

TRADESTART PROGRAM — WESTERN AUSTRALIAN PRESENCE

Statement

HON COL HOLT (South West) [9.56 pm]: I want to talk briefly about an issue that has been worrying me for a while, but it has a prelude to it. I want to talk about a trip to India that I was fortunate to take with some of my parliamentary colleagues. The idea for the trip began after a conversation I had with an Austrade coordinator in the south west about a food indulgence tour that Austrade was planning to take to India. That tour was about showcasing in India the fine food and fine wine that we have in the south west of Western Australia. We went on that trip and supported that program.

Last weekend, we were fortunate to play a reciprocal role, when the Austrade coordinator who works out of the South West Development Commission in Bunbury held an event for some people from overseas who were on a tour to experience the great food and wine of the south west. This tour targeted hoteliers, wine importers, resort owners and restaurateurs. It was about showcasing to them, as potential buyers of our great exports, the great produce of the south west of Western Australia. He also coordinated with the Western Australian trade office in India to show around the south west an Indian food writer and a photographer, with the aim that people in India would buy produce from our local wineries. The coordinator in Bunbury is working with about 200 client groups in the south west to promote their produce. He feels that he is having a great deal of success. He relayed to me that out of one of these tours, one of the small wineries was able to sell 500 cases of wine overseas. For the wine industry as a whole that may be not be significant, but for a small winery it is very significant.

That led to the issue of Austrade and the TradeStart program. Prior to last year, WA had quite a lot of TradeStart officers. There were TradeStart officers in Albany, Geraldton, Carnarvon, Kununurra and Bunbury, and in metropolitan Perth. The aim of those officers is to work with small and medium-sized businesses and enterprises to help them in their international trade endeavours. Since September last year, Western Australia's six TradeStart officers have gone down to two—one in Perth and a guy in the south west who is half-supported through the South West Development Commission. Western Australia has two officers to cover the length and breadth of this great state helping small to medium-sized businesses try to get a foothold in the world market. Does the guy in the south west now service Albany, Geraldton, Carnarvon and Kununurra, or does the guy in metropolitan Perth pick those up? It is a pretty tall order.

I thought I would check out what is happening with that program. Since I have been a member for the South West Region, I have found a few things happening with federally funded programs over the last couple of years, with a lot of them having been cut back and retracted. For example, respite care funding has retracted, as well as Austrade and TradeStart programs in Western Australia. I thought I would check out what was happening in the other states. New South Wales, which obviously has a lot more people than WA, but which is nowhere near our size, has nine TradeStart officers—three located in Sydney; and one each in Port Macquarie, Gosford, Nowra, Orange, Wagga Wagga and Tamworth. Victoria has five—one each in Ballarat, Geelong and Bendigo, and three in Melbourne. Queensland, which could be compared to Western Australia in some ways, perhaps in size and some of its industries, has eight—Bundaberg, Cairns, Rockhampton, Mackay, the Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, the Gold Coast and Brisbane. The Northern Territory has one officer based out of Darwin. Tasmania has one officer based in Launceston. South Australia, which probably has fewer people than Western Australia, and has less area to cover, has managed to get five TradeStart officers—two in Adelaide, and one each in Mount Gambier, Riverland and Port Augusta.

Western Australia has two. What is going on? It seems that federal services in Western Australia have been retracted, potentially to the detriment of our small to medium-sized businesses that have some aspiration to export overseas. I would like to see a greater push for TradeStart officers, especially in Albany, Carnarvon and Kununurra, which has the potential to be the food bowl of the nation. Why is the federal government not supporting some of the initiatives that the state is leading on, and leading in, to get our produce overseas?