solve some of those Perth issues. If that is part of our aim, we must address some of those policy issues and those issues that do not help us achieve that outcome. Transient worker accommodation is one of those things that facilitate people who live in the metropolitan area but who work in regional Western Australia.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Are you working on a policy?

Hon COL HOLT: Absolutely!

Hon Stephen Dawson: I look forward to seeing it.

Hon COL HOLT: The member will, and I am glad he is looking forward to it, too!

Hon Dave Grills; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Mark Lewis; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Phil Edman; Hon Col Holt

Absolutely we should be working on some of those issues that do not reach the aim of accelerating population growth in regional Western Australia. There are plenty of reasons why we need transient worker accommodation. We have already talked in this place about some of those reasons. Remote mine sites is one such reason. We are not in the business of opening up a town whose reason for being ceases to exist when the finite resource at the mine site runs out. That would just set up the town for failure. Such a mine site would obviously have transient workers. There are probably really good reasons for providing temporary accommodation for major shutdowns and major maintenance regimes in some of the big mining sites or big industrial areas. Karratha still struggles with the influx of around 1 000 workers for a month when a mine goes through a major shutdown. There is obviously a construction phase for a mine. We would not want to build a town, get people there and build up businesses to supply services during the construction phase and then find that those businesses struggle as people leave town when the construction phase finishes.

I remember an opportunity in Collie for a potential fertiliser plant to come to town. It was intended to build a construction camp for the fertiliser plant. At that time it was envisaged that between 1 000 and 2 000 workers would be in town for the construction phase, and around 200 would work on the project at the end of the construction operation. I remember being in discussions with the company, the Shire of Collie and the motorplex. We were looking at building the construction camp on the Collie motorplex site, so that when the construction finished and the workers left, the camp would not be packed up and taken away from town. Instead, the camp would provide accommodation for other businesses around the Collie motorplex, including for police driver training. When the motorplex is used for driving instruction, people need places to stay. We therefore need to look at ways of using construction accommodation in better ways too.

If our aim is to increase the number of people living away from metropolitan Perth in regional centres where all these fly in, fly out jobs are, in my view we need to do a couple of things. One is to make those centres attractive places for people to live and raise a family, and also for them to retire and grow old in comfort with all their medical needs addressed. I think royalties for regions is a program that has really tried to do that. Investment of royalties for regions is really about getting people to live in regional centres and do all those sorts of things. We know that there are plenty of challenges around education and the provision of health services. That is why we have been working hard in that space, and we will continue to work hard because that is the right thing to do to achieve the desired outcome.

Hon Stephen Dawson was right when he said that we cannot force people to live in a regional centre. However, we can do some things around policy settings and provide enticements to encourage them to do so. The provision of amenity is one matter. Another is about policy settings that government should look at that say that transient worker accommodation without any good reason is not sustainable and not acceptable. We should be sending a message to all companies that think transient worker accommodation is the best way for them to provide an outcome for their workforce and their business and that they need to take into account the community amenity and the community opportunity when bringing a mine, a processing plant or whatever it might be into the regions. We have to drive a better result for community and regional development outcomes; we just have to do it. We have to send a message through some government policy settings to say that it is no longer acceptable to consider fly in, fly out as the accepted mode of providing a workforce, because it does not wash anymore. If we want Perth to remain a fantastic, liveable city, we have to have growth in the regions. That is what we should be striving for in sending those clear signals. There is an opportunity in this debate for this Parliament to set that agenda now and to send a signal to those companies, in whichever industry they may be, that they have to start looking at ways of providing a greater community outcome in regional Western Australia, and that means looking at having a residentially based workforce.

We therefore look forward to continuing this conversation. We will be working hard on developing a policy that we think will help provide for those needs. It may be around the fringe benefits tax; it may be around revisiting state agreements to make sure that the benefit is for regional communities when new agreements come along. However, we will continue to invest in regional communities to make sure that they are great places to live. Anyone who has been to Karratha and the Pilbara Cities recently would have seen the incredible changes going on there.

Hon Stephen Dawson: The traffic lights drive you mad!

Hon COL HOLT: Are traffic lights in Karratha a problem? What a terrible problem to have! That means some things are working. It means that people regard those places as their home now. We talked about mines shutting down. Funnily enough, my brother-in-law grew up in Wittenoom—of all places—but he continues to live in Karratha. I do not think he will ever leave the north west because he sees it as the greatest place on earth.

Extract from *Hansard*
[COUNCIL — Thursday, 23 October 2014]
p7814b-7822a

Hon Dave Grills; Hon Ken Travers; Hon Mark Lewis; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Phil Edman; Hon Col Holt

With those notes, I thank members in the house for their contributions.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.