

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT — REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Motion

HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural) [11.42 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house notes the importance of economic development in our regions to Western Australia, and recognises the unprecedented focus of the Liberal–National government on job creation and opportunity.

It is with great pleasure that I rise this morning to discuss this very important issue and the role that our regions play in the economy of our great state. The latter part of this motion goes to the commitment of this government to our regions. This motion is about more than royalties for regions. Whilst royalties for regions is certainly an enabler that allows the government to deliver its vision for the regions, there are two motivating factors for initiating this debate today. The first is that it is appropriate for the Parliament to consider the short-sightedness of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia when it released last week its report titled “The future of infrastructure: A vision for WA”. The second motivation for this motion is to have a positive debate about economic opportunity in our regions and the unprecedented commitment of the government to support growth and job opportunities in the regions.

Those who observed the debate last week on the motion of Hon Kate Doust would be led to believe that WA was “stuffed”. The clear message of the negative ninnies opposite in that debate was: “Pack up and leave WA; there is no future here for you.” The true reflection of that debate on members opposite was their lack of understanding of our economy and, more concerning, their lack of appreciation for our regional potential.

I want to start with some remarks that relate to the release of the CCIWA’s report. Members will be aware that the CCI has called for a significant reform of royalties for regions, and that if that reform cannot be achieved, then royalties for regions should be scrapped. I do not want to add too much oxygen to that point today, because I believe that the CCI has plummeting relevance in the regions. That can be no better demonstrated than in the response of the Regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry WA, which represents some 9 000 businesses in regional Western Australia. I quote from its media statement of 16 March 2015, which states —

“Unless you have lived, worked and done business in the regions, it is hard to comprehend just how transformational the Royalties for Regions legislation has been for all regional towns and communities.” CEO of RCCIWA, Kitty Prodonovich stated.

“It is much more than things being built and programmes being delivered, it has created a complete shift in mindset that the needs of regional WA should be prioritised and well planned as those communities are the economic generators of the state. Royalties for Regions has done this and the impact has been profound and will be long lasting.”

Kitty Prodonovich went on to say —

“Royalties for Regions has empowered regional towns and cities to work collaboratively, plan strategically and achieve great community outcomes which in turn supports the economic generators that drive the whole state.”

As I said, I do not want to dwell on this point. If the CCI’s affiliated regional chambers and its members categorically oppose its position, it no longer has relevance to our regions, and I do not intend to give them any more time in this important debate today. However, I want to talk about the government’s record in agriculture, and specifically its commitment to invest, diversify, support and grow this vitally important sector to our regions and our state.

At the last election the only two parties that took serious agricultural policies and commitments to the people sit on this side of the house. Despite the rhetoric from regional members opposite, a short-term fix for tier 3 rails and the deregulation of the Potato Marketing Cooperation of Western Australia does not cut the mustard. This government’s commitment to agriculture through its \$300 million Seizing the Opportunity policy is an investment like no other in this state’s history. That policy, largely the work of now leader of the Nationals, Terry Redman, will be revolutionary for agriculture in this state. The commitment includes research and development, marketing of the industry and its product, infrastructure investment, skills development and training, and managing risk, to name a few. However, today I want to focus on what I think is the jewel in the crown of this policy, which is the Water for Food initiative. That \$40 million investment goes to the core of my motion—growing our economy, supporting small regional business and creating the jobs of the future.

I have lived in Gingin for more than two decades and I have seen the shift in irrigated agriculture from the northern suburbs of Perth increasingly into the agricultural region of the state. Water for Food is ably led by the

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Minister for Water, Hon Mia Davies, and will see a \$4.7 million investment into the midlands groundwater and land assessment project in my electorate. The target area of this project is to the north of Gingin up to Dongara, and is aimed to identify one or more 2 000 to 3 000-hectare precincts for irrigated agriculture. The Department of Water estimates that approximately 90 gigalitres of water in the study area, with up to 50 gigalitres available a year to support industry expansion. This project is absolutely vital to supporting the growth of the industry, and, more importantly, our regional communities that it will sustain.

If proven, this new food bowl will need significant common-user infrastructure investment. It will need new roads, telecommunications and power for it to succeed. The midlands' Water for Food project is only one of six in regional Western Australia that has funding, and I am sure that some of my colleagues from the South West, and Mining and Pastoral Regions may even touch on some of those initiatives in their electorates. I am confident that the government and the Minister for Water are more than up to the task to deliver on that vision.

We in the National Party talk a lot about primary industry in Western Australia because not only is it vitally important to our future prosperity as a state and nation, but also every member of our party in this place has lived and worked in agriculture. That is a background that I do not think any other mainstream political party in this state can claim. Despite the ridiculous rhetoric of members opposite claiming to be the only members who live in the regions and work in agriculture, I think their commitment in government and in opposition is testimony enough to that record in this space.

I want to now move to another aspect of supporting opportunity, jobs and growth in our regions—that is, how we communicate. Another enabler key of economic activity and job growth in the regions is telecommunications. I am pleased to with the renewed direction of the National Broadband Network under the Federal Minister for Communications Malcolm Turnbull. Small communities in my electorate are now scheduled to receive NBN in the coming months when they were on the never-never list under the former federal Labor government. This renewed focus on those with the poorest and most inadequate internet connections is a welcome change, and it is nice to see regional communities benefiting from major infrastructure investment ahead of many of our cities and metropolitan suburbs.

The state government also has an excellent record in reducing the digital divide in our regions. By the end of this term of government, Minister Mischin and Minister Redman will have delivered close to 200 new mobile phone towers in regional Western Australia. So far, that program, which is halfway through, has resulted in mobile coverage in regional Western Australia increasing by 31 per cent. The original target of the regional mobile communications project was a 22 per cent increase, so that is a significant increase above what was expected from the delivery of the first stage of the state government telecommunications project. That translates to about 137 000 square kilometres that previously did not receive mobile coverage now receiving mobile phone coverage. To put that into perspective, that is one and a half times the size of the state of Tasmania. Mobile phone and internet coverage is absolutely essential to any community, and it is absolutely essential to conduct business in this state and, in fact, in any state. It has been a long time since regional Western Australia has seen a mobile phone tower construction program such as ours. I do not think any other state or territory in Australia has anything comparable. I think we would have to go back to the Court–Cowan government and its Wireless West program to find anything that might compare. I think we would have to go back even further—if ever—to find when the Labor Party built, or even committed to build, a new mobile phone tower in this state.

In the opposition's baseless attack on the government last week during non-government business, Hon Darren West raised the opportunity of renewable energy and the natural advantages that our state has in this regard. In a demonstration of bipartisanship today, I agree with him; the opportunity is strong, as the technology continues to reduce the economies of scale to make these projects viable. I think I will see in my lifetime a change in how energy is delivered to our communities, especially the edge-of-grid communities, as the economies of scale reduce in these small-scale energy projects, particularly as is happening in Europe and North America. I think there will be a fundamental shift in how energy is delivered to edge-of-grid communities in particular. In his contribution, Hon Darren West referred to the large solar power station in the midwest and how the region could be the renewable energy capital of the world. He went on to attack the government for being tied to coalmining and not interested in exploring the opportunities of renewable energy. I suggest that the honourable member might like to spend a bit more time on his research in the future. The project that he was referring to is the Greenough River Solar Farm. It is unfortunate that the Leader of the House has left the chamber on urgent parliamentary business, because this project was delivered by this government through royalties for regions under the leadership of the Leader of the House as the then Minister for Energy. It is Australia's largest solar photovoltaic project, with 150 000 panels covering 50 000 hectares in the midwest. It was a \$20 million investment by the state government. That is a far cry from what Hon Darren West recently claimed in this place. We all know that he gets a bit carried away most of the time, but perhaps a little more fact and a little less fiction might be in order.

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In the remaining time I have, I want to talk about the way in which Hon Brendon Grylls and now Hon Terry Redman have refocused the efforts of the royalties for regions program. Initially, in those first few years, it was focused on returning some of those essential services and infrastructure to our regional communities. I remember that in 2008 the Royal Flying Doctor Service ran a campaign to try to attract the funding that it needed to run the vitally important aeromedical service in this state. Projects such as that really became a priority in those first few years. Now that we are moving beyond that, it has allowed the government to refocus the effort of the program and conduct some very good planning in each of our nine regions. I understand that those regional blueprints are being processed by, and are being approved through, the Western Australian Planning Commission processes. I think the south west plan has already been approved by the WAPC. Those plans will be really important in guiding not only royalties for regions investment, but also private investment, other government investment and federal government investment in how we grow and sustain our regions in Western Australia.

The regions have played an absolutely critical role in the growth of our state over many years. We can go back decades in history and look at the role that the regions have played, whether in our primary industries or mining, fishing or forestry. The important role that the regions play in our state economy is only increasing. We need to be smarter, more efficient, more connected and more sustainable than ever before. If in a decade's time we as a state are continuing to grapple with the pain of the unsustainable growth in metropolitan suburbs that we have seen over the past few decades, we will have failed. A significant part of the answer to meeting the infrastructure challenges of our future is embracing what our regions have to offer. It was a missed opportunity by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia in releasing its infrastructure report earlier this month. There is enormous untapped economic opportunity in our regions. This state government is investing in opportunity and growth like no other outside Perth. I am extremely proud of our record; however, pride will not deliver the outcomes that this state needs. What will deliver those outcomes are long-term understanding of and commitment to our regions. Sadly, neither of those attributes is possessed by members opposite or the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia. I commend the motion to the house.

HON MARK LEWIS (Mining and Pastoral) [11.55 am]: Firstly, I thank Hon Martin Aldridge for bringing this very important topic to the house. At the end of the day, in our regional areas it is all about jobs and how our government goes about creating them. I would like to bring my personal perspective and experience to this debate and talk about effectively what I was doing before I came into this place and still do under the present government.

Hon Martin Aldridge alluded to the water resource development going on under the Water for Food program, a program that will go forward. However, I would like to go back a step and put down some foundations for that and provide some understanding about why that project is important. It will leverage off a lot of work that has been done since about 2008. I was fortunate enough to be involved in a lot of the work identifying the large amounts of water resources, particularly in my electorate of the Mining and Pastoral Region and in the north. We went through a series of hydrological processes and a lot of hydrological reports and that sort of stuff. For such a dry state, it is quite remarkable that WA has considerable access to a lot of good water, particularly in the north. A lot of that water is underground, although, as members are aware, a lot of the big river systems up there are also very important for our future growth.

I will identify the areas from the north to the south that we need to be particularly mindful of because they are potential catalysts. For those who have not been involved in agriculture, agriculture has one of the highest multiplier effects of any industry. The meat industry probably has the highest multiplier effect, when meat is finally converted into boxes and exported. That is where the highest multiplier effect is felt in jobs for the economy and for the state.

We have all heard about the Ord, but a lot of work is still to be done around the Ord. Over recent years, we have been looking at cockatoo sands. Members might be aware that the Ord is predicated basically on big heavy clays. There are large areas outside the existing Ord area that are amenable to more contemporary fertigation techniques. They have been identified. There is a particularly large one called the Bonaparte Plains, or Nimbing, which is about 30 000 to 35 000 hectares of basically cockatoo sands. That will be a very important area going forward for large corporates or a big family aggregation of farms. Coming south, we identified the Knowsley area. For those who are not aware, there are old soldier settlers' blocks there. I suspect they were going to be dairy farms, but thankfully that did not happen. In the late 1930s a whole lot of irrigation blocks were identified just outside of Derby. We are also looking at that now.

Hon Ken Travers: You missed Camballin out as you were coming across.

Hon MARK LEWIS: I am going there now. As I said earlier, there is the Fitzroy. There is a huge amount of surface water flowing out of that ephemeral river system. However, there is a large amount of alluvial water alongside that river as well. Again, we must look at those opportunities, which are massive, in particular, where

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the pindan soils pinch on to the Fitzroy River; these will be important assets. Coming further down the state, there used to be a pastoral lease called Waterbank just outside Broome. It was called Waterbank because a massive amount of water sits underneath it. There is also a little area consecutive to Broome called Skuthorpe. In my previous life I had a number of goes at trying to get Skuthorpe into development. I think we will eventually get there one day as we further define the water resource. Further south, there is the area known as La Grange. Hon Martin Aldridge was talking about 50 to 90 gegalitres of water in the midwest; Skuthorpe has a very conservative 150 gegalitres of water. We are hopefully in the process of proving up that water resource. The yield is likely to be a lot higher, but the government is taking a very conservative approach. It will drill that area to more accurately define the sustainable yield. Still further south, we have always known about the artesian water area just pinching on the coast. The little system in there is quite important because artesian systems do not need a whole heap of diesel to run generators and that sort of thing for pumping. So there is a niche area in there, but more generally around that area, there is a large water resource in the West Canning Basin. Again, over the last three or four years, the government have been proving up that resource. That is now ready to be allocated —

Hon Ken Travers: Does that include Shamrock?

Hon MARK LEWIS: Shamrock is part of the La Grange system. I am talking about further south now, just north east of Port Hedland—near Pardoo and Wallal Downs. The system runs back south down towards Woodie Woodie or the Consolidated Minerals mine down there. That whole system is now very much in focus. Going further south into the Pilbara, which is all about mine dewatering, there is a significant amount of water in the Ophthalmia Range. Coincidentally, that is where all the future iron ore mines will be, and they will all be below the watertable. There are some fairly significant estimates around water resources there from 200 gegalitres to 1 000 gegalitres. That is a massive resource, and there is all sorts of talk about bringing that water back to Perth, down through to Kalgoorlie and through the pipeline back south. Maybe that is all in the future. My belief is that water is used in situ to virtually avoid blowing black smoke for pumping and it is much more favourable if water is used on site. The government has had a project called the Pilbara Hinterland Agricultural Development Initiative in place for some time. I just mentioned Woodie Woodie, where a pilot project is being undertaken. Another pilot project is looking for a place to land at the moment. It looks like that pilot project might be around the eastern Gurruma country in the Western Turner mine, which is one of Rio Tinto's mines. Negotiations are going on with the local Indigenous people there about where that project might land. I will come even further south now, and I think this is pretty old news, but Carnarvon has had a water resource development program going for some years. In fact, I will give the nod to Hon Kim Chance who started that project in developing the water resources further east of the current precinct.

Hon Ken Travers: He struggled to get good staff, but eventually he got it done.

Hon MARK LEWIS: They had very good staff in those days. Those water resources are being developed and there is further commitment under the Water for Food project to take that up past Rocky Pool if it is required.

Wrapping up, hopefully, all of those projects will end up in jobs at the end of the day.

HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan) [12.06 pm]: Once again, the house has had a good demonstration this morning of what makes up the current coalition government in Western Australia. The National Party is in one camp with its glossy marketing lines but really with very little substance behind what it is doing; it is all about politics and marketing. There is also the backbench of the Liberal Party having a fair degree of substance but clearly being ignored by their cabinet colleagues in what they have to offer. The reality is that we need to be producing jobs in regional Western Australia.

Several members interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Sorry; what was that? Say again.

Hon Martin Aldridge: Tell us your ideas. I am sure it will not take us nine minutes!

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am happy to go through those and, in fact, if the member had been listening to Hon Mark Lewis, he was pointing out that many of the current initiatives are not isolated issues; they have come about because of the history in those areas. The reason I asked about Shamrock is that I remember when Western Agricultural Industries was proving up Shamrock as part of a potential cotton industry. I think Shamrock is now run by the Trandos brothers—good Wanneroo boys who have gone up there, good people from my, Hon Liz Behjat's and Hon Peter Collier's electorate who have expanded out there. Why did that occur? Work had been done going back in the time of previous governments; in fact, I think Western Agricultural Industries originally started as a pie-in-the-sky idea about trying to develop irrigated agriculture off the Fitzroy River. It worked out that a fairly good agricultural scheme could be run using the underground water supply. One of the interesting issues—I am sure Hon Mark Lewis would understand the complexities of these projects—is that it is not just about some glossy slogan. It must be possible to work out the sustainable yield and what that means in terms of a reliability factor for the potential investment because many of those underground

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aquifers are not recharged on an annual basis. Those aquifers may be recharged only once every X number of years, so that becomes an issue of reliability. In fact, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs would have some interest in this because, of course, if we start tapping into aquifers, we must ensure that does not have a negative impact on the traditional watering holes of the Aboriginal communities in those areas. Therefore, it is not simply about coming up with a slogan and saying it is great; a lot of work is needed, and that work takes time to develop and it has been ongoing for a considerable time. Many of the advances are now occurring because of those opportunities. In looking at those points, it is a struggle to sit there and try to pretend that putting money back into the Department of Agriculture and Food budget, which this government took out in its first five years in government, is somehow a great outcome. Members all know that in the first five years of the Liberal–National government hundreds of jobs were cancelled in the Department of Agriculture and Food in regional WA and its budget was slashed. Even when the government puts the \$300 million in the budget that was supposed to be in there over five years, and will now go in over five to seven years —

Hon Col Holt interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I know that Hon Col Holt gets nervous when the truth starts to be told. Even if the government puts that money back in, it has now pushed it out from five to seven years, so the Department of Agriculture and Food budget will not even be back to what it was when this government took office.

I was listening to Hon Mark Lewis because I think he had a real contribution to make. When we do these projects, one of the challenges is to look at what jobs create long-term benefits. The government can come out with a project that has great politics attached to it, but does it provide long-term sustainable benefits? Yesterday we got an Auditor General report that points out that under this government Main Roads has been investing in road projects that are very good local projects—read “political projects”. Do they provide the best long-term value? The government has had research done—I have seen it under a freedom of information application—that looks at the issue around Ord stage 2 and whether the money invested will give us the best long-term outcomes in providing long-term employment in the Kimberley area. Were there better ways of spending that money?

Hon Martin Aldridge: Why didn’t Kevin Rudd invest in it then?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: He invested in the Kununurra community. If the member checks his facts —

Hon Martin Aldridge interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Ken Travers has the call. Perhaps we can drop the volume a bit.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Investing in the Kununurra community provides long-term benefits to the people of the Kimberley. The fundamental problem often missed by members of the National Party is that it might be good politics to spend a lot of money on projects that sit behind the party’s glossy projects and slogans, but if it does not do the rigorous analysis to determine whether they provide long-term benefits, the government is not only leaving a massive debt for future generations, but also denying them an economy to help fund that debt for future generations.

Hon Martin Aldridge: You mean like the Office of Shared Services?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Yes, I mean the Office of Shared Services, which this government continued to fund for four years after it took over. That is one we share blame for.

Several members interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I love the way they now want to scream and yell from the back benches of the government because they do not like —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! I remind members that we are talking about economic development in regional Western Australia.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: We must have a rigorous process of assessing these projects. It is not about how good the colour brochure looks, but how good the long-term sustainable outcomes will be. Many of the projects that Hon Mark Lewis talked about would have produced, if the government had done that rigorous analysis, far greater long-term outcomes than many of the projects funded by this government, driven mainly by the need to meet the needs of the slogans of the National Party, but without any substance. We will leave massive debts for future generations and without the economy to fund it. How do we know? When the Barnett government came to office, why did it say that it would do a rigorous back casting over the previous 10 years to look at capital works done in regional Western Australia to demonstrate that royalties for regions would deliver more capital works in Western Australia than was provided in the past? The government also tried to confuse it by arguing recurrent expenditure. The government never provided that back casting and it was never able to. The government claimed

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it could not provide it because it was too complex. Back casting on capital works is not that complex. There is only one reason it did not do it: it did not show the outcome it wanted. I believe that the Department of Regional Development went away and did it and came back. We saw, for instance, funding for local roads in regional areas was cut back. In the economy local roads are as important, if not more important, than funding telecommunications in regional areas, because it is problematic if we cannot get our produce in and out. That is why supporting tier 3 rail is so crucial. Our supply chain is a crucial part of it.

I want to talk about supply chains. Let us go to another issue. Do these people on the other side want to be seen as credible? Last year we had a debate on the Esperance port. The government wanted to amalgamate three ports quite different in nature in Esperance, Bunbury and Albany. One of the concerns the Labor opposition raised was that the amalgamation of those ports would lead to privatisation, contracting out and fly in, fly out workers. What is happening today under the watch of the Liberal–National government at Esperance port? We are already starting to see fly in, fly out workers at Esperance port doing work that was previously undertaken by local people. How does that help grow the economy of Esperance? This government is taking work away and putting it back into the Perth area. Government members do not like to hear these stories, but they are the truth.

Another issue I want to talk about is power into the midwest. Hon Kate Doust is better qualified than anyone to talk about this. When the Labor government left office, there were plans for a high-voltage powerline to service the midwest. At that stage Geraldton was ready to back it up with support and investment to make it the renewable energy capital of Western Australia, but what happened? The Barnett Liberal–National government came to office and what was one of the first things it did? It cut that high-voltage powerline out of its budget. If we want to talk about investment in regional Western Australia that will grow jobs in regional Western Australia, why did the government cut that? The government talks about what it built without rigorous analysis, but the government never talks about what it cut.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members!

HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral) [12.16 pm]: It has been an interesting debate so far this morning. I thank Hon Martin Aldridge for bringing this really important debate to the house. The fact that Hon Ken Travers can stand in this house today and state that royalties for regions is a glossy slogan is offensive to the people of Western Australia and, to use the terms of one of the member's colleagues, outrageous. It is incredible and goes to show the extent to which the Western Australian Labor Party takes for granted the regions in Western Australia. The Labor Party's regional members in particular should hang their heads in shame at the fact that Hon Ken Travers can stand there and suggest that royalties for regions is a glossy slogan.

The only party that has brought politics to this house today is the Labor Party. Hon Ken Travers making this about politics is incredible. I am happy to defend what the member calls a glossy slogan, because I know that to the people in my electorate it is making a long-term difference and it is achieving economic outcomes in the regions that sustain all those people who live in the metropolitan area. I think it is a timely discussion as well. Hon Martin Aldridge has already touched on the comments of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia and the report that it released into infrastructure demands and its suggestion that royalties for regions should be reviewed and abolished if necessary. I find it absolutely absurd, but here we go—a member who purports to be the shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food is suggesting royalties for regions is not making a difference. I suggest the member needs to find out more about his shadow portfolio. Why do we have to keep defending this program? I know it might hurt the member and I know the member opposite might think it is a glossy slogan, but it is making a difference to people out there in the regions of this state.

I find it incredible and offensive that this government needs to continue to defend a program such as royalties for regions, which has been instrumental in turning around the regional development of the state. Never have we seen a state government give this much investment and attention to the regions. Never have we seen this much enthusiasm about living in the regions of Western Australia and never have we seen this much job creation and economic opportunity. Royalties for regions has made a real and substantial difference to these communities, and that cannot be disputed. Development commissions, as all members know—if they do not know, they are not doing their job—are working on blueprints for their regions. The blueprint model devised by the Minister for Regional Development, Hon Terry Redman, is a framework for putting forward a process for the future directions of the regions. It will make clear what the future focus of those regions is for their economic development. It is through those blueprints that we will identify key projects that will create job opportunities. For example, the Kimberley blueprint states that if we do not achieve some outcomes for Aboriginal people, we will not meet optimal job opportunities or economic development for the Kimberley. It is absolutely essential that we have some outcomes for Indigenous people across the state. The Kimberley's blueprint recognises that if we do not address job opportunities for Aboriginal people, we will not optimise the opportunity they have for economic development. The connection between economic development and Aboriginal communities is

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fundamentally important not only in the Kimberley, but also across regional areas. With the changing nature of the resource sector, it is imperative now more than ever to find and seek out opportunities for economic development in the regions. To do that we need vision; we need to think outside the box and we need a framework such as royalties for regions—apparently a glossy slogan—that delivers funding into those areas that creates economic opportunity. This state government is doing that and in that regard royalties for regions has played a critical role.

In recent years within my electorate we have created some really fantastic projects that have directly benefited local traditional owners and people who live in the regions. One of those projects is the Ord–East Kimberley project—a massive agricultural development that would not have been possible without royalties for regions investment, the necessary political will to achieve a project such as that to put agriculture on the map, and also private sector investment. Through royalties for regions, the state government committed \$322 million to complete stage 2 of the Ord River expansion project, and by May 2013 the WA government had signed a development agreement with Kimberley Agricultural Investment, which committed \$700 million to lease and create 13 400 hectares of irrigated farmland as part of the Ord–East Kimberley expansion project. That agreement was absolutely phenomenal—\$700 million invested directly into the Kimberley.

Aside from the role that development is playing in meeting food shortages, this project has placed a strong focus on improving the social and economic wellbeing of the local community when negotiating this agreement; that is one of the things we are most proud of. As a result, significant outcomes were negotiated for the Miriuwung and Gajerrong people, the traditional owners of the land, including extensive training, employment and business opportunities in agriculture and tourism, and also opportunities for those traditional owners to have direct ownership. Every time I look at that project, it is something I am extremely proud of. The Miriuwung and Gajerrong people have done a fantastic job in partnering with government and private investment to achieve that. These opportunities would not have existed without the commitment and drive by this government, in particular the former Minister for Regional Development, Hon Brendon Grylls, and the current minister, Hon Terry Redman, to focus on regional WA, and their support and advocacy for the royalties for regions program.

I will run out of time today because there is so much to discuss about economic opportunity that is now available in regional areas. My colleagues Hon Martin Aldridge and Hon Mark Lewis talked about the Water for Food project. I agree that it is one of the most exciting projects happening in agriculture in the regional areas. It is the very nature of that sort of investment that spearheads economic development for the state. When the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia released its infrastructure report, Deidre Willmott called for a review of royalties for regions. An online article in the ABC news dated 18 March states —

Ms Willmott said the state’s financial circumstances had changed since the program was introduced in 2008.

She said the scheme needed a robust, transparent cost–benefit analysis to ensure it offered value for money.

“What our paper is saying is that we only have a certain amount of money that is going to be available to spend by government and we need to be very careful,” she said.

Ms Willmott is effectively saying that this investment is a luxury. It is little wonder that her regionally based counterparts within the CCI strongly disagree with her metro-centric viewpoint. I wonder whether investing in training centres and school upgrades to develop the necessary skills set and human capacity would pass a traditional economic cost–benefit analysis. There are more facets to economic development than just investment in economic infrastructure. I look forward to seeing the blueprints roll out across the state, and I look forward to seeing the royalties for regions program—the most scrutinised program in Australia—continue to make the critical investments needed in regional areas. We need more investment, not less, in the regions, as this brings confidence within the community, the financial providers and the private sector, thereby leading to new business development and job creation. I find it incredible that organisations such as the CCI cannot put that jigsaw together and are missing the point entirely. I suggest that the CCI needs to do a cost–benefit analysis of where it is at and what sort of infrastructure it has to support the state’s ongoing development of economic opportunities in not just the metropolitan area, but also regional areas.

HON KATE DOUST (South Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [12.27 pm]: I could not let that one go through. I do not know whether Hon Martin Aldridge listened to my speech properly last week; I find a bit of active listening is always helpful, not selective listening —

Hon Sue Ellery: A member has to be in here to listen.

Hon KATE DOUST: Thank you, member, for listening to me.

Hon Ken Travers: Apparently, I opposed telecommunications in the bush.

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Hon KATE DOUST: We have just seen an example of what active listening is not, unfortunately, from my own team.

The point of the debate last week was about having a plan for jobs for the future and diversification. It was interesting to hear today about a couple of the projects that have been set up in the areas of agriculture, tourism and mining, and those things are important. However, last week's debate was about extending projects into not just the metropolitan area, but also the regions. I have not heard members talk about creating jobs in the information and communications technology area, or about science-based or education-based jobs. They are examples of the areas in which the communities are calling out for jobs. The people in Derby are keen for their young people to pick up alternative types of employment in the ICT sector; they would love there to be an ICT hub in that part of the state—it would be a very significant change up there. I do not know why we cannot have a proper discussion about genuine diversification of employment opportunities throughout the state, rather than members having a go at us. That is about having a plan. My complaint last week, if members had listened, was that this government has not put into place a long-term strategy for job diversification. My argument last week was that this government has missed the boat; it has left things too late. We have been talking about this for many years. This government has been so reliant on the resources sector to create employment in the state that it has blocked out other potential opportunities. Members need to think more broadly than that.

I listened to Hon Jacqui Boydell's critique of the CCI. I share her concerns about how the CCI operates in the state in a number of areas, in particular trading hours, industrial relations, and health and safety. The CCI may soon be the provider for innovation in this state—who knows where that discussion will go? Hon Jacqui Boydell attacked the Labor Party and Hon Ken Travers for the words that he used during his speech. But I say to her that her greatest enemy in the future protection of royalties for region is not the Labor Party—we support the program and have been quite strong on that—but her colleagues on the government benches. Her colleagues have already put constraints on expenditure around royalties for regions—I recall that that went through without a bang or a whimper. Members opposite should not come into this place and attack us, because we support those regional areas and we support the continuation of the royalties for regions program, albeit it could be better focused than it has been. We certainly would not expend our dollars in the first instance on plastic cows and musical toilets as National Party members did. The Liberal government is the greatest threat to National Party members. Every time the government cuts back, it will look to them to cut back in regional areas. It has done so and those members sat quietly and compliantly and copped it. National Party members therefore should not come into this place and attack us about that; they should have a go at their colleagues about how they manage cuts. Members opposite continually have a go at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, and particularly at the CEO of the CCI, Deidre Willmott. We all know that she is an active member of the Liberal Party. She was a former candidate for the seat of Cottesloe and got bumped sideways by the Premier when he had another change of heart; of course she will follow the Liberal government's agenda on royalties for regions. There is a synergy between those two organisations. It is a traditional synergy. We have seen many people come out of that role and into Parliament. The Premier, of course, is one fine example of a former CEO of the CCI of WA. He is now the Premier of the state, so of course there is that connection.

Point of Order

Hon MARTIN ALDRIDGE: Madam Deputy President, I have listened to this second contribution from members opposite. The motion refers to economic development in our regions and I am not hearing a lot about that coming from any of the members opposite, and I do not think their contributions are relevant.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! A point of order has been taken before the Chair. I do not think there is a point of order, because a previous speaker commented on the CCI. If we let that go through, we allow an opportunity for other members to also comment, and the comment that the CCI made was about investment going to economic development in regional areas. It is a bit of a long bow, but it is there, and I hope that the honourable member will bring her comments to a close.

Debate Resumed

Hon KATE DOUST: I was just responding to the earlier critique by Hon Jacqui Boydell about Deidre Willmott, the CEO of the CCI, which I must admit I thought at the time was particularly harsh.

I will come back and talk about economic development in the north west of the state, which the opposition supports. In fact, for about 18 months before the election, prior to the change of government in 2008, the Labor government had been actively involved in the Pilbara community's consultative council. We were looking at ways to improve economic development and create a hub in the north west by targeting improvements in the areas of health, education and housing. That work was done in conjunction with the local, state and federal governments and a range of significant employers throughout the north west. We were looking at strategies to improve those arrangements in the north west of the state and, sadly, with the loss of government we were

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unable to proceed. However, I must say that a significant number of those changes are reflected in what the National Party has been able to achieve with its royalties for regions program.

The National Party also needs to know that it is all very well to talk about selective types of employment in some narrow projects, but it needs to address the issues currently faced by people in the north west. Currently, major resources and iron ore companies are cutting back employment in significant swathes; I think 300 jobs have been lost in Woodside. Iron ore companies are slashing back on employment. There will therefore be a decline in employment in those areas, and that will have a flow-on, negative impact in those towns. Small short-term projects in the north west and regional areas will not necessarily provide for the long-term generation of employment and sustained economic development.

I come back to the debate we had last week. We need a much clearer plan in place for where we are going in this state. We need a proper plan for diversification of employment. Taking a step back from a plan, we need to look at addressing education issues and skilling up young people so that they have the capacity to step into a wide array of potential jobs. I would be very excited to see the diversification of employment throughout our regional areas. I do not see why someone living in Kalgoorlie should think that their pathway in life is to work only in the mining sector. There should be a range of other opportunities. I do not see why someone working in the midwest should be restricted to only agricultural jobs.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon KATE DOUST: I am using these as examples. I think people should have the capacity to become a doctor, an engineer, a teacher, an information and communications technology specialist, a childcare worker or a retail worker—whatever.

Hon Dave Grills: You are scaring people!

Hon KATE DOUST: I am not scaring people. I am saying that we need a broad plan. We need to make sure that the resources are put in place. We need to make sure that the government does not continue to cut funding to schools thereby denying access to a range of education opportunities. We need to make sure that the government does not cut back —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Kate Doust has the call.

Hon KATE DOUST: Members opposite do not like to hear what I have to say. I am not making this up. It is a fact that the government has cut back funding in regional places thereby denying opportunities to young people. The government has made it difficult for young people to access TAFE because it jacked up the fees so high. The problems are there. The government has not addressed them. It has taken a short-term approach. Again, it comes back to the fact that we do not have a plan. If the government has no plan, how can it possibly create jobs in regional areas for the long-term future? How can it possibly create a diversified economy in the north west?

Hon Paul Brown interjected.

Hon KATE DOUST: Hon Paul Brown likes to interject because that is all he is really capable of. I would like him to get to his feet and deliver a sound argument for where this state is going and demonstrate to those of us on this side that the government of which he is part actually has a plan for the future—because it does not. It absolutely does not, and I will be surprised if it starts one up over the next two years.

Hon Martin Aldridge very usefully canvassed this issue. However, his speech was just another attempt by the National Party to broadcast a spin on its royalties for regions program. If National Party members really have such issues and problems, they should talk to their colleagues on the government benches. Obviously, there are communication issues, because they keep raising these matters in this place and sharing them with us. I do not know whether that is their only mechanism to grab the attention of the government benches. Yet again not one single minister has risen to his or her feet during backbenchers' time to articulate the government's response to Hon Martin Aldridge's motion.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon KATE DOUST: Again, I am very disappointed that the government does not care and is not interested in listening to backbenchers' concerns about where this state is going. I do not know whether a minister will speak in the next four minutes. I do not know which minister in this chamber is responsible for this issue. It may very well be Hon Col Holt in his new capacity; I am not sure. If it is Hon Col Holt, I hope he will get up and tell us what the government is doing.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the students of Infant Jesus School to the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia. It is in fact the primary school that I attended many years ago. I sincerely welcome you and hope that you find your visit here at Parliament both enjoyable and interesting.

HON COL HOLT (South West — Minister for Housing) [12.38 pm]: Welcome to the students and to the well-behaved upper house in this place!

A trend is emerging from this week's motion in private members' business and from the motion moved last week by Hon Kate Doust. Both motions come from a different angle but, as has been shown in the debates, have the same intent. Last week, the government was condemned for what it is not doing. Today, the government is defended for what it is doing. That is how these debates work. The opposition puts its point of view and the government puts its point of view.

It was amazing to hear about the plastic cow debate. I have not heard that debate in this place for about three years now. I probably need to remind the members who continually raise it that this government invested \$50 000 in that project. The federal Labor government at the time invested \$125 000 in that project. That project returned to the community of Margaret River well in excess of that—in fact, well in excess of half a million dollars into that community. If that is not economic development, I do not know what is. What a great investment! About \$50 000 worth of royalties for regions money went into that project to deliver a great outcome for that community. I suggest that anyone from the south west would know that and would agree with it. Members on this side of the house have talked about the investment and the specific programs that this government has put in place to help diversify our economic development. It is interesting to look at the history of how our economy has changed. This nation was built on the back of agriculture—we know that—and Western Australia is no different. In the early days, we had the gold rush, and in the 1960s we had the boom in iron ore in the north west of the state. We all know that we need to build resilience in our communities and in the economic development that drives this state. I suggest that is what this government has done and will be doing into the future.

Members of the National Party have talked about the Nationals' blueprint program. That program spells out exactly what will happen in the future through royalties for regions funding and investment in the regions. I suggest that every member of this house look at that blueprint, because it is a clear road map on how we want to diversify our communities and build resilience in this state. That is the first thing I would encourage everyone to do. The blueprint talks about agriculture, tourism and a variety of communications activities that we need to invest in to grow our state and our economy and to provide the opportunity for people who live not only in Perth, but also in regional Western Australia, to reap some of the benefits of that investment.

I want to touch briefly on the regional mobile communications program. I need to go back to the national broadband network, which was rolled out as a federal Labor government initiative. When the federal Labor government first talked about the NBN, it said that 95 per cent of Australians will have access to the NBN. All of us on this side of the house know where those five per cent who will not have access to the NBN live—they live in regional Western Australia. The federal government then changed to a Liberal government, and that government said it will roll out the NBN to 90 per cent of Australians; and, guess what, we know where those 10 per cent live—they live in regional Western Australia. The people who live in regional Western Australia are not able to access the communications technology that they should be able to access. What is this government doing in response? The regional mobile communications program has already delivered 113 phone towers and improved communications; another 22 or 23 towers were announced not long ago; and the government will be investing another \$45 million to keep that program going.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.