

## MIGRATION

### *Statement*

**HON CHARLES SMITH (East Metropolitan)** [6.25 pm]: This evening I would like to offer a few brief remarks on the so-called skills shortage myth that is currently doing the rounds in business circles, and in particular in big business circles. Organisations such as the Migration Council Australia, the Australian Industry Group and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia repeatedly claim that Australian businesses are experiencing widespread skills shortages, and use this claim to justify current mass migration policy settings, which the McGowan government has bought into via the graduate occupation list. Only last week there was an article in *The West Australian* entitled, “Our nurses go to Britain to work: Upset students say they feel ‘betrayed’ as they’re forced overseas to find positions”. I have asked question after question about the graduate occupation list and made several statements in this place, and at last the media have picked up on, in my words, the betrayal. On 19 February, I said —

Nursing, teaching, engineering and law are all on the graduate occupation list and are also occupations in which Australian graduates are struggling to enter the Australian labour market.

Recently the Morrison government signed the designated area migration agreement with the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder to address a so-called skills shortage. I have taken an interest in this because, firstly, it addresses the skills shortage myth, and, secondly, Kalgoorlie is my adopted home town in Australia. I do not believe there is a skills shortage in Western Australia, given the staggering unemployment figures, low wages and poor gross domestic product growth, particularly on a per capita basis. If there were a skills shortage, wages would be going up. The fact that they are not speaks volumes.

Wages have been declining in real terms for the last 10 to 15 years. An inability to find local workers to work at a specified wage rate, coupled with an unwillingness to offer higher wages, does not necessarily imply a skills shortage, particularly when local workers would be willing and able to work if the wage rate was lifted. This differs from a skills shortage in which there are simply not enough people with a particular skill set to meet demand. That is a skills shortage. There are so many Western Australian locals who are unemployed and looking for work that it is simply disingenuous of the employment sector to overlook them in favour of migrants. If mining companies have trouble finding staff, there is a very simple solution: offer higher wages. Despite what the federal government states, Australians are not the priority with this agreement. What is prioritised is big business and its bottom line. There is no such thing as a shortage of labour; there is only a shortage of labour at the price or wages that companies are generally willing to pay.

To conclude, I believe that this designated area migration agreement will only discourage employers from training local Australians in favour of hiring ready-made workers from overseas.

### *Statement*

**HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House)** [6.29 pm]: I rise to respond to the comments made by Hon Charles Smith because I think it is important that we get our language right on this. I made notes as Hon Charles Smith spoke. He referred to mass migration programs that the McGowan government had bought into and he referred to the graduate stream. I want to clarify to the house again—I have provided this information in answers to questions that he has asked—that our government participates in a targeted, capped program. The cap is set by the commonwealth government. It is a targeted program to provide opportunities for international students in areas that the state has identified, based on advice, we need to concentrate on. It is not correct to say that the McGowan government is participating in a mass migration program.