

## ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

### *Consideration of Tabled Papers*

Resumed from 28 June on the following motion moved by Hon Stephen Dawson (Minister for Environment) —

That pursuant to standing order 69(1), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 1340A–D (budget papers 2018–19) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 10 May 2018.

**HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural)** [2.27 pm]: Madam President, I also add my congratulations to you on your announcement. As a parent to five girls, I certainly understand the value of grandparents.

I rise to contribute to the debate on to the state budget. A fair bit of time has elapsed since this budget was handed down, but it is of course no less relevant to have this debate. I will not spend considerable time discussing the intricacies and details of numerous specific portfolio issues. Today I want to focus on a couple of areas of the budget that are dear to my heart—primarily agriculture, as well as education in relation to agriculture.

It is disappointing to see the loss of funding and support for our wonderful grower groups under this government, as well as for programs like the Doppler radar project and other programs. They are incredibly important projects and we need to make sure that this industry continues to receive the attention and funding that it deserves. Agriculture is a vital industry. It is worth over \$8 billion to this state's economy. Western Australian grain farmers are the biggest grain producers in the nation. In total, the agriculture sector comprises around 14 400 producers and employs over 183 000 people. The agriculture sector is a very important industry for our state, for employment, and, of course, for our regional communities, many of which are dependent on it for their existence. At a national level, this industry produces enough food to feed over 80 million people. That equates to each farmer in Australia feeding around 600 people—150 of those people are Australians and the remainder are in other nations. In Western Australia, the proportion would be different as our agricultural focus is primarily driven by export.

Unfortunately, the industry is much maligned at the moment by many people in the community. I quote Australian author Dave Freer —

It also changes the way you look at that now much maligned and derided hero of yesteryear, the pioneer, the colonist, and those who built on that legacy, so some urban lout who never got up at half-past predawn to milk, could whinge about government cheese. The farmer, the guy getting a sloppy-with-somewhat-processed-grass tail whipped across his face, the fellow squatting planting seeds he kept from last year, the fisherman on a wild and rolling sea ... these are my people, my heroes and my role models. These are the builders, the makers. These are the foundation stone people on which my Australia ...

Was built and still actually stands. He continues —

Not surprisingly they tend to see the world very differently from those who are sheltered from these things in the raw, and completely differently from the takers and breakers.

Our agricultural industry is incredibly efficient and innovative and a super-diverse industry. It is filled with very good people who are looking after the land, their livestock, their communities, their families and, of course, the rest of us. It is because of our farmers that those who choose to live an urban life do not have to worry about food security. The majority of our population does not need to be a farmer but every single member of our population needs a farmer.

As the late John F. Kennedy said, our farmers deserve praise not condemnation, and their efficiency should be cause for gratitude not something for which they are penalised. It follows therefore that our agriculture sector needs to be a strong focus of, and gain strong investment from, government. The sector needs support to continue improving, innovating and providing quality food and fibre for an ever-hungrier world. In order for this to happen, one would expect that the government of the day and the minister representing this industry would have a very strong grasp of the sector so that growth and development can be facilitated, yet it seems that our minister does not fully understand our agriculture industry and what our farmers have been up to in the last 40 years. We regularly hear flippant remarks suggesting that farmers have to change their practices by reducing their fertiliser use, applying compost, breeding dual-purpose merino sheep and changing countless other practices. Our farmers are already doing these things and have been doing so for some time. We are among the most efficient farmers in the world when it comes to fertiliser use, and we use technology the likes of which can be only dreamed about in many other nations, such as the infield normalised difference vegetation index measurement to determine nutrient requirements for crops as they grow so we can apply exactly the right amount of fertiliser they need without wastage. Our grain growers also adopted no-till farming at an extraordinarily high rate. Did they do that because

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they were driven by profit? No, of course not; this is about a sustainable production system. It is a lower cost and higher producing system that can continue long into the future.

Madam President, back in 1980, my father was one of the very first people in this state who adopted no-till farming, although it was not called “no-till” back then. He did it because he was sick and tired of watching the farm blow away every time a cold front came through during the growing season. I remember well that when I was a kid, I would step outside the house and it would be just a white dust cloud. All the topsoil would end up on the neighbour’s farm or further down the road. My father adopted no-till farming because he was tired of watching that happen. Our soils are fragile. Stopping cultivation prior to seeding prevented the devastating wind and water erosion that plagued our south coast farms for decades. The side benefit was that organic matter—plant material—was retained on the soil’s surface and naturally broke down over time. In other words, it became compost. Farmers have effectively been using compost for 40 years or more. It is not a new practice and it is not a new idea.

Farmers also innovated very early on in the field of land care. I believe my father and my good friend Marg Agnew from down in Esperance were members of the state’s first land care group, the Neridup Soil Conservation Group, which is still going strong today. It is still making sure that farms down there are well cared for and well looked after and that those farmers can come together to develop whole-of-catchment approaches to managing the environment in which they farm.

Our minister has read a book. I cannot remember the name of this book; was it the “Call of the Weed Smoker”?

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** It was the *Call of the Reed Warbler*. As a result of this epiphany, budget paper No 2 on page 190 states —

- The Department will work with Natural Resource Management groups and grower organisations to explore the science and best practice in regenerative agriculture ...

My first question is: will this be based on science? This is because, despite the book’s author apparently being a farmer, when he was asked at a conference this year about the science that his theories were based on, his answer was, “Well, there is science and there is science.” I am not really sure about that. Is there science and science in a parallel universe?

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

*Point of Order*

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** I am very interested in what Hon Colin de Grussa has to say and I am finding it very difficult to hear what he is saying over the interjections from the minister.

**The PRESIDENT:** Thank you, Hon Rick Mazza. I was trying to call a bit of order when you rose to your feet. I am sure that we are all very keen to hear what Hon Colin de Grussa has to say and that we will listen to him quietly.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** Thank you, Madam President.

So, the minister read a book and our state government made investment decisions for an \$8 billion industry based on that book. I do not know how many of us have been reading books over the break, but maybe we have some good ideas for new investment strategies for the government.

I am sure that our farmers would agree—I am sure because I have spoken to them and asked them—that their doors are open; they want the minister to visit them, to come to see and learn and understand just how amazing this industry is, to see what they do and what they have been doing to improve our environment, to look after our land and our animals, and to improve their processes to be the world leaders that they are. It would be a wonderful opportunity for our minister to gain a very good understanding of what we do and why we are leaders in the world and in our nation for production and the way we do it.

I will now turn to another focus of this government, which is not unrelated—namely, the government’s investment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Much has been made about it. Under the heading “Science and Innovation”, page 175 of budget paper No 2 states —

- The importance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) skills as a means to support the new economy and create the jobs of the future is increasingly being recognised. Funding of \$3.3 million over four years will be provided under a State STEM Strategy, developed by an across-sector

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Panel under the leadership of the Western Australia Chief Scientist, to enhance STEM skills across the State through a range of initiatives designed to prepare Western Australia's workforce for future jobs.

We can see on page 173 of budget paper No 2 that the government has allocated some \$970 000 to the strategy. This is interesting. On the face of it, it is a very sensible, logical, good investment of money to prepare our state for the future, including new jobs and new industries. There is nothing wrong with that. However, to my knowledge, there does not appear to be any acknowledgement in this strategy that our existing primary industries, particularly agriculture—every single farm—are working STEM laboratories. All our farmers are scientists. They are scientists in the fields of plant pathology, genetics, animal science, nutrition, spatial management and data processing.

Farmers are also engineers. They design and build innovative machinery and provide innovative engineering solutions to the challenges they face every day. Therefore, it follows that this primary industry, which was innovative much earlier than many other industries, is very much a natural and logical industry on which the STEM strategy should focus. I am a bit concerned that this government has cut education in the agricultural space. The government has abolished the agricultural education directorate that was formerly in the Department of Education. Regional schools and colleges, such as Moora, are being punished. The agricultural college fund is being raided. The government has a perfect opportunity to invest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and work with an industry that already does all these things, and in so doing help develop our state in the long term.

Every single day, STEM is at work in our wineries, vegetable farms, dairies, grain farms, and sheep and cattle farms. STEM is at work in every place in which our food and fibre is produced. Imagine what could be achieved if the government understood this fully and forged a link between farmers and the education system to deliver and develop the STEM strategy. The real-life application of STEM in the production of our food and fibre provides a huge opportunity for our children to not only understand the jobs of the future but also reconnect with our primary producers. In our increasingly urbanised society, that link has been broken. It is incredibly important that we maintain that link. Our children need to understand where and how their food and fibre is produced. We need to be the champions of change and work to understand and improve our production systems, create new technologies, build the necessary infrastructure, and help power our agricultural industries and our state into the future. Building stronger ties with our agricultural and regional communities is a key to the future success of this state. However, this government does not appear to understand that. Therefore, I have an idea. I suggest that when our Minister for Agriculture and Food visits our farmers, she is joined on that tour by the Premier and the Minister for Education and Training. That would enable farmers to, in the Premier's own words, "educate" them about this incredible industry.

We need to remember the importance of agriculture in the global context. Norman Borlaug, an agronomist and father of the Green Revolution, won a Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his use of science to help feed the world. This man's work in agriculture is credited with saving the lives of over one billion people. That is the power of agriculture. That is also one billion reasons why investment in agriculture is critical to the future of our state, our nation and our world. That is why our children must know and understand this amazing occupation, without which our cities and towns would not exist.

I encourage every member of this place to learn and understand this wonderful industry, get out on farms, and be involved in investing in agriculture and making it a better industry for everyone. As former United States' Senator Daniel Webster said —

Let us not forget that the cultivation of the earth is the most important labor of man. When tillage begins, other arts will follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of civilization .

I conclude my remarks at that point, Madam President.

**HON TIM CLIFFORD (East Metropolitan)** [2.43 pm]: I want to speak on this government's first full budget. I said in my inaugural speech, and I have said it since, that budgets should not be balanced off the back of the most vulnerable people in our community. That goes to the heart of the few things I want to speak about today, namely energy costs, renewable energy, climate change, and housing. These things have effectively been forgotten about in this budget. Energy charges have increased by close to 11 per cent as the government pursues cost reflectivity in the energy space. That is an average increase of \$169 a year per household. That might not be much money for members and for me, but for the everyday person in the street, that is a lot of money. For a person in Dalkeith, that extra cost might be an annoyance. However, for a pensioner in Gosnells, that might mean having to choose between having heating in winter or air conditioning in summer. I have spoken to some pensioners who do not turn on their power during the day so that they can save money. The most vulnerable people in our community are being hit the hardest by these increased costs. That is reflected in the demand for assistance through the hardship utility grant scheme. Every week, hundreds of people reach out to utilise that scheme. In the previous financial year,

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27 000 people applied for HUGS assistance, at a cost of \$11 million. That is an increase in expenditure of only \$7 million, which helps assist the most vulnerable people in our community.

Last year, I called on the government to scrap the tariff equalisation contribution subsidy. That was also one of the government's pre-election commitments. Therefore, I am surprised that the government did not take that up last year. However, putting that aside, the government should work towards shielding the most vulnerable people in our community from that cost. The most vulnerable people in our community should not be required to wear the burden of this subsidy when other people in our community can afford to pay it. The Western Australian Council of Social Service said in a recent report that it accepts the fact that the government does not intend to scrap the TEC for everyone across the board. However, it has called on the government to shield people who are receiving Newstart, a pension or other forms of government assistance from having to subsidise the TEC. That would cost the government \$15.2 million. However, at the cost of that small amount of money, the government would be able to protect the most vulnerable people in our community. That would save the government the indirect cost of having to help people who are being pushed onto the street because they cannot afford accommodation. That is not to mention students on Newstart. The Newstart allowance is below the poverty line. No-one has taken any leadership at the federal level in raising the Newstart allowance. People from all over this state come to Perth to study at TAFE or take advantage of our regional education facilities. These people often have to choose between studying and working. I have spoken to students who are both studying full time and working full time. I do not know how students can apply themselves to their studies if they are forced to work full time. For students, every dollar counts. I understand that HUGS is a service that everyone can use to help offset the cost of utilities. However, the term "energy poverty" is being repeated to me time and again when I speak to low-income earners across the regions and across the metropolitan area.

I turn now to renewable energy. I have asked a few questions about the government's plan to invest in renewable energy. I have been told that the government intends to undertake a number of reforms in this area. I have yet to see any reforms. A lot of people are waiting with bated breath to see where the government will go with this. I understand that the government is putting a lot of work into peer-to-peer training and into revolutionising how we redistribute our energy. Frankly, the old dirty coal-fired power station on which the whole south west interconnected system relies is completely outdated.

Another issue is that Synergy is proposing to invest in renewable energy. Over the 2018–19 forward estimates, Synergy is projected to spend \$162.7 million on its asset investment program. However, only one per cent of that \$162.7 million will be spent on renewables. In the age of climate change and innovation, we should not rely upon only one per cent of our future investment going towards renewables, when local businesses and communities rely upon the government to take a lead in this space to reduce our emissions and protect the most vulnerable people from the effects of climate change. That includes reducing our gas emissions in the mining and construction sector. We know that sector is carbon intensive, and we could do a lot more to ensure that these companies have options to adopt small-scale renewable energy projects, as we have seen in Queensland in recent years, as well as looking at means to reduce emissions of the vehicles and machinery used in that industry.

We should also look into where we get our energy from. More than three-quarters of the electricity on the south west interconnected system is supplied by coal—last century's technology. We should be looking at how to phase out the Collie coal-fired power station, while ensuring we have jobs for people ready to go. More investment in renewable energy will create more jobs. By 2021, only 13 per cent of our total energy consumption—989 000 megawatt hours—will be sourced from renewables, and coal will still supply most of our power, with a projected 5 082 300 megawatt hours. In addition, almost \$68 million will go towards extensive works on the coal-fired power station. Another \$65 million will go to gas, and only \$2 million will be invested in renewables. A whole bunch of companies are ready to go—ready to plug into the grid. We need legislative change so that small-scale renewable energy companies can plug directly into our grid to supply clean, renewable energy into our households to ensure that we reduce not only emissions, but also energy costs.

That brings me to climate change. I have asked a number of questions about staffing and the approach to climate change in the public sector. I understand that under the previous government only 0.5 of a full-time equivalent was dedicated to looking at climate change and reducing emissions and implementing better practices across the public sector. It heartens me to see that the government has increased the number of full-time equivalents on that side of things, but that is still only six people across the whole public sector looking at how best to reform our practices to deal with a warming climate. That is simply not good enough, especially as it is the biggest challenge of our time. I believe we need a climate change department and a climate change minister. We have a minister for gas and a minister for innovation, but considering that this is our biggest threat at this time, why the hell do we not have a climate change minister? It is just galling. It is really disappointing that the government is still relying on the last policy document that was written in 2012. I asked a question about that. I was told, "No, everything's fine;

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it's okay." A document from 2012 will give us direction on how we go forward with tackling climate change. That is simply not good enough.

We all know that the mining industry is the largest emitter of carbon and we understand that a fracking inquiry is underway, but we are not talking about emissions in regard to fracking. We have a moratorium in the south west, which is great, but in the north west there is the potential for thousands of wells that will produce a huge carbon bubble. That is just not acceptable. I understand the arguments around what fracking does to the watertable, but we have to look at what it does to what we put into the air. That is what we breathe, that is what is heating up the planet, and that is what we really need to look at. The liquefied natural gas sector is one of Western Australia's largest carbon polluters. It accounts for 30 per cent of the state's carbon pollution. That is a huge amount of carbon, but that sector pays the least amount of royalties. We pay for its pollution, yet it is extracting the people's resources and the state is basically getting nothing for it. We need to look at our royalty system and the responsibility that sector has to the community. As we have seen across the world, after companies have finished fracking and extracted the gas, they just leave and nothing is left for the people who are left behind. It is definitely a problem that we need to keep looking to address.

I have also spoken about housing and my belief that housing is a fundamental human right, but for many Western Australians, owning their own home is an unattainable dream. Anglicare WA's recent housing snapshot highlighted that out of 2.9 million Western Australians, 240 000 are currently living below the poverty line. For households on income support, only four per cent of Perth rentals are affordable. Nearly 80 per cent of people on benefits are also locked out of the private rental market. We always talk about how we are coming off the back of a housing boom, that prices are softening and there is a glut, but there is still the legacy of people being unable to afford to get into even private rental housing. People on a youth allowance or Newstart cannot afford to rent. People who mention that on an application for a share house will be dismissed by the real estate agent because they know those people cannot afford it. A huge portion of our community lives below the poverty line. We really need to look at how we prioritise housing. The government's housing strategy is heartening, because 1 000 new homes will be built over the next four years. A number of them will be put around the heavy rail systems around the Metronet project, but about 13 000 people will still be on the social housing waitlist. That is 14 000 people waiting for housing, but only 1 000 new houses. That is not enough, and it will not address the crisis we are in at the moment. They are the 14 000 people we know about, but a lot of people do not even report that they are constantly couch surfing or sleeping rough in alleyways or parks. Every night people in this state sleep in those places with no security or hope, considering the waitlist. It takes approximately seven years to even be considered for social housing. That is disheartening and crushing, so a lot of people have lost hope. We need to look at how we can get more out of our community, get more money into this sector and protect people and give them what should be a human right—a roof over their head.

Members have heard me speak in this place about the games industry. I have pressed the government with questions about whether it will fund games developers in this state, an industry that is twice the size of the film industry. I was heartened when the minister coughed up \$50 000 to support the games industry by getting people to conferences and getting their products online. But that still does not address the issue of the hundreds, if not thousands, of people leaving the state to go to other states, such as South Australia and Victoria, where they can get support. South Australia has spent \$2 million to support this industry. There are too many reasons for games developers not to stay in WA. These people are looking to go to a state that will support them. WA does not do that at the moment. We need to treat this issue seriously. We are very lucky that we are in the same time zone as much of South-East Asia. If there was government support behind the industry, we could have a market that attracted many more investors than are attracted to markets in other states. It is not much money. If we put money behind them, other people will come.

I have also asked questions about Bush Forever sites. Forever should be forever, but, unfortunately, for many of these sites, it is not. A lot of these urban precious places are under threat. When developers come in, they say, "It's degraded. There's no reason why we shouldn't be able to put a road through it or put a house on top of it." It is a chicken-and-egg thing. I think it has been nearly seven years since a government has put money into Bush Forever sites. That is completely unacceptable because, at the end of the day, it is death by a thousand cuts across regional spaces and across the metropolitan region. A lot of these precious places have been degraded only because the government has put no money into supporting them. That money is seven years overdue. A lot of community groups fully support them and are calling for immediate action. There was a lot of hope going into the previous election that a new government would save these places, because they need saving. By the time these precious places are assessed, they will be gone and endangered species such as the black cockatoo and other species that we take for granted will be a thing of the past. We must protect our urban precious places.

In closing, if we are looking to do our job in this place and we want to look the community in the eye and say, "We're there for you", we should really be protecting people who are doing it tough. There are reports of high unemployment and that the boom is well and truly over, and we are left with a whole bunch of people who had no

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say in the increase in our cost of living and in the way the housing industry exploded and overheated through different measures, such as negative gearing, that helped investors but not other people. If this government wants its legacy to be known as fighting for the everyday person, it should look at different ways to protect people. As I said before, we should shield people from full cost-reflective prices over the next four years. We know who these people are—people on Newstart, the pension and Youth Allowance and students—and all these thousands of people across our state need to be supported. A small amount of money can really go a long way in a lot of people's lives. I think we should be doing more.

**HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral)** [3.04 pm]: I would like to say a few words with regard to the Mining and Pastoral Region—the area I represent—and what it has missed out on, what it has and what it does not have.

Labor's pledge to increase local content in government contracts was very much made an election issue. I fully support this direction, but I fear that those good intentions have not made their way into the department that manages small, medium and large work contracts. It is so important that businesses in regional and remote communities are given every opportunity of preference at some level when contracts are awarded. I remember that back in my days in local government, prior to the Local Government Act 1995, there was a percentage to mark-up for local content. I am not sure what it was exactly, but it was either five or 10 per cent. That was obliterated later, but that is the type of provision that needs to be put back in. We must also determine the difference between genuinely locally based companies as opposed to businesses that come up and set up an office in a small regional town and put in a tender as a local tenderer. I guess that down in the big smoke, it is quite hard to work out whether or not they are local. Prior to the election, Labor's "Plan for the Kimberley" booklet included the following commitment; I quote from page 11 —

All government agencies will be required to include local content and local jobs as a key criterion in tender evaluation and other relevant procurement processes.

It continues —

- **A McGowan Labor government will close existing loopholes in government policies to ensure the Buy Local guidelines on the use of local businesses and workers are applied to regional projects and tender arrangements including to head contractors.**

Local contractors spend their money locally—I do not think I have to explain that—and, of course, they employ locally and understand the environment and the people. They are often the most effective way of getting things done. A slightly more expensive quote from a local business is much more likely to be an accurate reflection of the cost of carrying out the work instead of an outside company putting in a low quote, getting the work and then running over schedule, submitting variations and channelling the profits out of town, which is a concern. There have been a few examples recently that demonstrate this scenario. The first involves a water driller who has operated in the West Kimberley for over 30 years, with an excellent track record and local knowledge. He was not invited to tender for work on the nearby Cape Leveque Road. For those who do not know where Cape Leveque is, it is north of Broome. Cape Leveque Road will be sealed over the next couple of years, which is fantastic. The work was awarded to a company based over 1 000 kilometres away. This local company is the very first return with multiple Google searches on this topic. It begs the question: how much effort is put into securing the best value and most appropriate contractor to carry out what is often vital and important work?

The second example also comes from Broome and involves a local security company that employs local people—including, at times, well over 50 per cent Indigenous people—and which lost its contract to provide security services at Broome Hospital. A note was sent by Lycan Pty Ltd, which operates as Werewolf and North West Coast Security in Broome and Derby. It reads —

... we write to advise of the WA Health Department's awarding, on November 2017, of a 5-year contract worth over \$2 million to fly-in fly-out ... Perth company for provision of security to the Broome Hospital.

It employed some four full-time and 24 casual employees and had 70 per cent local content. The interesting thing is that the company that got the tender, Resolute Security Services, is a fly in, fly out company that costs approximately \$41 000 more each year than Lycan. It was \$41 000 a year dearer than the local company, Lycan, which had been providing the service for four years with local people in the local area. One would have thought that that was a message in itself. On top of that, the government is very lucky to have the local member for Kimberley there. I have a copy of a letter from Josie Farrer, MLA, the member for Kimberley, who wrote to Minister Cook to plead with him to reconsider this. One of the reasons Lycan missed out on the contract was that Perth procurement said that it did not have local knowledge. Well, it has local knowledge. One would have thought that a company that has been operating for four years would have an edge over a company that is going to fly in and fly out, not live in Broome and not contribute to the housing situation, schools and the medical situation. It would have available other security guards to perhaps work in some of the hotels, as well as in Derby, of course. The feedback it got was that it had a lack of cultural awareness training. I would have thought it could have worked

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that out fairly quickly, with 70 per cent being Indigenous. I am sure that the government would want to start pulling that into line if it wants to adhere to what it espoused before the election.

**Hon Peter Collier** interjected.

**Hon KEN BASTON:** Honourable member, yes, of course, I know there are others. I just plea now that ministers look at the procurement policies they make, and make it very clear to the people who are responsible for awarding contracts that the Buy Local policy is to be implemented. That, of course, has the capacity to allow sustainable economies to drive growth, job opportunities and improved services.

I would like to touch on an issue that has been on the agenda a fair bit: the live sheep trade. For much of this year my office has been busy responding to emails and calls from farmers and pastoralists who are deeply concerned about the state of the live sheep trade. Recent events have led to a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety. Going back a few years to when the Indonesian cattle trade was stopped by the federal government of the day, I think Joe Ludwig was the then minister responsible. He stopped that but, interestingly enough, it was stopped for only four weeks. The live sheep trade has now been stopped for nine weeks. For nine and a bit weeks, not one animal has left Western Australia in the live sheep trade. There is great uncertainty.

The wool industry has come back, and of course that industry dictates how long producers hang onto an animal and how many cuts of wool they get off them. In normal circumstances, when the price of wool had dropped and nothing was happening, the animals were sent off as lambs quickly as possible. Most of those went into local trade, but also export as well. Once they have grown wool, producers will probably run those sheep up to four years old, and then they will go overseas.

Western Australian sheep exporters have a very good, long and established relationship with buyers in the Middle East, and we can supply very high quality, essential food products. Moves to undermine or to destabilise this trade are looked upon almost as a betrayal of trust in those markets. When I was minister, I travelled to Saudi Arabia and met with some of these producers. After the live export ban on cattle, which was actually for killing them in abattoirs in Vietnam and other places like that in Asia, we started the exporter supply chain assurance system. That system was also put in place for the sheep trade. The sheep were not even involved in that at all, in a sense, but they of course were locked out as well. Saudi Arabia has not bought an animal since. In fact, when I visited, people there were quite hostile in the sense that they could not believe, after we had been trading with them for a number of generations and they had not done anything wrong, that we would put the ESCAS qualifications on them. They had just purchased a \$70 million vessel, which they had to put back on the market at a loss of some 30 per cent. The company had turned to North African countries to supply their sheep.

I visited the company's feedlot, which had something like 87 000 sheep under cover, in the bare desert. They were being fed on cheap nuts and lucerne hay, and I have to say, the product smelled superb. I dare say I could have just about eaten it myself; it just lacked the cream. Those animals were in the best condition I have seen for a long time. There were sheep and goats; most of them came from North Africa, and they looked magnificent. The Saudis certainly expressed their concerns about dealing with us. I am trying to illustrate that the live sheep trade is a significant part of Western Australia's global trade interface, and the way we treat our customers reverberates around the world.

Australia exiting this industry does not mean that the industry no longer exists; it simply means that the country with the highest standards and best oversight is no longer participating in it. The domestic market simply cannot absorb these sheep if they cannot be exported, and the chilled export trade is still decades away from replacing the demand for live sheep. The need for live sheep does not reduce in the northern summer, so our producers must have access to that market. I agree that some of those ships obviously need to be upgraded; however, over the years I was minister, I visited various cattle ships and I found them absolutely immaculate. I look at that footage with disbelief that, firstly, lambs were in the footage—they should not have been on there—and also that the sheep were so dirty. Somebody told me the other day that what they thought might have happened was that they had sprayed water over the animals to try to keep them cool, and the humidity just made it worse, so they stifled and could not breathe. That was obvious as well. There is no doubt that the disruption will certainly cause other markets to be hard to get back afterwards.

In 2016–17, just over 80 per cent of the sheep exported from Australia were from Western Australia, which makes the trade extremely important to our state. It supports numerous communities and businesses, including shearers, feedlots and transport companies. They will all continue to experience hardship if this uncertainty remains. It is the uncertainty that we need to get on top of now. I encourage the minister to please listen very carefully to the concerns of the Western Australian sheep farming communities and to keep working to improve industry outcomes for sheep producers and their communities. A ban on the trade in Western Australia will be a loss to global animal welfare standards and to our very old and important trading partners.

**Extract from Hansard**

[COUNCIL — Tuesday, 14 August 2018]

p4228d-4245a

Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Rick Mazza; President; Hon Tim Clifford; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Stephen Dawson; Acting President

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I would like to now turn to a bit of infrastructure in this state—that is, the section of the Goldfields Highway between Wiluna and Meekatharra. The unsealed kilometres between Wiluna and Meekatharra may seem a small, inconsequential piece of transport infrastructure in a remote and sparsely populated part of our state, but it is much more than that. If sealed, it could potentially help transform this part of the state. The distance between Wiluna and Meekatharra is approximately 180 kilometres, and it is a very straight road running east–west. Members who have flown over it or travelled along it will know that, on a dead-still day, the dust rises and just stays there for what seems like an eternity. Of course, people try to overtake through the dust on that road. If one flies overhead, one can see plumes of dust coming from each vehicle for kilometres before it starts to settle. Sealing that section will also save 140 kilometres each way on the sealed route to the Pilbara, which is enough to encourage traffic to go direct. That in turn will ease pressure on both Great Eastern and Great Northern Highways heading north. It will also facilitate over-width traffic hauling heavy plant to Kalgoorlie–Boulder for rebuilds, avoiding the narrow, winding and hilly road from Moora south—a great improvement for road safety on this notorious section of road. It will also improve the economies of the eastern goldfields and the Pilbara, both of which have been affected in recent years by changes in the mining industry and by the global price of commodities. Absolutely critical for the Pilbara is cost control and diversification of markets for Kalgoorlie–Boulder. For 125 years the eastern goldfields has been the economic powerhouse of Western Australia, yet it has received scant in return for the billions of dollars it has contributed to the economy. After all this time it would be a great shame to withhold the promised \$60 million needed to seal that road, but \$60 million has been taken away from that road.

A number of operational mines are located in the region, including the Matilda-Wiluna Gold Operation, which is about five kilometres south of Wiluna. I remember going to the opening of the Magellan mine—which is now mothballed—now known as Paroo Station Mine, with Alan Carpenter, the then Premier of Western Australia. As I have said, sealing this road was in the forward estimates prior to the election, but it was removed in the 2017–18 budget, much to the dismay of the people in the region, many of whom are some of the most isolated and underserved in this state. Sealing the Meekatharra–Wiluna Road would improve access to medical services, improve safety and encourage more heavy mining machinery to travel to Kalgoorlie, rather than to Perth, for service and refits. It would improve the regional economy and ease heavy vehicle congestion in the outer metropolitan region. For over 40 years the people of this area have been waiting for this road to be sealed.

The next road I would like to touch on is one that I have spoken about on numerous occasions in this place, and that is Tanami Road. Prior to the election the government also said that it would like to see this road sealed. I hope there will be a concentrated and coordinated effort at a state and federal level to seal Tanami Road, which stretches between Alice Springs and Halls Creek. Sealing Tanami Road would be nothing short of a nation-building project. Making the Tanami Road passable, which is the problem, requires millions of dollars to be spent every year on building it up and making it ready for sealing, and then along comes the wet season and the trucks and all that work is mucked up again and it starts again the next season. Tanami Road needs to be sealed once and for all. Of course, it will be expensive to seal, at around \$300 million. At present, the people who use Tanami Road save more than 1 000 kilometres on their journey from northern Western Australian to South Australia and New South Wales. It also saves 270 kilometres to travel to Kununurra, which is quite surprising, for tourists, Indigenous communities and people using it for mining purposes and transporting livestock. In the wet season, people who live in the remote Aboriginal communities of Balgo, Mulan and Billiluna must charter aircraft to fly in people to deliver health services and food rations. In 2016 the estimated cost of sealing this road was about \$300 million, depending on the width and standard of the road. The work done by the Shire of Meekatharra on the road heading towards Gascoyne Junction, which I think was some 30 or 40 kays, has produced a magnificent road. It may not be up to the standard of Main Roads, but it is a sealed road. Many of these roads are on a smaller scale to start with, and they need to be rebuilt later. Another matter I have not mentioned is that tourists who travel on Tanami Road stay in the Kimberley before they head back down through Broome and on to Perth, which creates a circle route from the eastern states to Western Australia.

I would now like to touch on Broome boating facilities, for which \$9.7 million has been allocated in the budget. Although I welcome any improvement to boating facilities in Broome, I encourage the government to remember that this is only a starting point and is in no way a solution to the problem that the town is facing. The problem is that the town sits on a magnificent piece of coastline that offers incredible fishing and recreational opportunities, but very limited infrastructure is available for small to medium-sized boats. Answers to questions during estimates confirmed that much of that \$9.7 million will be spent on the redevelopment of Broome Town Beach. People who know Broome will know where that beach is and know that it is getting washed away. A lot of money will go into fixing that, but not the boat ramps. Although this is a very worthwhile project driven by the Shire of Broome, it is incorrect to describe this money as a “boon for Broome boaties”, which was in the title of the minister’s media release on 8 December 2017. Much of the potential lifestyle and economic benefits of improved access to the sea are lost because the town’s boating facilities are extremely limited. Boat ownership in Broome is high, but is limited to small vessels that can be backed into the water with a trailer and steadied by hand. I have heard some horrific stories about accidents that have happened there. Sometimes there is a nasty chop at the ramp and the boats



**Extract from Hansard**

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lift up and come down with their motors still down. I have heard stories about not only motors being broken off, but also people's legs being broken when propellers have come down. Some boats have even sunk.

In 2016 researchers from the Western Australian Marine Science Institution analysed a year's worth of video imagery from the popular Entrance Point boat ramp, adjacent to the Broome Fishing Club. For anyone who has been there, that is the fishing club on the hill looking out onto Roebuck Bay. WAMSI explored the factors affecting the launching of recreational boats as part of its broader study looking at human use in the Kimberley. According to its website, WAMSI found —

In total, 6057 recreational boat launches were recorded by the Western Australian Department of Fisheries camera at Entrance Point during the 12 month study. The figure shows that, despite the town of Broome only having a relatively small resident population of about 13,000 people, boating is a popular activity.

To put it into context, the total at Entrance Point is equivalent to about 22 per cent of the total number of launches per year at Hillarys boat ramp which is one of the busiest in the Perth Metropolitan area.

I also add that Entrance Point is only one of a number of smaller boat ramps, and that if we were to add in the others, that number would add up very quickly to 8 000 a year. The geology of the region makes designing a marine-safe boat harbour challenging and, of course, very expensive. One go has been had at it and the price very quickly got up to about \$50 million. If it was done properly, the benefits to the Kimberley would be immense. If people were able to safely keep their boats in the water, there would be a surge in the economic activity that comes along with larger boat ownership, improved tourism business opportunities and the growth of businesses that support the industry. In fact, the boat ramps in the smaller towns of Augusta, Shark Bay, Exmouth and even Coral Bay are far superior. I think the Minister for Agriculture and Food was the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure when the boat ramp was built in Coral Bay. The only thing she did wrong was put the boat ramp in the wrong place, but never mind. It was an excellent boat ramp. I think it cost about \$9.8 million, if I remember correctly. I note that \$1 million has been set aside to investigate the scope works required, identify a suitable location and undertake a feasibility study. I strongly encourage the Minister for Transport to keep a very close eye on this and ensure that a feasibility study is undertaken, and eventually the planning and funding of marine infrastructure that will allow the industry to flourish. We need more than just a safe boat ramp. We need infrastructure to allow people to keep their boats in the water, purchase larger vessels and support businesses such as marine mechanics, engineers and vessel refits. I advocate something similar to the Cullen Bay development in Darwin. That works with a lock, and is an excellent system. That is exactly what would fit in Broome.

My fear is that small changes and spending relatively small amounts of money on bandaid solutions will simply see this process pushed back further. While on this topic, I would also like to say how much I welcome the proposal of a Kimberley marine support base—a concept to construct a new multi-user port facility in Broome. This could be an absolute game changer for the Kimberley and open up a huge number of export opportunities. I hope it is encouraged by the state and federal governments. It is proposed that a ramp be built that is virtually a floating wharf, which will run beside the existing jetty. The project has the potential to receive containers. Kimberley Marine Support Base Pty Ltd suggests that it costs about \$729 to bring a container down to Fremantle from Singapore. To get that container back to the Kimberley by road costs about \$3 000. The potential saving and the cost of transporting machinery, equipment, large parts and general goods to northern WA is significant. KMSB estimates that the project would lead to the movement of approximately 2 200 vessels a year out of the Broome port, up from about 1 000 currently. I have every hope that this project will become a reality. We would like to see it supported as it is well deserved.

Something else that I would like to touch on is hydraulic fracturing. It is certainly relevant in the Kimberley. I am looking forward to the report that was recommended by the scientific panel inquiry, which I believe will be out in October. I will be interested to see what it contains. There still needs to be a lot of community engagement and transferring of knowledge about the process from the industry to the wider population. However, the release of the community submissions highlights how much support there is for the industry to proceed across a broad range of groups. Allowing this industry to develop under appropriate and carefully enforced regulations should occur. It would be transformative for a regional economy such as the West Kimberley, away from reliance on government services and tourism.

I am a strong believer in the Ord River irrigation scheme. I wanted to touch on the subject of water. I encourage the Minister for Water to take a close look at the situation facing Ord leaseholders whose water allocations have reduced significantly. I was up there about six weeks ago. The growers, backed by the Shire of Wyndham—East Kimberley, have fought the decision, arguing that larger water allocations are required, even if the allocations are not fully used each year. The larger allocations allow for forward planning and add value to their businesses. In other words, if they are putting in crops that use more water, they have the allocation to back them up if needed. Of course, the water is distributed through a co-op up there. The larger allocations allow for forward planning. If the allocations

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were previously approved, there is no reason why they should alter. This sort of meddling by the government creates insecurity and reluctance to invest. It is impossible to envisage what can be achieved if there is no guarantee that a grower will have access to the amount of water required or if the allocation changes whenever the government sees fit. I think it is extremely important to have that continuity of supply. The growers in the Shire of Wyndham–East Kimberley challenged that decision and spent nearly \$2 million to build their own dam. They won their first case but they are still not secure.

The potential for cotton to contribute significantly to the economy is growing. I was up there looking at the cotton. The growers planted cotton in February and March to determine which month was the best time for planting. They were also trying to see whether they could get two crops in a year, not two crops of cotton but perhaps one crop of cotton and one crop of maize or something else. The thing that interests me is that 60 per cent of the weight of cottonseed is in the seed pod. The seed pods contain 15 to 20 per cent protein. As occurs in Queensland, they use the cottonseed to feed cattle. Farmers can have a feedlot. It is very high in protein and not utilised for anything else. With 10 000 hectares of land, some 30 000 tonnes of seed could be produced. With a top-up of hay and maize, which is grown up there as well, farmers can run a feedlot of 70 000 head of cattle in addition to the cotton product. If the land is increased to 20 000 hectares, the seed production would double.

After talking to Kimberley Agricultural Investment Pty Ltd, I understand that it still does not have the rights to Carlton Plain finalised. The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation has signed off on it; however, when I was up there last, the title had not been released. It may have happened in the last few weeks.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Member, it's gone through an appeals process.

**Hon KEN BASTON:** I thank the minister. I thought he had ticked off on it.

I would like to touch on law and order in Kununurra. It is an issue. I get heaps of phone calls about it. A lot of youth seem to be misplaced. There are many reasons for these problems. The solution requires a multifaceted approach and support for the police force. An article in *The Kimberley Echo* on 19 July 2018 suggested that a program of keeping young offenders out of jail and in their communities under a supervised program designed to get them out on country and learn more about their place in the world was a positive development. If carried out correctly, it could have enormous ongoing benefits for the whole of the community and, most importantly, the next generation. There is no doubt that many businesses and residents have been feeling the financial strain, fear and stress caused by theft, property damage and threatening behaviour carried out by a small number of people in the community. It is my belief that the police community would benefit from additional resources and extra police, and a permanent dog squad could be used for both drug detection and public order and tracking and apprehension. A canine squad that is suitable for the Kimberley climate and conditions would be a welcome addition. I raised this during budget estimates. It was said that the dogs would probably not take to the heat. The dingoes have lived there for a long time and are pretty tough. Maybe we could train a couple of them to be the new police dogs of the north. It has been put to me by various police officers both in Broome and Kununurra that they have been used fairly successfully. I know the Minister for Regional Development said that they had used them in Port Hedland. I think it is something that can be done.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** We could use them as quarantine dogs, too.

**Hon KEN BASTON:** We could. In fact, minister, I had one as a sheepdog for two years. Everyone told me if I could keep it for two years, it would stop killing sheep. They were basically right—in 18 and a half months it had knocked over 13 sheep and 25 goats, and bitten me on the leg once!

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** You are not serious about your suggestion, then?

**Hon KEN BASTON:** I have to say it was one of the best sheepdogs I have ever had. It was amazing. It never barked of course. It worked in the heat. It would run across hot ground doing everything and it was just amazing. It could kill an animal quicker than I could stop it from killing it, within about 10 feet.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Do you think we could use them for quarantine?

**Hon KEN BASTON:** The minister would have to talk to police about that. They seem to be the experts on which dogs should go where.

Kununurra is a great town. I believe it has so much potential. It has an incredible landscape, a rich Indigenous heritage and almost immeasurable economic potential. Looking at the history of the Ord and how it started, back in 1941 an ALP Premier—I cannot remember his name now—was the first one to get it off the ground.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Was it John Willcock?

**Hon KEN BASTON:** I think the minister is right.

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Despite a few issues, I would recommend it to anyone visiting and staying in Kununurra. The Ord Valley Muster of course is a must, particularly for those people who have not seen it. It is very good.

I would like to move down into the cooler climates—that is, Exmouth and Cape Range National Park. The Minister for Environment has a fair idea about this. I would like to use some of my time today to discuss the interaction between Cape Range National Park and Ningaloo Marine Park and the surrounding communities, particularly Exmouth. A number of issues that are bubbling away in Exmouth are starting to create general concern and unease, especially tourism-based businesses. They are increasingly being negatively impacted by the growing commercial activity conducted by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions while the shire picks up the bill for road maintenance, rubbish collection and boat ramp upkeep. This is despite the department collecting over \$6 million in revenue from various avenues, including entry fees, camp fees and whale shark swim fees. Over the past three years, during the expansion of the Cape Range National Park camping areas, according to the Exmouth Chamber of Commerce, Exmouth township parks have experienced a 20 to 22 per cent drop in camping nights. Adequate consultation needs to be undertaken to determine what can be done to improve this situation and ensure that the relationship between the national parks and the town of Exmouth delivers benefits for the people who live in the area all year round, and ensure investment in the area. Of course, everyone said that World Heritage status would bring heaps of people and heaps of money and everything else. We have seen that in Denham, Shark Bay. That was the first World Heritage listing in the state. That was in the early 1980s. I think the population is probably less now than what it was in the early 1980s.

It is also interesting that there is total interest in lithium mining. I am very pleased that Derby and Broome will benefit from the upcoming Sheffield Resources mineral sands project. It has had a few hiccups. It has had to get over some hurdles—native title et cetera—but I believe it is strongly heading in the right direction. It is located about halfway through; it is about 60 kilometres west of Derby. It will not have a fly in, fly out workforce; it will be drive in, drive out. It will be good for both towns to have that stability. It will employ 240 people on a long-term basis. They will be based up there and not fly in, fly out. On top of that, it has a mine life of 42 years, which is a pretty good mine life. The company has done a lot of work. It has already started training staff while waiting for the various applications to be approved. I think it is a good-news story.

I would like to touch on some of the exciting things that are happening in the Mining and Pastoral Region, including the discovery the other day by Carnarvon Petroleum and Quadrant Energy of more oil and gas off the coast at the North West Shelf. That is always good for the economy. The possible piping of the Browse gas back to the North West Shelf will be a big thing as well because there will not have to be so much capital outlaid for the infrastructure building that, apart from the cost of the pipeline. That is jobs for this state.

There is also the expansion of BHP iron ore. Its next mine will be bigger than Mt Whaleback. Rio Tinto of course cannot be outdone—it is extending its output as well. There is also the lithium mines in the Pilbara–East Kimberley. I believe the minister opened up one the other day in the East Kimberley.

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** Browns Range.

**Hon KEN BASTON:** It is excellent to see that. I believe that is a trial one at this stage and will be developed further.

Another thing up there is the proposed prawn farm worth \$30 million. If it gets up, it will be a \$1.6 billion property. When I was the Minister for Fisheries, I went to Jeddah, near the Red Sea, to look at the biggest prawn farm in the world. It produces 100 000 tonnes. They are smaller prawns. We were a little dubious about whether we would be successful in farming black tiger prawns, but one can only hope—they command a premium price.

I have spoken in this place before about Cone Bay, which is a barramundi farm about 163 kays north of Derby. That has been bought by a Singaporean company. I heard the other day it was sold for \$18 million. This company is already in the trade of breeding fish. I think it will be a tremendous boost for Western Australia to have that aquaculture with that amount of capital in it. That is for 2 000 tonnes—it will go up to 6 000 tonnes. It really needs to go right up to about 20 000 tonnes to be very profitable. I do not know whether everyone has been out there, but the product is superb. I was very proud to be the first politician in this state to ever go out there. I have watched it with keen interest. We are just about coming to the start of the next financial year and finishing this one.

**HON ROBIN SCOTT (Mining and Pastoral)** [3.47 pm]: In 2015, the now Premier, in his budget reply speech, described the budget as telling a tale of two states. The two states in his monologue described Western Australia along the lines of reality versus fiction. On one hand, he said the 2015–16 budget alluded to where Western Australia could be, whereas, on the other hand, the 2015–16 budget spoke of where WA was in 2015. After the now Premier boasted of his vision for Western Australia, he promised that under his leadership Western Australia would be “a prosperous, vibrant, successful, caring, compassionate and fair state, brimming with opportunities”. Fast-forward to this administration’s second opportunity to fiscally get it right, the honourable members of this house were presented with a pile of numerical line items accompanied by a collection of excuses

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to justify the ineffectiveness of this Treasury, which essentially boils down to one statement: we inherited these financial problems from the previous government. Thank you, Premier; the honourable members of this house already knew that. However, how has this government improved the situation? Is Treasury so lacking in financial skills that it believes the only way to return to surplus is through burdening the people of this state by shutting down industries and putting up the cost of utilities? Like the two tales mentioned, this budget also tells a dichotomous anecdote: a delightful tale of urban development versus a disappointing story of regional neglect; the treatment of the haves versus the have-nots; or the short-sighted support of local projects versus the far-sighted ignorance of and punitive measures against development, jobs and the fabric of Western Australia.

Back in 2015, the current Premier said, I quote —

A budget, by definition, is based on numbers but it also should have within it a sense of vision ... for the future ... a roadmap to a better future for all;

That is unless, of course, you live in regional Western Australia. The central question, which the current Premier indicated should have been answered in the development of the 2015–16 budget, is: does it provide good value for the taxpayer or does it not? I wish that government members had honestly asked that question of themselves and amended the line items and appropriations accordingly. As members of an administration who screamed murder once state debt reached \$20 billion under the previous government, what will this government say when the forward estimates point to state debt increasing under their leadership? The debt will reach \$39.1 billion in the 2018–19 financial year and will peak at \$42 billion in 2019–20. This administration campaigned on assuring the Western Australian people that the budget would be back in the black by 2019–20 and that debt would be reduced over time like a mortgage. However, the appropriations tell a different tale and the forward estimates paint an even bleaker picture for Western Australian families and businesses.

The Premier accused members of the previous government of being political criminals because they acted contrary to their election promises. That is precisely what Western Australia needs—a government without broken promises. The Premier said on the campaign trail, I quote —

There will be no new taxes on West Australians, full stop. If we are elected, there will be no new taxes on West Australians or increases in taxes on West Australians. If we're elected, full stop.

Just a few months after that sentence was completed, by September, he had already broken that pledge in the government's first budget that increased the payroll tax. Proudly, this government announced that it was sparing mums and dads pain by targeting only those who could afford to pay more. Nonetheless, this government's first budget stimulated an increase in household costs by an average of \$440 a year due to increases in charges. Water, sewerage and drainage fees increased by six per cent a year. Public transport fares rose by 1.8 per cent a year. Motor injury insurance increased by 2.8 per cent a year. Driver's licence fees increased by 1.7 per cent a year. Vehicle licence charges increased by 5.5 per cent a year and the emergency services levy increased by 3.3 per cent a year. This administration's second annual fiscal allocations gave rise to a seven per cent increase in electricity tariffs, a 5.5 per cent increase in water, sewerage and drainage charges, a 1.5 per cent increase in public transportation charges and a 3.8 per cent increase in motor vehicle licence charges.

The budget works under the assumption that household spending is expected to take over as a primary driver of employment growth in the medium term by creating 50 000 service sector jobs. But how will it do that? As it stands, the Western Australian household is cumulatively forking out \$700 a year directly from an increase in charges. Is it not a logical assumption that this spike in the cost of living will ultimately result in a decrease in household consumption, with the average household having to make tough spending decisions? Economists from JP Morgan and the National Australia Bank suggest that a decrease in household spending is already happening. Beyond staple consumer goods like groceries, Western Australians are keeping close to their dwindling purse strings. Currently, the household savings ratio has decreased to 2.1 per cent, a decrease of six percentage points in the last three years. Does Treasury have a magic wand to change the spending habits of Western Australian families after taking away their hard-earned dollars?

Like the current Premier said in 2015, Western Australian families are “under assault” by this hopeless “dim, dismal document”. It looks like just another case of the pot calling the kettle black. In 2015, the current Premier criticised the budget as a “job-killing budget”. The irony is that this administration created a similar monstrosity. This budget is another job-killing budget. Although in 2015 the current Premier called for long-term planning for Western Australia's economy and social life, this budget appropriates a 4.7 per cent decrease in funding for the Economic Regulation Authority. Meanwhile, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development will experience a 9.6 per cent decrease in appropriations. The regional industry and community development investment facilitation service will experience a 12 per cent decrease in staff numbers. The regional technical and technological development service will experience a 15 per cent decrease in staff numbers, and the regional skills and knowledge development service will see a five per cent decrease in staff

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numbers. How does this administration expect to foster an increase in economic effectiveness by reducing organisational capacity? It is via the very same actions that the Premier criticised in 2015. Do members of this government merely say what needs to be said with the full intention of doing the opposite? In one breath, the Treasurer hailed this budget as a stimulus for “creating jobs and strengthening the State’s economy”, but in another breath, he said appropriations would destabilise the backbone of employment and the state’s economy.

This government acknowledges the abundant benefits that the resources industry presents to maintaining the longevity of Western Australia’s economic ecosystem. It is no secret that the resources industry is a constant contributor to the Western Australian economy, accounting for 29 per cent of gross state product in 2016–17. The mining industry directly employs 110 000 people and indirectly drives increasing labour force demands in other sectors such as the manufacturing and service industries. Notwithstanding, this government’s budget treats the industry like a disgruntled mistress, particularly with the exploration incentive scheme. The EIS will now operate as a cost recovery initiative, partly funded by increasing the cost of mining tenement rentals by 90 per cent in this budget and, according to forward estimates, a further 48 per cent in the 2019–20 budget. The Treasurer has hailed this decision as being “financially responsible”. Previously the government granted \$10 million to the EIS each year, and in return received over \$100 million for its kindness. This government may very well have placed small mine owners and prospectors in a chokehold.

Additionally, the comments made by the Treasurer about royalties for regions funds supports my assertion that metropolitan dominance severely undermines regional development. Will this government put it in writing that there will be no further changes to royalty rates? As though that was not enough, the resources industry, under provisions in this budget, will be forced to contribute to the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund, which can best be described as a lacklustre attempt at training resources sector apprentices. Forcing the resources industry to pay for a program that does not come close to meeting the demands of the resources sector due to the inefficiencies of the training program structure is a slap in the face for all aspiring apprentices. The resources sector will have to pay for the cost of apprenticeships for apprentices who it will probably never use while this mob has reduced the funding for sector development research by approximately 33 per cent. Who is the political criminal now? This Premier, in his 2015 contribution to the budget reply speech, called for the creation of a budget that presents a “long-term plan” for coming generations. Nonetheless, he committed \$39 million to an essential slush fund to train baristas who will service the increased household consumption that never was and the 50 000 service sector jobs that were never created. This government is going to supply a surplus of baristas, I assume to serve all the tourists who are expected in the state.

For once, it would be nice if Labor would elevate its thoughts. For example, the oil and gas industry has contracts that are approved for more than 40 years, meaning today’s school leavers could spend their working lives in a lucrative career. Instead, their aspirations have been mortgaged for \$39 million as they spend their working years learning how to serve coffee correctly and make beds, while holding onto lost dreams of being entrepreneurs. This state is uniquely positioned to experience a virtual gold rush in the form of lithium. We should be training the next batch of tradespeople, engineers and professionals to support the inevitable increase in demand. Instead, as the government twiddles its thumbs and sucks the life out of miners and prospectors, rest assured that we will always be able to get a good cup of coffee.

In accordance with the current Premier’s calls in 2015 for long-range planning, his flagship election policy called for the development of Metronet. According to the Minister for Transport, Metronet is “a world-class public transport system that is smart, affordable and achievable and will create thousands of new jobs for Western Australians”. That sounds all well and good, except that Labor is now struggling to figure out how to pay for “metrodebt”. The budget indicates a \$750 million commitment from the commonwealth government. However, upon closer examination in one of the estimates committee sessions, that was found to be merely an arbitrary figure, because a business case had not been submitted. That is a deliberate case of counting our chickens before they have hatched. Considering that the cost estimates for Metronet have already ballooned by \$200 million from the pre-election forecasts, this government should now find time to try a little honesty by saying, “We don’t know how much this is going to cost, or if it’s going to create any jobs, or if it’s even going to be achievable.”

The loud message that this budget sends to our regions is in the continued de-prioritisation of regional development and reprioritisation of metropolitan advancement. Our regions are stuck in the Dark Ages, for goodness sake! As the famous saying goes, “A team is only as good as its weakest link.” The lack of comparable development in regional Western Australia is our weakest link. As a state, we cannot continue to encourage metropolitan expansion to the detriment of regional improvement. For how many more years do the locals in the midwest region have to wait for the sealing of the Meekatharra–Wiluna road, when it was first promised 60 years ago? The Premier has failed to use his context as a country-town boy to push for any tangible improvements to the livelihoods of regional inhabitants.

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When will this government, or any government for that matter, deliver an MRI scanner for Kalgoorlie Health Campus? Of the \$8.8 billion committed by this government to “improving high quality health care”, mere peanuts has been offered for regional health improvements. This government has appropriated \$1.8 million to Fiona Stanley Hospital, which was built in 2009, yet Laverton Hospital has been sentenced to sustained neglect. It was last upgraded in 1973. The pledge that this administration made to Laverton Hospital was dramatically reduced from \$19.5 million to zero in the blink of an eye. The Minister for Health said that his government made those promises because it believes the health system should be working for everyone. We believe in putting patients first. I can tell members categorically that the state of Laverton Hospital is not working for everyone. Perhaps egalitarian statements that suggest improvements to the livelihoods of regional people lose their appeal once the campaign season has run its course.

In closing, I will leave honourable members with paraphrases from the current Premier’s monologue as he analysed the 2015 budget. As members will come to see, these are highly relevant and appropriate in describing the incompetent actions of this government in delivering this budget document. This budget is a hopelessly dim and dismal document. It fails woefully to present a prosperous, vibrant, successful, caring and compassionate vision. It is two light-years away from being a viable long-term plan to ensure a thriving economy and robust social life. This budget is a jobs-killing budget, because in it this government has made promises that it cannot keep. As a result, this is a document that details political selfishness, as it violently assaults regional development, electricity consumers and small businesses. In preparing this document, the government failed abysmally to conduct an appropriate examination of the economic opportunities that Western Australia has to offer. The Premier, although raised in the country, is either unaware or operating in blatant disregard of the important needs of regional Western Australia. This government is essentially a mob of political criminals because it has acted contrary to the promises it gave to the people of Western Australia.

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Mr Acting President, I do not believe it is appropriate for the member to use the language that he has used, and I ask that he withdraw, please.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas):** Honourable member, I must agree that the use of the word “criminals” in this case is unparliamentary and I would ask you to withdraw.

**Hon ROBIN SCOTT:** I apologise, Mr Acting President, and withdraw the word “criminals”.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon ROBIN SCOTT:** This administration does not take responsibility for its diluted planning actions. It is always the fault of the previous government. At this point, that is an exhausted excuse to justify this government’s lack of creativity. Thankfully, regional Western Australians will survive this administration because they are resilient, hardworking and very proud.

**HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [4.05 pm]:** This budget has been described as a very dry, predictable and mundane budget. I do not actually have a problem with that. Many years ago, a business mentor of mine advised that I should never employ an accountant with a bow tie and a gold tooth. He said that creative accountants with flair will only get us into trouble. The advice was that we should look for an accountant who is devoid of personality and very boring. I am not having a go at any accountants here! I was advised that is the best way to keep out of trouble. Therefore, I do not have a problem with this fairly conservative budget.

However, unfortunately, the cost of living has been hit yet again in this budget. Households will be forced to pay an extra seven per cent a year for electricity, an increase of about \$120; 5.5 per cent more for water charges; 5.8 per cent more for vehicle licence recording fees; 3.7 per cent more for driver’s licence fees; 2.4 per cent more for motor injury insurance; and 2.1 per cent more for public transport ticketing costs.

I understand this was a very challenging budget for the government. However, governments always seem to have the habit of increasing taxes and charges at a time when the economy is at its worst. That is, of course, when the community is most vulnerable. One of the most prominent features of the 2018–19 state budget is the fact that households will be hit with an extra \$292.07 a year for utilities and other fees. That is a 4.8 per cent increase in the overall cost of state government fees and charges. Unfortunately, this trickles down to households and causes many people to suffer from mortgage stress. I want to refer to an article in *The West Australian* of 9 August, which was only last week. I still get my views from *The West Australian* on occasion, members. The article states in part —

More West Australians are falling behind on their home loans, according to alarming new numbers from the country’s biggest mortgage lender.

Announcing a lower \$9.23 billion annual profit yesterday, Commonwealth Bank said the number of WA customers more than the 90 days late on their repayments blew out 20 basis points, or 15 per cent, in the June half-year to 1.5 per cent of borrowers.

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The State figure compared with Commonwealth's increased national arrears rate of 0.7 per cent, which includes loans by its WA subsidiary, Bankwest.

The bank said the blow-out in late payments reflected "pockets of stress" as "some households experienced difficulties with rising essential costs and limited income growth".

Hon Tim Clifford spoke earlier about affordable rents and affordable housing. There is another side to this story. A lot of people in urban Western Australia are the working poor. They are battling to make their mortgage repayments. These increases in utility costs are adding more pressure for those families. Some of those people want to put their house on the market so that they can get out of the mortgage trap. However, the price of houses has continued to decline. Therefore, they face the prospect of a mortgagee sale, because the price they can get for their home will not meet their borrowings, so they are in negative territory. The stress in the community is flowing on to investors. The comment has been made that investors are buying all the houses and there is not enough stock for everybody else. Let me tell members that investors are not big fat cats with millions of dollars. A lot of them are simple families—mums and dads; two parents working. Maybe they have paid off most of their house, or maybe they have paid off their house, and are looking to secure their future, so they buy an investment property. That investment property is often quite marginal for them. By the time they pay rates, their insurance, the land tax and everything else that goes with it, it becomes quite marginal, particularly the interest payments. Over the last 12 or 18 months rents have on average slumped around \$100 a week. If a property investor who is fairly highly geared loses over \$400 a month in income, it hurts a lot. Again, for them to try to get out of that they might find themselves in negative territory with the money they owe on that property. Of course, they then try to sell it and the market gets flooded, hence in Western Australia we have had a very soft real estate market for quite some years now. When we talk about putting up utilities' charges, it all sounds good for the state budget, but the flow-on to households causes a lot of pain in the hip pocket for people who are working and trying to maintain their lifestyle, whatever that lifestyle may be.

The Residential Tenancies Legislation Amendment (Family Violence) Bill 2018 was read in before we rose. I will not go into my second reading contribution on that, but that will put further pressure on landlords. Again, these are not fat cat landlords; they are just ordinary people. I think a comment was made in the other place that this was not about landlords—actually it is. If they are on a very marginal budget to try to maintain that investment property and suddenly the 12-month lease is terminated early, they could be out of pocket for two, three, four, six weeks' rent, plus they have to pay the re-leasing fees et cetera to try to get in another tenant. So, the impact on them could be quite devastating.

I return to mortgagee sales, whether for an investment property or principal place of residence. If someone has to enter into a mortgagee sale, the social impact is devastating. A lot of those people then look to the private rental market, if they can raise a bond, or social housing to try to accommodate them. The government has to be very, very mindful of putting up fees and charges when people are at their most vulnerable.

Despite some positives for the country, like the \$2 billion spend on regional roads, this is basically a fairly underwhelming budget for country Western Australia. In fact, the WAFarmers president, Tony York, expressed a similar level of disappointment when he said on 11 May —

"Given the agricultural sector is a significant contributor to growth state product and the bulk of our product is exported, WAFarmers is disappointed that the overall budget for agriculture and regional development is at best static, as the whole primary industries sector is a worthwhile investment opportunity."

Hon Colin de Grussa said we are a bit of an export state when it comes to agriculture; I think he said around 80 per cent of what we produce is exported. Agriculture is certainly worth investing in, and so is the infrastructure in country Western Australia and country towns.

In January 2013, the then opposition leader, Mark McGowan, said that then Premier Colin Barnett's —

"... priorities revolve around the central business district in Perth and how many plaques he can get with his name on ... in the ... city."

The current government, however, as reported by Gareth Parker on 4 February 2018 in an article published in *The Sunday Times*, has a \$39 million program that funds school, sporting clubs and community groups, with not one dollar being spent in a safe Liberal or Nationals-held seat—a bit hypocritical.

Months after the tabling of the budget, people are still demanding that cuts be reversed. The Country Women's Association of Western Australia penned an open letter to the state government in late July; I am sure that everybody here received a copy. It said it would not give up the fight and expressed "absolute disgust" on behalf of 140 CWA branches from Kununurra to Condingup. The CWA has about a century of history. It is the bastion of the country. Those formidable women live in an environment where they have to rely on neighbours; they are always there to lend a hand with volunteering. Any member who goes out to the country for some sort of meeting knows that the CWA is usually there with a jam and cream scone and a cup of tea. If there is a wildfire in the south west or somewhere where there might be the need for the support of volunteer and professional firefighters, often

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the CWA provides the sustenance. It has been a very conservative group over many years; in fact, the protest it had in front of Parliament House was the first ever in its 100-year history. So when it pens an open letter, which was circulated to members, using the language it did, we know that something is rotten out in the country. I will read a couple of the lines that the CWA penned —

This week's Country Women's Association of WA ... State Conference saw 268 of our members (representing 140 Branches from Kununurra to Condingup) express absolute disgust that your government has failed to reverse funding cuts severely affecting WA families and communities.

Then is then a list of dot points, one of which reads —

How do you feel about garnering funds raised through unpaid youth labour? Shame!

Those are very strong words from the CWA.

Members, I am pleased to say that on Friday I heard the news that the government has reversed its decision on cutting funds to community resource centres. That is good news. I do not call it a backflip; I think the government has seen good sense on the importance of CRCs to regional Western Australia. They are quite often the epicentre of towns, whether used as libraries, vehicle licensing centres or banks, and a lot of clubs use them. They are very, very important, and I am very pleased that the government has seen good sense in reversing those cuts.

**Hon Peter Collier:** No, it's a backflip, mate.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** You call it what you like.

**Hon Peter Collier:** I will. It's a backflip.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** The CWA referred to Moora Residential College in its letter. It is set to close in four months' time; no money was allocated for it to stay open. But the Minister for Education and Training recently overturned the decision to reject the advanced determination application of Bunbury Baptist College, telling the 7 August edition of the *South Western Times* that the original decision had not taken into account "community feeling", and —

Parents should be able to choose where they send their children to school ...

That article is quite interesting. It reads —

Education Minister Sue Ellery has backflipped on her decision to reject Bunbury Baptist College's advanced determination application, with the school back on track to open in 2019 at the existing Ocean Forest Lutheran College campus.

Ms Ellery originally rejected the application based on advice from the Non-Government Schools Planning Advisory Panel, which believed its opening would impact on other schools in the area.

She said while the panel's view was valid, it did not take into account "the community feeling".

"I spoke to Bunbury MLA Don Punch who had canvassed the opinions of local parents," Ms Ellery said. "Parents should be able to choose where they send their children to school and clearly a number of parents had already chosen Bunbury Baptist College ..."

If community feeling is a test of whether an education facility should be opened, I am quite sure the feeling in Moora is very strong.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** The choice: when you are talking about the establishment of a new private school—I accept I guess it's shorthand—parental choice is about choosing between public and private, non-government schools. That's what I was talking about. Now, I accept that it wasn't explicit in those remarks. But when you're talking about the establishment of a non-government school, parental choice in that sense means choosing between whether they send their child to a public school or a private school. That's what I was talking about.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Thank you, minister. The fact is, though, that Moora Residential College and Moora still has a lot of strong community feeling about that.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** I accept that, but that's not what I was talking about.

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** Backed up by the CWA.

After hearing these comments, Central Midlands Senior High School P&C member Tracey Errington, who has been campaigning to have Ms Ellery overturn the government's decision to close Moora Residential College, said her community felt that there was "one rule for us and another rule for another part of the state". I suppose that depends on who the sitting member is in a particular district. The government may dig in its heels on the closure of Moora Residential College. I suppose it does not want to be seen to be doing a number of backflips. I do not see the government as backflipping on these things. If it can see that something is in the best interests of the



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community, there is no trouble—go ahead and do it. That is what we are really after. This is not about being obstinate or being seen to be weak. This is about doing the right thing for the community.

It was recently announced that the RSPCA will receive \$100 000 to continue the Pets in Crisis program. The government cannot find \$500 000 to keep Moora Residential College open but it can find \$100 000 for the Pets in Crisis program. I do not begrudge providing funding to animal shelters to look after displaced pets. What irks me somewhat is that this is a case of warm and fuzzy retail politics because it has been connected to domestic violence. It is not about domestic violence. Thousands of pets are displaced every single year for varying reasons—people can no longer look after them, maybe the pet has some vices that cannot be handled or whatever the case may be. There are numerous shelters around the place that will take pets for re-homing, re-education or whatever the case is. To tie it in to the Pets in Crisis program is warm and fuzzy retail politics. I do not see how giving \$100 000 to this program is that beneficial to the state. The government could give money to other areas of the community that looks after pets. Further, \$922 000—that is double what is needed to keep Moora college open—has been granted to the RSPCA to refurbish its Malaga site. I have some difficulties with the government’s prioritising of funding. There is no indication that the government will reverse its decision to permanently close six camp schools in 2019, which are located at Bridgetown, Kalgoorlie, Dampier, Geraldton, Pemberton and Rockingham.

The war on country education continues with the state government planning to axe funding to community kindergartens that do meet the minimum of 16 children from 2019. Cutting off avenues of education is damaging. This government decision represents another wound for regional students to bear.

Last December, a plan was announced to boost consolidated revenue by taking 20 per cent of the 40 per cent of on-farm generated money contributed to the agricultural education farms provision trust. Perhaps that money was needed for the Pets in Crisis program—I am not quite sure. We usually connect some of these things with other programs, such as the funds for Landgate funding something else. The fund is derived from farming profits of agricultural colleges in Harvey, Narrogin, Morawa, Cunderdin, Denmark and Esperance Senior High School Farm Training Centre. It provides for ongoing expenses at these schools and also supports agricultural programs at 10 metropolitan and smaller regional schools. Unfortunately, they are going to lose some of their money.

The government said its second budget would contain no surprises. This was not the case for Recfishwest and the state’s fishing community after discovering that the cost of recreational fishing licences would rise for a second time by \$5, being a total of \$10 for each licence across all categories. If someone bought all six recfish licences for boating, fishing, rock lobster, abalone, marron, freshwater angling and net fishing, they would face an increase of \$60 a year. If a fisher applies for more than one type of licence in a single transaction, they are entitled to up to a 10 per cent discount. If they buy all licences with the discount, that still adds up to \$261 a year. That might not sound like too much, but a statement from Recfishwest’s website said —

Recfishwest does not support this fee increase, we were not consulted about it, we don’t believe the need for it has been adequately explained and we have concerns it may reduce fishing participation.

I agree with that. A lot of people engage in recreational fishing as a pastime. There are disability platforms on many rock walls and jetties for people with a disability and the elderly. Kids are taught to fish off the beach. Fortunately, no licence is required to do that in this state, which is one thing for which we are thankful. A pastime for many Western Australians is getting out there, catching a feed of fish and spending some time with the family. On top of that \$261, we have to consider that on 11 June, *The West Australian* reported that the Department of Transport will raise mooring fees by 11.5 per cent next month. Former Boating Industry Association president Geoff Ellis said —

The Government was going after boat owners to prop up its Budget because they were a “soft target”.

He rightly observed that boat owners are not millionaires but, rather, mums and dads. He said that the pain is set to continue for boat owners in coming years with the Department of Transport flagging increases of up to 10 per cent, plus consumer price index, from 2019–20. These increases will be for mooring, registration fees and boat registration fees. Not only will it cost \$261 to buy all the licences, there are increases in mooring fees, boat registration fees and trailer registration fees and for some those extra costs through the year will mean that they will apply for fewer licences and participate less; they will go not go fishing as often or they will sell their boat. Again, these sorts of fee increases will discourage people from going out there and having a healthy pastime in our outdoor environment.

The 2018–19 budget contained an increase of \$30 a week for government regional housing, which will have a direct impact on regional Western Australia. The WA Police Union is not impressed with this, saying that although officers received a \$2 000 increase over the last two years, rental costs in the country equal \$3 120. Effectively, they will have a decrease in pay of \$1 000. WA Police Union President, George Tilbury, said that there are places in WA where it is difficult to attract police officers and an increase in rent will only make matters worse. He said that it will reach the stage at which there are multiple vacancies in some regional towns and no

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police officers will want to go there, thus leaving that community at risk. He added that the quality of houses that police rent in regional Western Australia are substandard, making it unfair for officers to pay more for a poor quality house. The WA Police Union put an advertisement in the paper, which says, “The State Government has left regional WA out in the cold again”. It states that it has slugged officers another \$1 560 a year in rent when rental prices across the state are falling. That is something that bewilders me somewhat. Rents in the private rental market are dropping by \$100 a week, yet the government has seen fit to increase the rent for police officers in country Western Australia. The union is quite right: if their rent has gone up by \$3 120 a year, their \$2 000 wage increase is wiped out right there and then—plus another \$1 000.

The government has also allocated \$425 million over five years to Tourism WA for destination marketing in tourism. All this will be for nought if the government does not get serious about implementing a comprehensive shark strategy. I was pleased this morning to see on the news that the state government is looking at trialling SMART drum lines off the coast of Western Australia. It is about time; it has been a long time coming. A lot of pressure has been put on the state government to do something about sharks. Spring and summer is just around the corner and people will want to go to the beach to swim, dive, surf and all the things they like to do. The fact that the government is finally prepared to put something in place by trialling SMART drum lines is a good thing. It would not accept the offer by New South Wales to lend the drum lines for free; rather, it will invest between \$5 million and \$7 million itself. I do not know why there is a resistance to have anything that New South Wales has. I do not think our government even agrees with its research. Anyway, at least the government is doing something about it. There is no doubt that shark attacks have damaged our tourism industry. I heard the Minister for Tourism saying that people from overseas were not really worried about sharks. I have spoken to people overseas and a lot of people over east, and when I say “Western Australia”, the first thing they say is, “Oh, you’ve got sharks”, so there is no doubt that sharks have had an impact on tourism in this state. The fact that the government is finally recognising that it needs to protect its citizens and people who visit Western Australia is, I think, a very positive thing. I will not call it a backflip, members; it is just a good, sensible rationale.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** That’s very generous of you!

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** I throw a bone now and again, minister!

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Woof!

**Hon RICK MAZZA:** It is disappointing, however, to see that three tourism-related programs finished in 2017–18: the caravan and camping program, \$2.2 million; the regional visitor centre program, \$1.4 million; and the tourist demand driver infrastructure grant, \$1.8 million.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 4257.]