

## INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF COOPERATIVES

*Statement by Minister for Commerce*

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Commerce)** [3.08 pm]: I would like to take this opportunity to inform the house that today is the Australian launch of the International Year of Cooperatives. The declaration by the United Nations of 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives recognises the valuable contribution made by this form of enterprise to global economic and social development. A cooperative is a business organisation owned and operated by its members for their mutual benefit. Cooperatives operating in Western Australia are incorporated under legislation administered by the Department of Commerce. Similar member-based models exist in Western Australia as mutuals, credit unions and larger incorporated associations. The goals of the United Nations for the International Year of Cooperatives in 2012 are to increase public awareness about cooperatives and their contribution to social and economic development; promote the formation and growth of cooperatives; and encourage governments to establish policies, laws and regulations to support cooperative enterprises. The 100 largest member-based enterprises in Australia have a combined annual turnover in the order of \$14.7 billion, membership of more than 13 million and over 26 000 employees. Interestingly, four of the top five, ranked by annual turnover, are Western Australian businesses—Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd, HBF, Capricorn Society Ltd and the Royal Automobile Club of Western Australia.

As members will be aware, the recent enactment of the Co-operatives Act 2009 in Western Australia replaced dated legislation with a single, modern plain-language statute. The legislation was designed with the aid of extensive industry consultation and with the support of the industry's peak body, Co-operatives WA, to meet the needs of cooperatives in the current environment. Western Australia enters the International Year of Cooperatives with the most modern cooperatives legislation in Australia, and perhaps the world. A designated cooperatives unit has been established within the Department of Commerce to provide advice and support. These initiatives provide an opportunity for cooperatives in Western Australia to look forward to the future with confidence.

First and foremost, cooperatives are business enterprises that must operate efficiently and generate profit for distribution to their members or to be applied towards a communal purpose. Cooperatives are, however, set apart from other forms of enterprise by their commitment to democratic member control, community support and education, and the conduct of business in a way which is sustainable over the long term. Perhaps the principles are no better explained than by looking at one of Western Australia's larger cooperatives, the Geraldton Fishermen's Cooperative, which provides an excellent example of these values in practice.

The western rock lobster fishery is the single most valuable fishery in Australia, with an export value of over \$300 million per annum, and the Geraldton Fishermen's Co-operative is the largest processor and exporter of rock lobster in the world. The cooperative is committed to community education to promote the industry. It is the only western rock lobster processor in WA funding its own research and development department aimed at maintaining a better environment in the fishing industry. It works closely with the Department of Fisheries, providing data and enforcing strict catch limits to ensure preservation of the fishery into the future. Stricter limits have been required in recent years as a result of adverse environmental conditions. Although it has been hard, compliance with these restrictions has resulted in a marked recovery in the fishery and an improved outlook for the future.

In the International Year of Cooperatives, I encourage members to draw on the resources offered by the Department of Commerce, and to engage with their local communities to explore the ways in which communities around our vast state can benefit into the future from this unique form of business enterprise.

Consideration of the statement made an order of the day for the next sitting, on motion by **Hon Ed Dermer**.