

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from 23 June on the following motion moved by Hon Simon O'Brien (Minister for Finance) —

That pursuant to standing order 49(1)(c), the Legislative Council takes note of tabled papers 3310A–F (budget papers 2011–12) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 19 May 2011.

HON HELEN BULLOCK (Mining and Pastoral) [10.20 am]: As I did last year, when I received this year's budget papers, the first thing I looked for was the line item for the Kalgoorlie–Boulder intermodal freight facility, commonly known as the transport hub, and the line item for a sealed road link between the Goldfields and Great Northern Highway. To my disappointment, it has been left out of the budget again. In my remarks on last year's budget I spoke about how important these two small projects were. I thought the former Minister for Transport agreed with me and got my point. I suppose the former transport minister is not an action man; he is an agreeable man, but also a forgetful man.

I will start with a bit of history. Early in spring last year, attracted by birds singing in the sycamore tree in the Goldfields, the Premier and his ministerial cabinet flocked to Kalgoorlie–Boulder to have their regional cabinet meeting in the Goldfields. The local community of course took this very rare opportunity and campaigned very hard for these two small projects. Both the former transport minister and the Premier lent their attentive ears to these two proposed projects, which raised great expectations in the business community in Kalgoorlie–Boulder. The Chairman of the Goldfields–Esperance Development Commission, Graham Thomson, was so intoxicated by this expectation that in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* of 11 September 2010 he pronounced —

It is finally coming to fruition and I will be surprised if the Government does not endorse the project by the end of the year and it is included in the next year's Budget. I am reasonably and confidently expecting construction of the road to begin by 2012.

I am sure he is more disappointed than I am, but I will leave that aside. The lack of funding is certainly a big blow for the Shire of Wiluna and also for the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder. When I spoke to them about these two small projects just two months ago, they were sure that they would be funded in this year's budget. Instead of an allocation in the budget for these two small projects, I saw an allocation of \$5 million for planning for the Portslink project, and I was told the transport hub and the Wiluna link might be part of this mega-plan. This was certainly something new and the first time I had heard about it. According to GWN television news, a country development commission—I suspect it was GEDC—came up with a \$3 billion plan to connect all WA ports and said that if WA wants to keep up with the mining industry, this will be the way to go. This project will take 20 years. It is certainly a grand vision, which presumes that the mining boom will last forever. Will it? I just wonder how the latest announcement by Sinosteel will impact on the GEDC's grand vision. We will have to wait until we read the expensive feasibility study to find out whether this plan is practical or economically viable. I am not sure of the views of the former or current Minister for Transport on this project, but I feel that the bigger the minister talks, the smaller the chance that these two small projects will appear in the budget papers in the next few years. Talking big is just covering up. The sum of \$5 million is a lot of money for a feasibility study. Even the Director General of the Department of Transport, Reece Waldock—I think the former transport minister heard this during the estimates committee hearing—thought that \$5 million is perhaps overfunding for a feasibility study. Personally, I am very grateful for the billionaire Brendon Grylls' generosity. If people throw money at me, the decent thing for me to do is to say, "Thank you." I thank billionaire Brendon Grylls for the \$5 million allocation for a feasibility study.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I point out to the member that it is the custom to refer to members of the other house by their formal positions.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: I thank the Minister for Regional Development and also, of course, he has another name starting with "B". The reason I think this funding —

Hon Simon O'Brien: It is not a rude name, I hope.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Let us continue.

The reason I think this funding is irrational is that I asked last year, if the former transport minister remembers, for a contribution of only \$3 million towards the Kalgoorlie–Boulder transport hub project. That \$3 million was to secure \$3 million from the federal government's funding for the AusLink regional program to assist in the development of the transport hub. That request fell on deaf ears. The government now allocates \$5 million for a feasibility study to link all ports in Western Australia.

Hon Simon O'Brien: It is a very positive thing.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: It is. I thanked the Minister for Regional Development; what else do I need to do? I would have thought, former transport minister, a more down-to-earth and practical approach would be to use \$3 million of that money to secure funding from the federal government, and then use the rest of the \$2 million maybe for a feasibility study into the transport hub and Wiluna link, because I think these two small projects are inevitable, based not only on commonsense but also on the feasibility study that has been done so far.

Hon Simon O'Brien: What we need to pursue is an overall regional transport plan, not a few individual projects in isolation. That is what the government is seeking to do.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: I understand that vision, but grand visions need to be practical and economically viable.

Hon Simon O'Brien: That is why we are investing suitable funds into planning. It is something that the previous government was not capable of conceiving.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: I take that point. I remind the former transport minister that these two small projects have to come first. These are also stand-alone projects; they do not affect other projects and will not be affected by other projects.

Hon Simon O'Brien: I suggest the member approach my good friend the Minister for Transport and get a briefing and find out something.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Can we let the member on her feet make her own speech?

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: The minister can respond to me in his reply speech. The time frame I was given in the estimates committee hearings was that it will take two years to spend that \$5 million. After all, \$5 million is a lot of money for a feasibility study. From reading between the lines, I conclude that the Kalgoorlie–Boulder intermodal transport hub will have no place in the budget for at least the next two years. I have to say that I am left speechless by the actions of the Minister for Transport. I am looking forward to reading this expansive feasibility study—probably the most expansive feasibility study ever done in WA's history by the Department of Transport. Meanwhile, I promise the minister that I will keep reminding him to update me on the progress of this study, until such time as I see these two small projects get into the budget.

I move on now to my next topic, which is a sovereign wealth fund. I used the opportunity during the debate on the appropriation bills to talk about the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund. I must say that that was not very well received as the Minister for Finance ignored that topic completely in his response to that debate, so I thought I would try again—just briefly. Like Australia, Norway has been blessed with abundant natural resources such as oil and gas. Norway started oil production early in the 1970s, having realised that proceeds from oil revenue should not be used to fuel private and public consumption if Norway was to sustain its prosperity when its oil reserves ran out. In 1990, the Norwegian Parliament passed a law to establish the government petroleum fund, which was the birth of the country's sovereign wealth fund. The plan was to regularly transfer capital from government petroleum revenue to support the government's long-term management of petroleum revenue. In the very short period of 30 years, as at 2007—four years ago—this fund had become the largest of its kind in Europe, and the fourth largest in the world. As of 19 October 2010, its total value was equivalent to \$A512 billion. Holding one per cent of global equity markets with 1.78 per cent of European stocks, it is said to be the largest stock owner in Europe. Indeed, it has been very impressive in terms of both forward thinking and results. It is a black and white contrast when compared with what happens in Australia. Western Australia also started its iron ore development in the early 1970s, but compared with Norway, not only have we not managed to establish any kind of savings fund, but also today we are \$14 billion in debt and we will be \$20 billion in the red in 2014. We are using the proceeds from our resources to fuel both private and public consumption, which is exactly what the Norwegians thought should not be done. We are simply spending too much—far more than we should be and far more than we have.

Our economy has been very dependent on resources. At the moment we are riding on the giant's back and that giant could turn out to be a monster. We do not know much about the beast that we are riding on. How much do we know about the real reason behind the latest decision to indefinitely shelve Sinosteel Midwest Corporation Ltd's project? Not long ago, during a casual dinner organised by a friend, I heard something that was very interesting. Some of the steel mills in China have overproduced steel, and these mills have also overstocked on iron ore. In China's twelfth five-year plan, the government has predicted—I really should use the word "decided"—that its economic growth will slow down. As members know, the Chinese economy is controlled by the government—not like our economy. Ours is also a controlled economy, but it is controlled by the interest rate, which is manipulated by the Reserve Bank. If the Chinese government has made a decision to slow down its economy, it will be done; there is no doubt about it. After that dinner, I reflected on what I had heard. I had the attitude that I would wait and see how things turned out, because it will be interesting to see. I did not know how to interpret the news that I heard over the dinner table. To me, if the news is true, it will have a large impact on

the production of big resource companies such as BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto. On the other hand, I suppose that Rio Tinto and BHP would have long-term production contracts with Chinese companies, so that any impact on BHP and Rio Tinto would not show until their contracts finished. Furthermore, if anything happened, China would protect its state-owned companies ahead of province-owned companies. Let us call those provincial steel mills the second-tier steel mills. Basically, I am trying to say that if contracts with BHP and Rio Tinto are with state-owned companies, they are safe for a while. It is those small province-owned state mills that are in danger first. Sinosteel did not give a real reason why its Mid West project has been shelved indefinitely, but we have interpreted that to be the delay in the Oakajee port project. It may well be the reason, and I am maybe overthinking this, but it seems to fit in with the news. Let us wait and see. That is always our attitude. We do not worry too much. We live by the day. We do not care much about what happens the next day.

We have been on this joyride for so long that we have the impression that it will last forever. That delusion, along with the lack of forethought, is preventing us from seizing the opportunity to establish our manufacturing industry and related industries in order to protect Australian jobs. We do not have any state ownership in any of those big resource companies. I cannot understand what is wrong with the state government owning 50 or 60 per cent of BHP and Rio Tinto. There is nothing wrong with supporting state ownership and, at the same time, believing in the theory of capitalism.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Is the member saying that 50 to 60 per cent of BHP should be state owned?

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: What is wrong with that? We should have made a contract right at the beginning, because now it is too late. What is wrong with state ownership of those big resource companies? We do not have legislation in place to prevent jobs that are generated from our natural resources going overseas, let alone the legislation to prevent those resource companies having headquarters outside Australia; why do they need to do that? Many of the shareholders of these giant companies are foreigners. Each year a large portion of this state's wealth is sent overseas in the form of super profits generated by those dirt diggers, yet some of us think that those companies pay enough tax and do not want them to pay any more tax to benefit our own country. We also provide generous incentives to encourage foreign companies to come to Western Australia and carve out their territories. On top of all that, the royalties for regions legislation provides that 25 per cent of this state's wealth from the mining royalties is spent as fast as it can be generated. Can anyone see anything wrong with this picture? The Minister for Finance certainly cannot. I suppose it is too complicated for him.

Hon Liz Behjat interjected.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: I promise that from now on I will be nice.

On 26 May during non-government business, the Minister for Finance asked which of the following projects should be cut: Perth Waterfront development, hospitals, the Premier's palace, the new stadium, new police stations or new power stations et cetera.

Hon Simon O'Brien: What is your response?

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: The minister knows that he was playing politics. It is not a question of which projects we should not have; it is a question of how to manage the limited resources at the government's disposal. Can the minister not see this fundamental difference? I am glad that the Minister for Finance also compared the state budget with a home budget; it is a very good and intelligent comparison. However, the minister does not really know how to manage his finances. He should go home and ask his wife whether she would manage her home budget differently if the minister did not receive his ministerial remuneration package. He should also ask his wife whether she would manage her home budget differently if the minister decided that he had had enough and would retire in two years.

Hon Liz Behjat: That's not going to happen.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: It is only a scenario; it is not true. If that were the case, would the minister's wife manage her home budget differently? Obviously, the answer is yes.

Hon Simon O'Brien: We manage our budget together; we do not have sexist stereotypes on this side of the house.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Right; I will let the Minister for Finance win this time. I think the minister got my point in the same way that he got my point last year about the transport hub in Kalgoorlie. I ask the minister to please act on it, and not only to be agreeable. Before I move on to another topic, let me say that it is time for us to learn from other countries, such as Norway, and it is the right time for us to set up our own state sovereign wealth fund. The Premier indicated his intention to take such an action back in March. I am not sure whether the minister is aware of that; if not, I will pass on the article in the *Kalgoorlie Miner*. The Premier's intention was not really well reported; I do not know why. It is disappointing that we have not heard anything since. I wonder

whether the minister will indicate in his reply speech the government's plan and the time frame for the establishment of a state sovereign wealth fund.

Moving on, as a regional member, one of the topics that I must touch on is royalties for regions. I get the impression from the National Party's propaganda that the government does not spend enough in regional areas. Therefore, I went through past budgets and tried to extract simple information on how much the government has spent on regional areas. The results make for interesting reading. I went as far back as I possibly could. Here are some of the facts. In 2003–04 we allocated \$308 million to fund projects in the regions, compared with \$145 million in the metropolitan area. In 2004–05, we allocated \$355 million to the regions and \$403 million to the metropolitan area. In 2006–07, we allocated \$594 million to the regions and \$492 million to the metro area. Listen to this: in 2007–08, we allocated \$1.2 billion to the regions and \$701 million to the metropolitan area. In 2008–09, we allocated \$1.8 billion to the regions and \$1.5 billion to the metropolitan area. In 2009–10, before taking into account the royalties for regions money, we again allocated \$1.8 billion to the regions; and, after taking into account the royalties for regions money, the total allocation was \$2.4 billion to the regions and \$1.7 billion to the metropolitan area. Similar amounts were allocated in 2010–11, which is this year's budget —

Hon Simon O'Brien: Are you saying that the regions are getting too much?

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: I have not finished. I did not give a conclusion; I am just giving facts. Could the minister please be patient?

Hon Simon O'Brien: I thought you were inviting me to comment.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Was I, Mr President?

The PRESIDENT: No; I cancel the invitation.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Similar amounts were allocated in 2010–11, which is this year's budget, with \$2.3 billion allocated to the regions and only \$1.8 billion to the metropolitan area after taking the royalties for regions money into account. Simply by looking at this figure I can understand that spending has gone bananas since the Liberal–National government took over. The latest population figures show that approximately 704 000 people live in regional Western Australia and 1.6 million people live in the Perth metropolitan area. It seems to me that there is no shortage of spending on the specified projects in the regional areas. In the past couple of years and coming years, we have seen and will see a river of money flowing into the regions. I do not have a problem with that, but I have concerns and questions. Let me start with the country local government fund allocation formula. Based on that formula, a shire with a population of 200 will potentially receive an almost equivalent amount to that received by a shire with a population of 31 000. For example, the Shire of Menzies, with a population of 239, received \$767 000 in local government funding, whereas the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder, with a population of 32 000, received only \$1.3 million.

Hon Simon O'Brien: What were those funds for?

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: The minister knows better; he should tell me!

Hon Simon O'Brien: Could it have been for roads?

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: No; it was for specified projects. I do not know, okay. The minister should tell me. I know that all this money is going to the regions.

Hon Simon O'Brien: You are making a speech attacking money being spent in your region.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Was I attacking or was I just making a comparison of the facts extracted from the budget?

Hon Simon O'Brien: Are you in favour of it or are you against it?

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Let us move on. The National Party —

Hon Simon O'Brien: What's your point?

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: I thought that Mr President had already pointed out that the minister needs to have patience.

The National Party somehow thinks that if a hospital, school, university, theatre, swimming pool, shopping centre, police station, arts centre, museum or fun park is built in a shire such as Menzies, people will go to Menzies to live. However, jobs bring people to live in the regional areas. Jobs come first! The National Party must remember that it is about job creation. In spite of all the money spent in the regional areas, if we do not create enough jobs in those regional areas, there will be no attraction for people to live in the area.

Furthermore, royalties for regions money is currently used to top up major projects in the regions. That has not stopped the National Party from making the false claim that these projects are fully funded by royalties for

regions. It is as though the Liberal Party is making cakes, while the National Party puts the cherry on top of those cakes and names the cakes “cherry cakes”.

The Minister for Regional Development is a very rich man; he controls \$1 billion a year in hard cash. Over the past two years he has certainly learned very quickly how to spend that money as though there is no tomorrow. When I was preparing my speech, I could just not stop thinking of the song from *Evita* titled *And the money kept rolling in (and out)*. Here is a variation of the song —

And Royalties keep rolling in from every side
Grylls’ big hands reached out and they reached wide
When the money keeps rolling in, you don’t ask how
Think of all the people guaranteed a plastic cow
Grylls called the country to him, open up the doors
There has never been the Royalties for Regions before

Grylls and his blessed fund can make your dreams come true
Write your name and your dream on a card or pad or a ticket
Throw it high in the air and should our saint pick it
He will change your way of life for a week or even two
Name me anyone who cares as much as —

Can I say the name?

Hon Simon O’Brien: The Minister for Regional Development.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Yes; the title, Minister for Regional Development, destroys the whole thing —

And the money kept rolling out in all directions
To the poor, to the weak, to the destitute of all complexions
Now cynics claim a little of the cash has gone astray
But that’s not the point my friends
When the money keeps rolling out you don’t keep books
You can tell you’ve done well by the happy grateful looks
Never been a saint, loved as much as the Minister for Regional Development

These days, the minister is spending much of the royalties for regions money in the Kimberley, Mid West and Pilbara, only because he has his eye on the three lower house seats in those areas. It is no secret that the minister is buying votes in those electorates. Before I move on, I would like to say that I think that, like everything else, this needs to be balanced; spending like this is not sustainable. It is not sustainable especially in towns in the Pilbara. Every time the Chinese economy contracts—not BHP; yes, the Chinese economy—it has a devastating impact on the investments made by others. BHP Billiton should and could do more for towns in the Pilbara in the same way that Rio Tinto could do more for Newman.

The National Party members have to do whatever they can to eliminate the unnecessary waste. I say that because the current method of administering royalties for regions is very expensive. For example, \$45 million in the budget is allocated to administering the royalties for regions grants. That \$45 million is on top of the 25 per cent of the total of state royalties. Another example of this waste is that the Minister for Regional Development recently spent \$250 000 on an advertising campaign to promote the National Party’s image. It is not right —

Hon Mia Davies: That is not quite correct.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: It is not right, but I cannot quite put my finger on it.

Hon Mia Davies: There was no National Party logo on any of that.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Hon Mia Davies can speak after this. I have only 22 minutes left.

Hon Mia Davies: Take care to make sure you tell the truth.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: She can stand —

Hon Mia Davies: I will.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: I would have made my speech a long time ago, but I was waiting for National Party members to stand for another round of, “What a wonderful job we have done!”

Hon Mia Davies: Just make it truthful.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Yes; the member, who has waited for me to stand before she stands, can now say that. What a chicken!

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Kate Doust: Hon Mia Davies has just been accusing our member of being dishonest.

Hon Mia Davies: Well, she was.

Hon Kate Doust: She was not.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: That is very right.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Members have to be very careful about the terms they use to describe members in this place and in the other place. I will leave it at that, at this stage.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Thank you, Mr President. I am, and will certainly always be, careful.

Before I finish on this topic, the royalties for regions fund is not an extra revenue stream for Western Australia; it is just a different heading in the budget and a different way to spend the money. The National Party members should always remember that they represent not only the people in the regional areas who voted for them, but also people in Western Australia as a whole.

Moving on, I wish to address the topic of not-for-profit organisations. I have in the past called for increased funding for small not-for-profit organisations, such as the Goldfields Women's Health Care Centre and the Kalgoorlie Boulder Volunteer Centre. I know that the big not-for-profit organisations, such as Centrecare and Red Cross, are able to look after themselves. I can see that they are also very well funded by the federal government. It is the small not-for-profit organisations that are struggling to survive. It is my hope that this \$1 billion funding allocation in the budget for the not-for-profit sector over the next three or four years will somehow benefit the sector and give it new life, to enable it to continue to deliver its vital services to the Goldfields community.

One of the small not-for-profit organisations that I did not get a chance to speak on behalf of is the Eastern Goldfields Sexual Assault Resource Centre. EGSARC is the only specialised provider of services for victims of sexual violence in the Goldfields. Like the Goldfields Women's Health Care Centre, it is fully funded by the Department of Health. However, the funding allows for only one full-time coordinator position, while all other support is provided by volunteers. Over the past year or so, this centre's project funding and other sources of funding have almost dried up, compared with what happened two or three years ago.

I would like to give members an overview of the centre's current situation in its own words, by quoting a few paragraphs from its most recent briefing paper, dated 12 May 2011. According to my notes it states, in part —

“Until recently, EGSARC also provided free 24 hour crisis response and support and specialised crisis counselling for victims of sexual violence. However, in December 2010, counselling was ceased due to insufficient funding.

The unfortunate decision to withdraw counselling services was reached due to the fact that the Centre could not offer a competitive remuneration package and could no longer afford to sustain the continuously increasing costs of service delivery. Without these cost cutting measures, the Centre faced the imminent risk of closure. Current funding levels no longer meet the basic operational costs of running an effective service.

We have acted on all opportunities to reduce costs including scaling back on staff hours and rental costs, while ensuring that we can continue to deliver some essential services to the community.

The Centre is now run by one FTE Coordinator, who manages the Centre, as well as providing a number of support services including, rape crisis support, information and referral services for victims and their supporters (during business hours).

While we have implemented various cost cutting measures to ensure financial viability of the service, this has significantly reduced the overall relevance and effectiveness of the service. More specifically, we cannot afford to offer specialised counselling for victims of sexual violence.”

This briefing paper really paints a gloomy picture of a typical small not-for-profit organisation that is struggling for survival. I personally doubt very much that it will survive this year, as it is quite clearly stated in the briefing paper that, due to the funding shortage, it is having difficulty providing its core services. It seems to me only logical: if an organisation cannot provide its core services, there is no point to its existence.

I asked during the estimates hearings whether it is the Department of Health's intention to continue to fund EGSARC. The answer was that there is no threat to the funding. I am still waiting for answers to the second and third parts of the question, which were about the funding levels and the term of the contract. I would like the Department of Health to know that there is no point in continuing to fund that organisation if the funding level is not going to be increased, because it will not survive on the existing funding level.

The centre used to have a three-year funding agreement, but two years ago it was changed to a yearly funding arrangement. This change created serious uncertainties and uneasiness for the centre, as it was no longer able to make long-term plans to deliver its core services in a consistent and continuous manner. Instead of being able to focus on how to deliver its core services, the centre is constantly distracted by the endless need to cut costs and carry out paperwork, such as lodging applications for grants and compliance forms. That is really too much for a one-man band; I would not do it. Were it not for those devoted people who run the centre, there is no way it would have survived for such a long time.

I suggest that the Department of Health should really sit down with the centre and discuss these issues honestly in terms of how the department sees EGSARC's future. After all, the centre is fully funded by the Department of Health. I think the department should communicate with EGSARC about the sort of expectations it has of the centre. If it is the case, however, as was said during the estimates hearings, that the funding is not under any threat, then the funding level from the Department of Health should be realistic.

I had a very frank conversation a while back with the person in charge of EGSARC; I am not sure whether that person is still there. I suggested that perhaps EGSARC, to save costs, should approach other small not-for-profit organisations such as the Goldfields Women's Health Care Centre to share their premises and administration costs. In that way it could devote a bigger portion of its funding to running its core services.

This centre has already been reduced to a skeleton; nothing further can be cut. It had already explored all possible savings possibilities long before I began exploring the same ideas. Its future is now in the hands of the Department of Health. I understand that the centre is now seriously thinking of permanent closure. As for the Goldfields Women's Health Care Centre, its situation is not as desperate as EGSARC's, but I also had a very frank conversation with that centre. I told the centre I personally thought that some of the programs it runs were economically unviable. I asked whether the centre had carried out cost-benefit analyses before offering those programs, and it admitted that it had not, for some of the programs it offers. I also explored the idea of selling the premises—the centre owns the premises from which it operates—and leasing it back from the buyer. I suggested that because the centre is facing huge maintenance costs, it puts pressure on its funding.

I spoke in this chamber not long ago about the difficulties the Goldfields Women's Health Care Centre faces. I think the Minister for Child Protection promised to look into it to see whether she could get the centre some one-off funding to solve the current problem. Unfortunately, the Minister for Child Protection is away on urgent parliamentary business, but I will remind her at a later stage to enlighten me about whether she has made an inquiry about this one-off funding that she promised to look into. I sincerely hope that not-for-profit organisations will somehow benefit from this \$1 billion allocation or from increased funding to the health department. As I have mentioned in my remarks on other motions, increased funding of a mere \$40 000 or \$50 000 will make a big difference to those small not-for-profit organisations and allow their continued existence and opportunities to help change the lives of people in the Goldfields.

As a member for the Mining and Pastoral Region, it is my duty to talk about remote communities. Human beings are extraordinary creatures. Every day I am amazed at our ability to achieve unimaginable things. Members will probably remember the rescue of 33 Chilean miners who were trapped 700 metres underground for 69 days. We have walked on the moon and we launched the *Voyager* space probe 33 years ago, which is continuing its mission to explore the galaxy. However, when it comes to dealing with Aboriginal issues, especially the issues confronting remote Aboriginal communities, we surrender and admit that we do not have solutions. I have heard this expression on a number of occasions very recently from the Minister for Indigenous Affairs and also from the Minister for Regional Development. After saying that, they put more resources into those remote communities, knowing that there is "an enormous amount of duplication (and) a massive amount of wastage of resources which are not necessarily directed at the right areas." I have just quoted from an opinion piece in *The Weekend West* dated 11 June 2011. I am sure the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, who was here a while ago but has now left the chamber on urgent parliamentary business, will remember his comments. That is right. It is not a shortage of funding; it is not a shortage of resources.

I refer to the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku, which is located in the eastern Goldfields. I have visited most of the remote communities along the central road on Ngaanyatjarraku land. The Ngaanyatjarraku shire has a population of 1 800. In the 2010 financial year, it received more than \$24 million in grants and its total revenue was \$30 million. To put this in some sort of comparable perspective, the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder has a population of 31 000; its total revenue as at 30 June 2010 was \$47 million, so it is \$47 million versus \$30 million and, in population terms, 31 000 versus 1 800. On top of this funding, extensive resources are directed to the shire, such as a permanent school structure, staffing and housing; a permanent policing structure, staffing and housing; a permanent DCP structure, staffing and housing; and the same for DIA, the Department for Corrective Services and the Department of Sport and Recreation. Magistrates Court services are chartered every month to Laverton, Warburton and Warrakurna. The court consists of a magistrate, a prosecutor, a court officer, someone from the

Aboriginal Legal Service of WA and Legal Aid, and someone from community corrective services. If there are any juvenile cases, someone from the juvenile justice unit will also fly there. That is at the state government level. At the federal level there is Centrelink, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Indigenous Coordinating Centre. At non-government organisation level, job service advisers are funded by government grants; Centrecare is fully funded by both federal and state governments; Red Cross is funded by federal government grants; and the GP network is funded by federal government grants. On top of this list, millions of dollars come from mining companies. People walking into the post office trying to cash cheques for \$19 000 or to spend \$200 000 at the pub in Laverton within a day or two are normal practice.

I am going to stop here because, by saying that, I was trying to support the Minister for Indigenous Affairs' point that the issue is not about a shortage of resources. The minister was also quoted in the same article in *The Weekend West* as saying that some attempts at a solution were like putting a bandaid on a broken arm. Well, that is a good comment; we are getting there, but not quite. I believe that our solution to the issues and challenges we face in remote communities is like adding another layer of bandages to the already-bandaged, festering sore. The condition is deteriorating inside, but it looks all right on the outside, and from time to time the symptoms of deterioration surface and the puss wets the bandage. What do we do? We do not want to open it up; we simply devote more resources to it. We put another layer of bandage over it to cover the leaking puss. Then we blow our trumpet and pat ourselves on the back, just like the Minister for Child Protection did.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: When? I don't recall patting myself on the back.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: All the time, as we have heard. I would rather the minister kept quiet.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: All right.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Otherwise she will embarrass herself.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: I have not yet embarrassed myself in here.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Jon Ford): Order, members! We can have everybody quiet as long as the member addresses her comments to me.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Go for it; I will take an interjection.

That is not a solution; it is more like a painkiller; it does not solve the fundamental problem.

On a number of occasions I have expressed my belief in the importance of education. I have to say that it is the solution to most of our problems. In remote communities I think it is, of course, the only solution to solving the problems as long as the federal and state governments have the courage to implement the right policies. During my visit to the remote communities, I had no shortage of first and second generation educated Aboriginals come up to me and tell me that their fathers and mothers are educated and they believed that education is the best thing that has happened to them. Their parents agreed that it is the best thing that has ever happened to them. They also said that they will make sure that their next generation will be educated. It takes only one generation.

HON KATE DOUST (South Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [11.20 am]: I also rise to make some comments about this year's budget papers that have been tabled in this place. I listened to some of those last comments about applying the bandaid. When I look at some of the areas that I have an interest in, sometimes I think that the bandaid has been ripped off so many times that it accounts for the continuous hurt a number of my constituents feel every time they receive their latest power bill.

I want to run through a number of concerns that I have about the budget papers. One of the simplest ones that we find in the documents that were tabled in this place is that less information was provided to us and to the public about how the government is managing this state financially. The number of budget papers has been reduced. We used to have three budget papers and now we have two. There is less detail for us to turn the torch on the government and apply that level of scrutiny and get it to provide the answers that we need about what it is doing to ensure that our state will grow and thrive into the future.

I want to talk about the issue of energy first. A lot of the things that I will canvass today will probably go over matters that I have canvassed during the past couple of years since the Liberal and National Parties have been in government in this state. There is still a lot of disappointment about how the government is managing this portfolio. First, I want to talk about the 330-kilovolt line. We touched upon this briefly during the estimates committee last night. It is unfortunate that I have not been able to access the transcript to review the answers provided by the Minister for Energy and Mr Aberle on how they are managing the advancing of the 330-kilovolt line. I was somewhat disappointed yet again by the ongoing delay and deferment of this very important energy infrastructure project for our state. It is interesting to note that whilst the government says that it has allocated money in the budget—indeed, there is money in it—it has simply been spread over a period and deferred, but we are not seeing any real action. One thing I remember from last night's estimates committee hearing with Western

Power is that when the question was put to Mr Aberle—we referred to comments that he made during the previous estimates committee hearing 12 months ago—about how Western Power was managing in getting the 330-kilovolt line up and going and what work had been done to finalise the business plan and get the government to tick off on it, he acknowledged that the business plan had been given to the government in July last year. The minister has been sitting on the business plan for almost 12 months. That is another year's delay in this essential infrastructure project. Although the minister says that it will still go ahead—I think he said last night that it will be completed by about 2013 or 2014, and I look forward to clarifying those dates again—this project should have been up and going by now. It has caused great concern in the Mid West region for the industry players in the iron ore and renewables areas and it is certainly an ongoing concern for the town of Geraldton. I will come back to those matters in a moment. The government needs to get its act together on this issue. It is not even talking about the whole rollout of that very essential piece of infrastructure; it is looking only at the first stage of that rollout, not the second part. Who knows when and if it will get to talk about that particular part of the rollout.

I was fortunate enough to be in Geraldton a couple of weeks ago with my good colleague Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm. We met with a number of people in the town and doorknocked a number of houses in the town, talking to people about their energy issues. I do not know about the Minister for Energy, but I quite enjoy doorknocking. It is great to get out and talk to people and listen to their concerns and take matters up. On that occasion we were talking about the problems with the Crowther Street upgrade with the 132-kilovolt line through to the port and the new substation that will be built in that area. I say to the minister that I think Western Power could have handled the consultation process with the community better. It should have explained the other options to the community—that is, where the powerlines will be located, the option of undergrounding or the location of a substation and the surrounding buffering for that substation. I hope that after my discussion with Western Power, it takes those comments on board. If the community feels that it has had genuine input and that Western Power has addressed its issues, we might find that there is a swifter and much more appreciated way forward.

Hon Peter Collier: It was raised with me when I was up there about a month ago as well.

Hon KATE DOUST: I think the minister would acknowledge the level of concern. The town of Geraldton is certainly opposed to the proposal that has been put to it relating to how that street would be dealt with.

What is interesting about this 330-kilovolt line is the manner in which it has been handled, and not just by the minister. I want to talk about some of the comments made by the Leader of the National Party, Hon Brendon Grylls. He is quoted in *The Geraldton Guardian* of 23 May this year, not long after the budget was tabled. This article in *The Geraldton Guardian* is headed “Grylls defends 330kV charge”. The article reports that he defended the state government's decision not to fund stage 2 of the transmission line from Eneabba to Geraldton. He went on to say that the first phase from Pindar to Eneabba was included in the budget, but he did not speculate on whether a Geraldton leg would be built. I would have thought that the National Party would be dead keen to ensure that that Mid West area, where the bulk of its constituents live and where it has its strongest base, is looked after into the future by having a 330-kilovolt line. The Leader of the National Party cannot even give those constituents a clear answer on whether stage 2 will be built. When we were in government, the whole of that line was planned for, and budgeted, even though we now know that there were problems with that budgeting allocation. I think the opposition has provided the minister with some assistance in seeking answers for him about how—I cannot use the words I really want to use —

Hon Peter Collier: It was very much appreciated.

Hon KATE DOUST: I am always happy to help the minister extract answers from his own agencies. Even last night I saw that sometimes the minister does not always have the information from certain agencies that he should have. I might come back to that shortly.

In making those comments, the Leader of the National Party acknowledged that further investment is needed to deliver power to Oakajee. He went on to talk about the dollars. These comments just add to the uncertainty for those players who want to invest in that region. I understand that the uncertainty about this upgrade to the infrastructure has resulted in some of these companies delaying their projects; it has caused them difficulty with their financial arrangements. The government really needs to step up. Not only are we dealing with the resources boom in the north west, which is important for our state, but also we have the potential for growth and expansion in the Mid West in both the return to the state and the provision of employment for families in the region. We need to ensure that all the necessary infrastructure is there. I would have thought that a primary responsibility and the main focus of this government would be delivering as swiftly as possible the best energy infrastructure to guarantee security of supply. What we have seen repeatedly over the past couple of years is that the government has not been able to deliver. It is constantly establishing more review committees and engaging more consultants. It is spending a lot of taxpayers' money, but we are not getting the answers we need.

I know that Minister Collier is very keen to demonstrate that he can deliver for this community. I say to him that he really needs to start taking the brakes off this project; he needs to start delivering for this community. I know that in 2008 Western Power internally commissioned quite a technical report that referred to the urgency of this upgrade to the powerline. It said that if it was not in place by, I think, 2012–13, there would be quite severe consequences in delivering capacity. I note also that in, I think, 2010, Western Power delivered another internal technical report in which it seemed to have changed its position. I do not know what happened to the person who wrote the first report, because the first report would have been the impetus to move on and make decisions about delivering this project in the first place. Somewhere along the line Western Power has shifted its reasons for the need for this project and has been party to the delays. I do not know why, because it has never been clearly articulated to us or to the communities in that area why Western Power and the government are dragging their feet and deferring this vital project for this part of the state. Even the budget papers have changed; there was a very definite allocation of funds for this project, and then it was deferred, and then quite a separate part of the budget was allocated to this Mid West project. That separate allocation is no longer in that part of the budget papers; it is now in the Western Power budget area. The deck chairs are being moved, and it does not provide certainty.

I do not think I got an answer to one of the questions I asked during the estimates hearing last night. There might have been a period of silence, but I will read the transcript when I get it. I do not understand why the private iron ore company that is developing the Karara mine can build and deliver its 330-kilovolt line for, I think, less than \$300 million, which was half the original figure mooted for the 330-kilovolt line from Perth to Geraldton, but this state government can drag its heels for so long and still not clearly indicate the time frame in which this project will be delivered. I do not believe that this project will have commenced by the next election. Call me a doubting Thomas, and I might need to put my fingers in the sores, but I do not believe that the minister will deliver this project in time for the next election. If the Liberal Party is in government at that time—I hope that that is not the case—I think that we will be talking about this every year for a number of years because the minister cannot get his act together to deliver this project.

I want to keep talking about this project in Geraldton, because it has been interesting to note the local member's attitude to this vital project. I would have thought that the Liberal member for Geraldton would be banging on the doors of the Minister for Energy and the Premier and constantly talking to the Treasurer and asking, "Why aren't you delivering on one of the key pieces of infrastructure that I need for my community? I have all these industry players, renewable players and local government players constantly on my back. The local chamber of commerce is asking me why I'm not delivering on this project." But, no, the local member, Mr Blayney, takes a very interesting approach to this project. I do not know whether that is because he is a new member and he thinks, as do a lot of backbenchers, that if he waits and behaves himself, he will ultimately get what he wants. I think Mr Blayney needs to learn the lesson that if he really wants to deliver for his community, he needs to be in the ear of his ministers constantly and demand that they deliver on this vital project; otherwise, Mr Blayney might not hold that seat for too long. Just for the record, I hope that will be the case.

In 2009, Mr Blayney wrote a letter to the editor of *The Geraldton Guardian* in which he rejected comments that had been made at that time. Two years ago, the CEO of the Geraldton council made comments attacking the state government because it had not delivered on the 330-kilovolt line upgrade at that time. Nothing has changed. At that time, Mr Blayney responded to those comments in his letter to the editor. He rejected the description of the decision to review the 330-kilovolt powerline as "almost frightening". He also said that the suggestion that there is a lack of understanding about the importance of our future energy supplies in the Mid West is simply not accurate. I put it that the member for Geraldton does not understand the future energy supply needs in the Mid West and Geraldton. He went on to say that the government had set up a working group, comprising the Department of Treasury and Finance, the Department of State Development, the Office of Energy and Western Power, to review this project. He also highlighted the areas that the government considered were essential to review for this project. Members need to keep in mind that this is 2009—two years ago. In this letter he said —

The Government considers it worthwhile to review this project for the following reasons:

- The effect of the changed economic environment on demand forecasts
- The accuracy of Western Power's cost estimates
- The appropriateness of Western Power's chosen route
- The viability of alternatives such as local generation
- The possibility of benefits of the construction being staged.

He said that the working group would report back to the government by the end of 2009. Some of those issues were probably valid issues to look at, given the global financial crisis that we were going through at that time. I know that there were issues about some of the pastoral areas that the line was to go through. It is now two years

later and there has been no movement, no advance and no powerline. Mr Blayney defended his government at that time, and he is still defending the government. In fact, an article written by Ben O'Halloran headed "MPs war over cash for region" in the *Midwest Times* of 26 May refers to Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm coming out firing against Mr Blayney over the state budget. I know that Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm is equally passionate about the need to get the 330-kilovolt line up and going in this area, because he understands the future implications for that region if we do not have that upgrade. He also has been pursuing this issue on behalf of his constituents in the area. In the article, Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm is reported as saying that Geraldton is crying out for the 330-kilovolt line. I must admit that that was the key message I received from everyone I met with during my recent visit to Geraldton—they are desperate to get this line up and going. That is a fairly consistent line. However, the article further states —

Member for Geraldton Ian Blayney said until large projects like Oakajee were signed off there was no need to have expensive infrastructure built.

We all know what has happened in the past week; there is a bit of uncertainty about that. The article goes on to quote Mr Blayney as saying —

"You can't put in this big, really expensive infrastructure until it's actually needed. That is the rules under the ERA," ...

"Sooner or later if people keep going on about this powerline it's going to start affecting confidence in the area.

I say to Mr Blayney that it has already affected confidence in the area, and he needs to pull his head out of the sand and start talking to these people. It is not a case of wait and we will build and they will come; it is a case of they are there now and they desperately need it and we have to get it up and going, otherwise they will not stay. I would hate to see what would happen in the area then. Maybe Mr Blayney has seen that wonderful baseball movie. Someone will have to remind me —

Hon Peter Collier: *Field of Dreams*.

Hon KATE DOUST: Yes, *Field of Dreams*—a fantastic movie: build it and they will come. I do not think that applies to the 330-kilovolt line. Hon Peter Collier might need to tell that to Mr Blayney. In the article, Mr Blayney is then quoted as saying —

"Go and find the company that says we have got a problem with power because I'm not aware of it. I haven't got people coming and saying that to me."

Well, Mr Blayney, I have people coming and saying that to me; Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm has people coming and saying that to him; I am sure that members of the National Party who are active in that area have people coming and saying that to them. I do not know how he has missed that opportunity. I do not know what he is doing about connecting with his community, because the community is certainly sending out that very clear message. Further down in that same article, it states —

"Mayor Ian Carpenter —

This was obviously a week after the budget was handed down —

said he would be disappointed if funding wasn't allocated for the second stage of the line.

"I am sorry for him and everyone else. The Government has let the Mid West down."

That is the mayor of Geraldton saying that this government has let the Mid West down. At the end of the article, Mr Blayney is quoted as saying —

"Why is the City council forever going on about power? Can they not get enough power? Have they appointed themselves guardians of WA's power industry?"

I have never heard such a moronic response. The local government in the area has done all its work. It understands the needs of its area; it understands the needs for the future. It has done the calculations for what is required for its area and to fit in with its plans. Yet here we have the local member saying, "Why do they keep carping on about this issue? Why don't they just go away and be quiet?" I think that perhaps the member needs to step up and stand up for his constituents.

In fact, a document was provided to me by the CEO of the City of Geraldton—Greenough when I was there for my visit. It is from the Mid West Development Commission and is headed "Mid West Investment Plan 2011 – 2021". One has only to go to page 10 of this document, which is a government document, to see that it refers to "Mid West Energy Stage 1 and 2". I am going to read from this document, because I think it is important that we get these comments on the record. It states —

The provision of power is seen by regional stakeholders, including MWDC, —
That is, the Mid West Development Commission —

as the single biggest impediment to growth in the Mid West region. The major development projects that are planned heighten the Mid West's need for a secure, high capacity electricity transmission network to underpin the future economic and social growth of the region.

It goes on to say that the proposed project is broken into two parts. It then states —

It is identified as a key regional priority and the State Government is seeking funding for this development through Infrastructure Australia.

I imagine that would be stage 2; it is certainly not stage 1. It then goes on to state —

This infrastructure will enable the region to optimise the significant opportunity for a diverse renewable energy sector from demonstrated wind resources, potential wave energy, geothermal leases, some of the highest solar indices in Australia for photovoltaic or solar thermal plants and ample land to develop bio fuel resources.

We all know, minister and members, that WA is perhaps one of the wealthiest places in Australia with its diversity of renewable energy resources. Certainly, in this Mid West area, there is the luxury or the capacity to tap into all of those types of renewables that are mentioned in this document. It then states —

The 20% target for renewable energy in 2020 and likely carbon pricing place the Mid West in an advantageous position to become a focus for the production of renewable power.

However, going back to the start of that item, it states that if we do not have the 330-kilovolt upgrade, that is the single biggest impediment to these types of things happening. Therefore, I believe that perhaps the member for Geraldton needs to read the Mid West Development Commission's document, because it spells it out quite clearly. I know that the CEO, the mayor and certainly the councillors whom I have met with in Geraldton absolutely back the need for the swift development of the 330-kilovolt line, because they understand that unless this line gets up and going fairly quickly, they are going to be left behind the eight ball. It will mean that the opportunities and the plans that they have for the development of their own town, for the surrounding areas, for the iron ore industries that will need to hook into an upgraded grid and for the potential renewables in that area just will not happen. Therefore, the government needs to take this on board and stop delaying. If it has had that business plan for 12 months, it really needs to get on with its job and deliver this vital project for this area.

I am pretty sure that when I come back to make my few comments on the budget speech next year, I will probably still be saying the same things about the 330-kilovolt line. I hope that the government disappoints me and gets this up and going. I will be quite happy to be disappointed about not having to get up and criticise the government for not delivering on this vital piece of infrastructure. Therefore, I encourage the minister to disappoint me and build it; otherwise, I will be getting to my feet again and, much to the chagrin of the local member for Geraldton, I, like the council in Geraldton, will continue to bang on about the need to upgrade the power system leading up to Geraldton. If the minister has not got that message, he should get it fairly soon.

Going back to look at some of the comments made about power, I will talk about some comments that have been made by the National Party. We know that National Party members are key players in this place. We know that they have forged a very interesting and powerful alliance with the Liberal Party to have government. I picked up on the comments made by Hon Jon Ford the other day. It is always interesting to see how two parties play out together when they are meant to be part of the same team. It was interesting to note that in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* of 21 May, an article written by Sam Tomlin is headed "Nationals will keep them honest" and states —

THE National Party has pledged to keep the Government honest on water and electricity prices for regional customers, following the announcement of a five per cent jump in utility prices as part of this years State Budget.

Hon Jon Ford reminded us that three National Party members in the other place are in cabinet, and a National Party member in this chamber is a parliamentary secretary. It is not about keeping the Liberal Party honest in government. National Party members have every opportunity, when it comes to decision making, to voice their opinion and to vote on a particular line. To use Hon Mia Davies' line, it is dishonest of National Party members to continually say, when it suits them, "We are part of government", and to say, when it does not suit them because they want to curry favour in their electorates, "Oh, no, we're not part of the Liberal Barnett government. We're separate; we're different. We do things differently. We'll keep them honest." The reality is that the National Party signed an agreement; it is part of the government. It cannot keep the government honest because it is part of the government. If National Party members want to do things differently, they should speak up or separate. They cannot keep putting out this nonsense and pretending to be something that they are not. It amazes me that National Party members have been allowed to get away with this type of nonsense for the past two years.

It will be very interesting to see how the government deals with them in due course. I know that the Premier probably would love to have an opportunity, if unfortunately he is re-elected to power, to not to have to engage in that type of arrangement. The article also stated that the commitment was made by Hon Wendy Duncan at the previous day's post-budget breakfast, which was held in the Goldfields–Esperance region. The article continued —

Kalgoorlie–Boulder Mayor Ron Yuryevich raised concerns about the impact the five per cent efficiency dividend on Government-owned utility companies such as Western Power and the Water Corporation would have on regional Western Australia.

Mayor Yuryevich made a couple of valid points, one of which was raised with me when I visited Kalgoorlie. He talked about how Western Power does not have enough people in that part of the world to deal with issues that are raised by the consumers who live there. Mayor Yuryevich said —

... you have to deal with someone remotely in Perth if you want to fix any problems you may be having.

I think that is an interesting and valid comment because we all appreciate the tyranny of the distance from Kalgoorlie to Perth. After her post-budget breakfast speech, Hon Wendy Duncan acknowledged the impact the price rise would have and said —

“We’ve obviously got the balance of power, which gives us considerable leverage,” ...

Hon Wendy Duncan says that the National Party will keep the government honest—there is a touch of the Democrats, I think—but in her next sentence says, “We’ve got the balance of power and we’ve got leverage.” Why does the National Party not use that leverage? If it is so concerned about the impact of rising water and electricity prices upon its constituents in rural and regional areas, why does it not use that leverage? We do not have difficulty calling the government to account when it jacks up utility prices. We do not have a problem with trying to put pressure on the government to reduce the negative impact of price increases on householders, but I have yet to hear National Party members in this chamber talk about what they are doing to hold the government to account on managing pricing arrangements for people in the bush and the sort of assistance they want the government to provide so that people do not have to make drastic lifestyle changes. As a key example of what the National Party looks to do, Hon Wendy Duncan pointed out that on one occasion the Nationals lobbied on behalf of the McDonald’s restaurant in Esperance. If my memory serves me correctly, the issue was that the restaurant was about to open but the owner had a problem accessing power. I forget the details, but I remember speaking to this gentleman and that it was a very interesting issue. I note that Hon Brendon Grylls did indeed step up on this occasion and some changes were made to provide assistance. I remember telling the restaurant owner, “Look, I’m quite happy to take your case up for you. I’m quite happy to get some media up because that might be the only way you can get the government to sit up and listen to you and actually address your concerns.” If the matter was not resolved, he could not open his new McDonald’s restaurant and employ a number of young people in that town. The gentleman told me that he did not want to pursue it because he was a member of a political party that was not ours and he did not want to upset people too much. Therefore, I am pleased that the National Party resolved that issue, and not just for the owner of that restaurant. However, that is just one example for one employer; what are National Party members doing for ordinary householders? Are they raising householders’ concerns with the government and putting pressure on the government about that? How is the National Party trying to keep the government honest when it is part of the government?

Hon Robyn McSweeney: Because we are honest!

Hon KATE DOUST: I do not suggest that the government is anything but honest, Hon Robyn McSweeney. I am simply quoting from an article in which Hon Wendy Duncan said that she thinks she needs to keep the government honest, so maybe Hon Wendy Duncan does not think that the Liberal government is an honest government. The minister will need to ask the member that the next time she sees her.

The Treasurer is also quoted in this article as saying that the price rises people have to put up with as of Friday, 1 July, are modest. The price rises could have been a lot higher, but I think that because we have been able to apply pressure to the government, not only this year but also last year, the government was compelled to reduce the amount of the increase it would have rolled out. Therefore, that has slowed how the government will ultimately reach the point of cost reflectivity.

Another thing that needs to be taken into account when we are talking about these issues—I have not heard the National Party talk about this—is the implications for local government. We have recently seen—again, it will kick in this Friday—a 29 per cent increase in the price that local government has to pay for street lighting. That cost increase will ultimately be passed on to local government ratepayers. Ratepayers will pay not only an additional five per cent for their power from this July and an additional amount of money for water—I think it will increase by 14 per cent this year—but also an increase in their rates. There has been quite a bit of

controversy in the Rockingham area over the past few weeks about the proposed 12 per cent rate increase. I know that the City of Melville is currently debating whether it will increase its rates by more than, I think, 8.6 per cent. Both councils attribute part of the reason for the need to increase their rates to the increases in the cost of power and other utilities. I met with the City of Stirling recently and I put the question about how much extra money that council will have to find in its budget this year to deal with the increased utility costs. It said that it will need to find an extra \$1 million this financial year to cover that 29 per cent increase in street lighting.

Hon Max Trenorden: So are you going to apologise for disaggregating the power system?

Hon KATE DOUST: I will not apologise for disaggregating and I am not going to apologise for —

Hon Max Trenorden: You caused that; that's all on the Labor Party!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Jon Ford): Order!

Hon KATE DOUST: The member is upset because I made those comments. He needs to stand and defend his constituents.

Hon Max Trenorden: I'm really upset; I'm almost in tears!

Hon KATE DOUST: Good on you! I like to see blokes cry occasionally, so go for your life!

Every which way they turn, Western Australian taxpayers are being hit up. They are being hit up when their power bills go up this Friday, and they are being hit up when their water bills go up. They still have their gas bills and local council rates to come, and they have had a range of other charges, which I will go through shortly, significantly increase in the past couple of years. I put on the record that these are real concerns and that I do not know how the taxpayers of this state will actually afford these changes, because it is not just the five per cent increase in the price of power as of this Friday; the Office of Energy tells me that another five per cent and another 12 per cent and another 12 per cent will need to be rolled out in due course to reach cost reflectivity in electricity prices.

A number of constituents have talked to me about how they have had to tighten their belts and change their lifestyles, social habits and eating habits to pay their power bills. I recently met with a group of union officials from what is now called United Voice—I am still getting used to that name change—and I wanted to know how their members were dealing with the increased utility costs because their members are predominantly on the lower pay scale; they work long hours for low pay. A couple of examples were given to me. One woman told her organiser that she has not bought a pair of shoes for the past two years; she cannot afford to because she has to find the dollars to pay her power and other utility bills. I wondered why in this day and age do people have to make these types of decisions. We just take it for granted that if something breaks or our kids need a new pair of shoes, we will go out and get them, but a lot of people in our community are finding it so tough that they have to actually change how they get those things. I know that the government has talked up what it is doing with the hardship utility grant scheme, and it has put more money into that area. A lot of people of my father's age tend to sit down and note every cent and dollar that they spend; they manage their finances. A woman came to see me last August who had been a lifetime public servant in quite a senior role. She lived alone in my electorate; she was a lovely woman. She sat down and took me through her income and what money goes out. She showed me; she had documented everything. Once she pays the rent on her Homeswest property and her utility bills, she has nothing to live on. She does not have a car anymore; she got rid of that. She has no credit cards anymore; she got rid of all those. She is finding it harder and harder. At that point—I think it was last August—she said to me that she was barely managing. She told me she had been to apply for HUGS assistance and asked me whether I had seen the amount of paperwork involved to go through to the program. I say this to the minister because I think that the issue is the paperwork and the process. For a lot of people who are very proud of how they have managed their lives, it is quite a daunting process to have to literally go begging for assistance from the government to be able to pay a power bill and to be compelled to sit down with a financial counsellor. I imagine that in a lot of cases someone who is a lot younger and who may have different life experiences would feel very embarrassed about having to articulate or justify to that counsellor how they manage their dollars and cents. I do not know whether there is another way that the government can deal with this issue so that people do not feel so intimidated, so threatened and so embarrassed that when they find it so tough, they cannot just put their hands out for assistance.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: They might be embarrassed, but I do not think that they are threatened in any way.

Hon KATE DOUST: A lot of people say to me that they will just not do it; they would rather cut back in some other area rather than go through the process, because they are embarrassed at that point in their lives about having to explain something to a person or to be told how to change how they budget. I think that that is something that the minister needs to take on board, because at that point in their lives they should not be put in that position. I do not say that everybody is an excellent manager of their finances. Some people are very good at it and other people genuinely need assistance, and that is fine. But a lot of people say that they will not even go

down that path because it is such a daunting and embarrassing process. How that is managed needs to be addressed, so that people who need that assistance can readily ask for it and not feel that they are in a difficult place.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: You would have to agree that there has to be some sort of system.

Hon KATE DOUST: Yes, there has to be a system, but maybe it does not have to be as convoluted or difficult to work through, nor does it have to put a person in a position in which they would rather just go without than get help. One other issue that this woman raised with me, which I thought was quite interesting, was that when a person seeks that type of assistance, they already have to be in arrears. She found—this is one of the reasons she got rid of her credit cards—that once a person steps up and seeks assistance or once they are in arrears, it is reported to the credit agency and it therefore affects that person's credit rating. It means that if at some other point in their lives they need to seek some sort of credit assistance or obtain a bank loan—they might need to buy a new gas heater for their home or a hot water system or something like that—if their credit rating has been adjusted because they have had to seek financial assistance, it causes them difficulty as well. I do not know whether that has been raised with the minister before, but I think it is an interesting issue.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: They can do it beforehand —

Hon KATE DOUST: I think that is an interesting issue that the minister might want to look at, so that people are not put in that situation. It is just one of those unexpected negative outcomes that people do not always think about until it happens to them. I put that on the table and I would hope that the minister might seek advice on that, and I would be interested in her feedback at a later stage about whether that type of outcome has been canvassed with her department.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: If people know that they are going to have problems, they can ring beforehand; they do not have to wait until they are in arrears, so to speak. The message is out there and it is quite generous. But I will take it on board and I will have a look at that.

Hon KATE DOUST: I just wanted to get that point over.

There are indeed a lot of other issues that I would like to raise. I dutifully sat down and wrote my three pages of dot points, but I will not get through all of them.

I notice in today's *The West Australian* that the Premier has finally made a decision about a new football stadium in Burswood, which is in my electorate. I note that the government is looking to spend \$1 billion. There has been all sorts of argy-bargy over the last couple of years about the need for a football stadium and where it would be located. Who is the minister responsible in this chamber for sport and recreation? It is Hon Norman Moore. I raise this as an obscure question —

Hon Norman Moore: With great enthusiasm!

Hon KATE DOUST: Yes, I know; I am sure Hon Norman Moore would like to have it as a full-time gig really, would he not?

Hon Norman Moore: I had seven years of it, which is probably enough.

Hon KATE DOUST: I raise this as an interesting point. I understand that part of the arrangements to deal with noise issues for the residents of the new Burswood precinct who live so close to the Burswood Dome—the high-rise area and the apartments around—is that whenever an event is on at the Burswood Dome, they are offered free tickets; it keeps them onside and happy. I pose the question: if the stadium goes ahead at this location, given its close proximity to this residential precinct and also to the proposed residential precinct over the road in the current Belmont Park area, which the Town of Victoria Park is very keen to progress, will the people who operate the stadium also offer these residents in these areas free tickets to any events at the stadium?

Hon Norman Moore: I have got no idea.

Hon KATE DOUST: I want to raise that issue —

Hon Norman Moore: I do not suspect that people in Subiaco get a free ticket to the football.

Hon KATE DOUST: They may not, but this is a special arrangement that already exists in Burswood and I wonder whether the government will extend that arrangement to the stadium. I just raise it as a curiosity.

Hon Norman Moore: Are you thinking about buying a house there?

Hon KATE DOUST: No, I am not; I cannot afford houses there! I had a look at them with a couple of friends, but, no, I cannot. But it is a lovely area.

I just thought that it was a curiosity and that I should raise it. I would be interested to note, in due course as things move down the path, what the government does with that.

This government has mapped out a couple of significant projects; this government has talked about a couple of grand visions. One, of course, is the Perth foreshore plan. I know that there has been a lot of discussion, regardless of government, about what should happen there and a lot of lovely diagrams and stories told, if we like, about what could happen there.

Hon Norman Moore: Dubai-on-Swan, as a matter of fact!

Hon KATE DOUST: I do not know whether that is really the way it should be! I do not know whether that is really appropriate. I sat in the building on the Esplanade that used to be the childcare centre; it is now a Chinese restaurant.

Hon Norman Moore: It is a very good restaurant!

Hon Sue Ellery: It is a very nice restaurant!

Hon KATE DOUST: It is a beautiful restaurant!

I went to a biotech brokers function there a week ago. I sat there looking out over that area, and the person sitting next to me said how fantastic it was; there was such a great view and it was such a lovely part of Perth. I agreed and said that if the government had its way, the whole building would go; a heritage building would just go. I hope that the government has a serious look at the design for that area. I do not know whether it will deliver the vision that people expect.

One of my real concerns, as a member for the South Metropolitan Region, is the implications for people from my electorate who want to traverse their way from, say, Victoria Park when driving up Albany Highway and who need to cut across the city or even go into the city. Once this development goes ahead, that access will be denied them and we will find people being forced into the Graham Farmer Freeway tunnel or forced back through Canning Highway and South Perth. I do not know whether the government has done any research on traffic flow or numbers in those two areas. I know how difficult it is now for people commuting to the city via the tunnel, via the Causeway and even coming through that main road cutting along the river—I always forget whether it is Labouchere Road or Mill Point Road—and going to and from South Perth. In the evenings it is quite crazy. If it is as bad as that now, that is a real concern. I imagine that the member for South Perth, John McGrath, has already taken up these matters with the government. Getting into the city is not an issue for people coming from the western suburbs, because their access will not be cut off once the foreshore development goes ahead. Let us face it, it is going to take a long time; it is not something that will be done in a couple of years. It may take 10 or 15 years or longer before that type of plan is fully implemented. I have real concerns about the implications for people in my electorate coming into the city from the eastern suburbs, as they will be denied access along the foreshore area. I do not know whether the government has looked at some sort of tunnel or an overpass so that we can still have some sort of traffic flow. We all know how difficult it is to get through the city now. The speed limit has just been dropped to 40 kilometres an hour. Pretty soon I think we will just be walking through the city, which is not such a bad thing. However, those are real concerns.

We have the foreshore plan—I do not know what sort of dollars have been allocated to that grand vision; we have the Premier's palace, which has already been canvassed by a number of my colleagues; and we have \$1 billion for a football stadium. Although an article in *The West Australian* today says it will come in under \$1 billion, I doubt that very much. Enormous amounts of money are being spent on these great visions. I know that members of Parliament and particularly Premiers like to leave a legacy. We have seen that as we go through history. More than likely, they like to have bricks and mortar; they like to have some monument to their work in the state, and I do not deny them that opportunity. However, in a state such as Western Australia, where we are doing so well, perhaps we are missing opportunities. Personally, I think we need to address the priorities.

An article in *The West Australian* today, “Kids forced to live on streets ‘for little reason’”, refers to the 20-odd children who have been evicted from their public housing homes over the last few weeks. Hon Robyn McSweeney has probably read this article. As part of the new policy of this government, those children will be homeless. I imagine the government will have to try to find some sort of accommodation for these children. I raise this as an issue because I know that there are significant problems with lack of public housing and lack of housing for people on low or no incomes. This is a problem that both governments need to address, and I am not shying away from that.

In the last couple of weeks a number of matters have been raised with my office, particularly by Ms Betsy Buchanan from the Daydawn Advocacy Centre. We have taken up some of those problems, and I have talked to a number of other members to see whether a pattern has emerged since the change in government policy about how Homeswest tenants are managed when there have been difficulties. Ms Buchanan tells me that over the last three weeks about a dozen families have been evicted, comprising predominantly Indigenous women with children. That is a real concern for me. Here we are in this great state, and kids will be living on the streets. On

the other hand, in the same paper there is an article about spending \$1 billion on a football stadium. I have a real concern about where our priorities are —

Hon Robyn McSweeney: Can you tell me why they were evicted?

Hon KATE DOUST: It was for a variety of reasons. I am not saying that people are perfect; I am just saying that it is a real concern when children are the innocent victims and have to suffer as a consequence of whatever occurred. The government needs to address this issue of homelessness, and it needs to address the issue of providing affordable housing. I would have thought that this period of economic boom would be the perfect opportunity to pour dollars back into providing sufficient housing for these people so that the government can reduce these outrageously long waiting lists and ensure a decline in the huge number of people who do not have access to a home. I wanted to put that on the record, because that is a real concern of mine.

Hon Norman Moore: Are you saying that we should not proceed with the stadium?

Hon KATE DOUST: I am not saying that. I am just saying that it is about priorities, minister. When I start to see grand visions being rolled out and big dollars being talked about, and then I read about kids being forced to live on the streets, I say that the government needs to get its priorities in order.

Hon Robyn McSweeney: Do you know that when the arena was built, about 60 kids were being turned away every night?

Hon KATE DOUST: Minister, this is my opportunity to talk about what I think of the budget. I think it is deficient in a number of areas. It is unfortunate that I will not get an extension of time; I could probably go on for a bit longer than I had planned.

In my remaining four minutes I want to touch on science and innovation. This year the government allocated about \$29 million, which was a great shock to me but well received. The \$29 million is corralled into three projects. There is about \$10 million for the Square Kilometre Array project, another \$9 million or \$10 million for iVEC and about the same amount for the Western Australian Marine Science Institution. That is great, but there are a range of other programs and grants that still have not received appropriate funding. We are still seeing the loss of opportunity to develop science and innovation as a viable, sustainable industry in our state. We have already seen the difficulties that the science community has faced this year. The government finally re-established the Science Council and reverted to the Technology and Industry Advisory Council, and within a couple of months the government's appointed chair and another committee member had resigned in frustration because of the government's lack of interest and investment in this area. That is a real shame. We have only to look around at what is happening in other states to see that places such as Queensland are thriving on opportunities to develop themselves as a smart state.

I say to the ministers responsible that, if they want to look to the future, this is a very important area to invest in. When I went to the biotech forum a couple of weeks ago, I was fascinated to hear three companies that talked about projects in the biotech area. They talked about development opportunities and the stages they were at with their projects, all of which were medicine related. But it is all being done in America! Tens of millions of dollars are being poured into their projects, but it is all being done in America. We need to provide the proper infrastructure and the proper types of support to these companies and organisations in Western Australia so that they can grow and develop, and we can get the best return to our own state, not just now but for the future. The government is asleep at the wheel on this issue. It is focused only on the SKA, which we all support and we all want to happen. My worry is that because we are so isolated on this, we may miss opportunities. If we do not put in the dollars and develop those opportunities, we may lose them to other states and countries.

There is still uncertainty for the future development of Bentley Technology Park as an incubator for science and innovation. We still do not know where Scitech will be located after the contract expires in 2013. We have seen a reduction in the number of staff working in the science and innovation portfolio area. We talk to them about developing industry, but, unfortunately, they are focused only on heavy industry. They are not talking about ICT, biotech or agricultural or medical research. Unfortunately, the federal government was seeking to cut back medical research. I canvassed my federal colleagues quite loudly to get them to maintain that research. I know that our important scientists such as Barry Marshall, Fiona Stanley and Peter Klinken did the same—we had the rallies here—but the state government was silent instead of showing support for ensuring that the valuable work of these very important scientists would be able to continue. It was only in the last couple of weeks at a dinner function that the Minister for Health, Hon Kim Hames, actually made a donation to fund some work in the area of medical research. It is a bit late, but at least he put some money in there! The government has to step up and speak loudly to promote, invest in and determine a plan for science and innovation in this state; otherwise, it will miss the boat and we will miss the opportunities.

I note that the government finally listened and put \$1.1 million into the Gravity Discovery Centre at Gingin, which is a very important piece of work that we want to continue. I know that Hon Liz Behjat is a big fan, having been there on the weekend.

Hon Liz Behjat: I saw Saturn; it was amazing!

Hon KATE DOUST: It is a very important project, not just for the opportunity to see Saturn, but also for the research work done jointly with the federal government. We have to put pressure on the state government to keep these sorts of projects going.

HON MIA DAVIES (Agricultural) [12.20 pm]: I am pleased to rise today to speak to some aspects of this budget, in particular those areas that will have a positive impact on the Agricultural Region. I will start by saying that the Nationals in government have maintained a very strong focus on delivering improved services and infrastructure into regional Western Australia. In just over two years, regional WA has undergone a transformation which we are seeing come to fruition and which has been unprecedented. To a large degree, that focus has been provided by royalties for regions.

The royalties for regions policy is now being examined by other states so that it can be replicated and introduced. Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria are looking at what we are doing in Western Australia and how they can replicate it in their states. Western Australia is leading the way in investing in its regions, and a large part of that is through royalties for regions. It is about recognising the people who work, live and invest in the regions, and rightly so because that is where the majority of the wealth in this state is generated. Perhaps more than that, it is because we are poised for immense growth and Western Australia's population over the next 30 years is expected to grow by about two million people. Under current settlement trends, we could see about 500 000 extra people in regional WA. If that happens, every regional town in Western Australia can expect to see growth. As a government, it is absolutely vital to plan for this population growth to maximise the opportunities that members on both sides of the house have spoken about already in their responses to this budget.

A good government plans for growth and change. If I have enough time, I will come back and talk about one particular item in the budget provided through royalties for regions—that is, the supertowns initiative. That initiative acknowledges that we need to plan for growth and that that growth is happening. Brian Haratsis addressed the Committee for Economic Development of Australia and various Property Council of Australia groups. The federal government has undertaken a massive population strategy. Everyone acknowledges there is going to be growth, and Western Australia needs to be ready and willing to capitalise on the opportunities that that will create.

Today I am going to speak about another royalties for regions initiative—the southern inland health initiative. For me, that is probably the most significant initiative of this budget, for not only the Agricultural Region, but also a much broader area than that. I would like to start by commending Ministers Grylls and Hames for their foresight and commitment in rectifying the situation that has been occurring over a number of years in the regions in the delivery of health services infrastructure. To start, I would like to go back to 2008. On 26 March 2008, *The West Australian* ran an article titled “State of rural health ‘bloody unsafe’ says former chief executive”. I do not know whether I am allowed to say that in this place, but it is a direct quote. I apologise to those members who have sensitive ears. I will quote a few bits and pieces from this article. The article commences —

Chronic neglect, a failure to plan for staff shortages and the mining boom have left parts of rural WA with unsafe health care, a former head of the Health Department's country service says.

The article is referring to Chris O'Farrell —

She blamed the country health system's inability to cope on the “metrocentric” attitudes of bureaucrats and politicians and their focus on pouring funds into refreshing the bricks and mortar of country hospitals rather than on rewiring and redesigning at policy, communication and transport levels so things ran better.

“You still have to provide a responsive medical emergency system out there for country people and it's not just there all the time anymore,” she said. “In some areas, it is becoming blatantly ... unsafe.”

The article continues —

Dr Teasdale, who has worked at the Nickol Bay Hospital in Karratha for 11 years, said the shortfalls had resulted in poorer health prospects for country patients ...

Dr Teasdale stated —

“The standard now if you have a heart attack in the city is you get an angiogram within 90 minutes,” ... “Now I can't even get a plane here by Royal Flying Doctor Service within nine hours, so my heart patients automatically are going to do far worse than any city patient.”

We know that the government has provided the RFDS with a substantial amount to rectify some of those problems. The Liberal–National government has introduced measures in its state budgets over the past two years to address that issue. In this article Chris O’Farrell finished up by saying —

“I have been in the health system for nearly 40 years and I have worked with a lot of governments, a lot of ministers, a lot of director-generals and a lot of departmental executives, and I just think there is this ongoing relentless chronic neglect. At some stage you cannot get away with this sort of neglect.”

Ms O’Farrell said that it was blatantly unsafe. In opposition, before the 2008 state election, members of the Nationals consistently raised these issues with the then Minister for Health, Hon Jim McGinty, and this issue was in the media. This was the minister who labelled the RFDS an interest group, so it was hardly surprising that these concerns fell on deaf ears. More than that, Hon Jim McGinty denied there was a problem. Quite clearly there was and still is a problem with the system. The system has a combination of federal and state funding. Perhaps before I talk about the response that the state government has made to the failures of the federal Labor government in the provision of doctors in the regions, I will refer to the actions that the Nationals took to highlight these problems so that we could quantify the damage this was doing to people living in regional Western Australia. Last year, as a parliamentary party, we wrote to every country local government to try to quantify exactly the challenges that shires in the regions faced in attracting and retaining doctors. We conducted a fairly brief survey, and we had a very good response rate. We asked the following questions: Does the shire currently have a doctor? If yes, how many? Does the shire have a current doctor shortage, in its opinion? If so, by what figure? How many towns in the shire are without a doctor? That question accommodated shires such as Lake Grace, which has more than one town in the shire. Does the doctor reside in the shire? If not, where does the doctor reside? How many days a week does the doctor provide a service in the shire? And, how is the doctor employed? This will be well known to everyone who lives in the regions, but in a vast number of cases the shire is the employer of the doctor because ratepayers demand that service. The shires have been left holding the can when the federal and state governments have been unable to provide that service.

Hon Max Trenorden: Or unwilling!

Hon MIA DAVIES: That is correct. We asked the shires to quantify how the doctor was employed, whether they had a direct contract with the doctor, whether the shire went through the general practitioner network, whether the doctor was salaried to the hospital, and whether there was a joint contractual arrangement or a combination of options. On top of that, we asked what subsidies were provided by the shire: Does the shire provide or subsidise the salary? Does the shire provide the doctor with housing, a surgery and a car? The final question was: what impact has that had on the shire’s rate base and the proportion of rates it has spent on securing the services of a doctor to their town? The results were absolutely astounding. That is not from our perspective of what was happening, because we knew it was happening; everybody said that nobody had ever tried to quantify this before, so they were very happy to provide this information. I have a summary of this survey. I will not read out individual responses from shires because that information is probably not necessary. The responses have been summarised electorate by electorate to see what the shortages were and what impact this had on these shires. In Central Wheatbelt, which is in the Agricultural Region and is one Legislative Assembly seat, 17 out of 20 shires responded: four shires did not have a doctor at the time the survey was held; seven said that they had a doctor shortage; 15 shires, which was 83 per cent of the shires that responded, provided incentives to attract and retain a doctor, including a house, car, surgery and financial incentives ranging from nil to \$150 000 a year. This was in a shire that sometimes does not have more than 500 people living in it. The average amount spent on incentives by shires that reported that they provide incentives was about \$62 780. The average amount spent on incentives across all the shires in the Central Wheatbelt electorate was about \$55 300. In the electorate of Wagin, 23 out of 23 shires responded to the survey. Eleven shires did not have a doctor and 12 shires said that they had doctor shortages. The survey showed that 14 shires, which was 60 per cent of shires that responded, provided incentives to attract or retain a doctor and those incentives ranged from nil to \$936 626. The average amount spent on incentives by shires that reported that they provide incentives was about \$176 000. The average amount spent on incentives across all shires in the Wagin electorate was \$107 000. There are a couple of pretty big towns in the electorate of Wagin, but the remainder are fairly small and do not have the populations to support that kind of funding from their ratepayer bases.

In the electorate of Moore, 14 out of 17 local governments responded to the survey. One shire did not have a doctor, but a few shared doctors. Six shires said that they had doctor shortages. Ten shires, which was 71 per cent of the shires that responded, provided incentives to attract or retain doctors ranging from nil to \$887 000. The average amount spent on incentives was more than \$157 000. In the North West electorate, the average amount spent on incentives was in the range of \$53 000. Four shires said that they had doctor shortages and three shires said that they did not have doctors. In the electorate of Blackwood–Stirling, four out of the seven local governments responded to the survey. Two shires said that they had doctor shortages and none provided incentives to attract or retain doctors.

It is obviously easier to attract doctors in Blackwood–Stirling and the South West, but incentives are still paid in the South West and Mining and Pastoral Regions. The biggest issue that came to view through this survey was that it was almost impossible to attract a doctor in the agricultural regions in the Wheatbelt; once local governments got doctors to those areas, they had to pay substantial amounts to keep them. That is sobering, but not surprising. I guess that all regional members would be well aware of this issue, but to have it quantified puts a very sharp focus on the need to approach the problem.

To highlight the problem, we provided this information to Kim Hames, the Minister for Health, Minister Grylls, and the federal Minister for Health and Ageing, because the state government is responsible for hospitals and infrastructure and the federal government is responsible for the provision of doctors. The former model did not serve regional Western Australians well, particularly those in the southern inland areas. In fact, the model failed those people miserably. Therefore, I was absolutely delighted to see the southern inland health initiative in this year's state budget. Through this initiative \$565 million will be invested to reform and improve access to health care for all residents in the southern inland area of WA. The footprint is from Meekatharra down to Bremer Bay. I am not sure whether too many people would say that Meekatharra is south, unless they live in Kununurra, but certainly the initiative has a very large footprint and is very welcome. The southern inland health initiative is funded by royalties for regions and includes a \$240 million investment in the health workforce over four years and \$325 million in capital works over five years.

I recall the previous Minister for Health's response to a question about comments made by Christine O'Farrell. He listed the investment that the Labor government had made in bricks and mortar for hospitals. Hospitals are important and funding is available through this package to deal with some of those bricks and mortar issues. However, without the support systems and the workforce to wrap around them, hospitals are white elephants sitting in the middle of nowhere. We must have doctors, allied health, information technology infrastructure and systems that support the volunteers and paid workers in our hospitals. The southern inland health initiative will increase the number of private GPs in the system by the equivalent of 44 doctors and put GPs back into our regional towns, but in a new way that supports the way doctors like to work these days.

As members would know, I grew up in Wyalkatchem. My family doctor lived in the town with his family for close to 30 years. There are fewer and fewer doctors in the world like Frank Kubicek, who was prepared to live in a small isolated country town without the support and professional opportunities to develop. Doctors simply do not work like that anymore. This initiative is about trying to create a system of support networks so that doctors can take leave, attend emergency departments, continue to build their skills and work with their colleagues. The only doctor in a small town, or even a big town, cannot work 24/7, as we often ask our doctors to do.

The first stream of funding under the initiative is \$182.9 million for the district medical workforce investment program, which will improve medical resources and 24-hour emergency response to all districts covered by the initiative.

The district hospital and health services investment program will upgrade at least six district hospitals. Some of these hospitals have not had upgrades since they were built. I have been to a few hospitals since becoming a member of Parliament and some of them look remarkably similar to how they looked when I was a child and ended up in hospital. The carpet squares look remarkably similar and I do not reckon the walls have seen too much fresh paint. Members of our community, including elderly people, are ending up in these places because there is nowhere else to go. These hospitals are long overdue for upgrades. Funding is provided under this initiative to redevelop and enhance the campuses at Northam, Narrogin, Merredin, Katanning, Manjimup and Collie, which are the major district hospitals in the southern inland area. Recurrent funding will also provide a boost to the primary healthcare services in each of those districts.

Some funding is also allocated for a primary health care demonstration program, which asks people: "Does the way in which the health system works in your community deliver the best outcomes? Do you want to look at the model in Jurien Bay, for instance, where there is a multipurpose service and access to allied health, and you can utilise different services?" The program will deal with preventive health care and access to better specialists. To access those different services, do people have to shift away from the service that is provided at the moment? The health care demonstration program will work with communities and ask, "Are you ready to take that step? If you are ready to take that step, we have a system that you might want to look at." There is funding in the budget to do a number of pilots across the region.

Funding has been allocated for telehealth. We have done telehealth in the past and it has probably amounted to putting a computer screen and a telephone in a hospital and then not showing anyone how to use it or having anyone at the other end of the phone. That is not much help when a healthcare worker is in Merredin with a trauma accident and they cannot pick up the phone and utilise the service to access a specialist at Royal Perth Hospital or Fremantle Hospital. Funding must be provided to ensure that healthcare workers have access to

emergency specialists at the other end of the telehealth network; this funding is designed to do that. We will fund telehealth properly so that staff members know how to use it and there is someone on the other end.

Another component of the southern inland health initiative is the residential aged care and dementia investment program. A very significant issue in many of our towns is that many elderly and aged members of our communities must move away from their families and their support structures for health care. It is devastating when someone must move away for health care at a time in their life when they want to be surrounded by their family and friends and support network. We are seeing people being forced to make those moves not just to major centres in the region, but mostly to Perth or Mandurah. This program is about identifying the fact that real work needs to be done in the provision of aged care. Incentives need to be provided to private providers to offer services in some of our centres.

The last program under the initiative is the small hospital and nursing post refurbishment program. That is a capital works program for small hospitals that require upgrades or rebuilds. There are many small hospitals and some of them are looking pretty tired.

I am sure those six streams are being worked on by the WA Country Health Service in conjunction with key stakeholders. I know that it has been in constant contact with the Royal Flying Doctor Service, Silver Chain, GP networks and the Wheatbelt Health MOU Group, which has been driving some of these changes for a long time. This will have a real step-change in the way health is delivered in the regions, and will put the federal government on notice by saying that we are prepared to put our money on the table to try to fix this problem. However, it needs to be acknowledged that this is a federal government responsibility and that we would like to see a greater investment or willingness on behalf of the federal government to try to do something different, especially when it is clear that the system has, at every opportunity, failed.

I have been in touch with various people from WACHS and note that its members are travelling around the state to brief stakeholders. As an inclusive process, WACHS will work with communities to try to address individual community needs, and this funding will enable that; it is not a one-size-fits-all solution. I also note that Dr Felicity Jefferies, a director from the WA Country Health Service who has been extensively involved in the development and management of this program and who has worked with rural doctors in regional Western Australia for over 30 years, was, according to my notes, reported in the media to have said —

“I have been in health for over 30 years in the country and I have never seen a time like this, where we have such a great investment in what we do. It has just never happened before.”

A far cry from her colleague who left saying that the system was suffering from ongoing chronic neglect, we now have people starting to say that this is a huge step-change and that what we are doing will change the lives of people in regional Western Australia.

Royalties for regions is underpinning this investment; that is, it is underpinning a new and innovative way of delivering health into regional Western Australia and the tailoring of solutions that will suit communities. Far from being harsh on families, which I think we have heard a bit about this morning, this government has recognised that access to quality health care is of utmost importance to these communities; no matter where people live, it is important, and we have delivered on that.

I want now to touch briefly on something in stark contrast with the new paradigm that we have seen at a federal level. It was mentioned earlier that the federal government has responsibility for this; that is, it has its own regional investment fund. We have heard a bit of criticism about royalties for regions this morning. I could not let the opportunity pass without noting that the first cab off the rank for the federal Labor government’s regional investment fund was the upgrade of the roads around Perth Airport. I noted that Hon Ken Travers was supportive of that concept—that is, using a regional investment fund to upgrade roads surrounding Perth domestic airport. Quite honestly, I think it is absurd. It worries me to think about what would happen to the royalties for regions fund—a fund that is delivering such change into the regions—if our state Labor colleagues got hold of the fund. What would they consider to be regional? What would they consider to be of benefit to the regions?

I would like to use the remaining time to focus on some of the social infrastructure supported by royalties for regions. The perception in the community is that it is about only bricks and mortar, and that is certainly not the case. I can see Hon Robyn McSweeney nodding. Some of the initiatives that we have supported have been in her portfolio and are certainly making changes in peoples’ lives. It has been recognised—I think Hon Helen Bullock touched on this earlier—that employment is necessary to develop regions. However, we also know, from the experiences of Karratha, Port Hedland and Newman, that there must be social amenities in these towns before anyone will consider moving there to seek employment. The social amenity in places with the most employment in regional Western Australia now—Karratha, Port Hedland, Newman and Tom Price—was nothing; it was worse than nothing. People were living in caravans and could not get a haircut. They could not afford to live in a house. The social amenity that provides the incentive for workers to say, “The salary is good, but I am not taking

my family to that region” was just not there. Royalties for regions funding is dealing with that, along with the big ticket items and the bricks and mortar projects. The one that comes to mind first, and about which I receive a lot of feedback, is the Country Age Pension Fuel Card, which provides eligible pensioners with \$500 to access fuel and taxi fares when they are not able to access public transport to get to medical appointments or they wish to visit family, and for a raft of other things. I think all my colleagues agree that we hear amazing feedback about the fuel card. It has changed lives because it has allowed people to re-engage with the community by attending functions and it has allowed them to get to their doctor and stay healthy while not being such a burden on their family. Some people did not want to be a burden and were too proud to ask for help. Others were simply not engaging with their community and were also too proud to ask for help or could not afford to access transport or fuel to get them where they needed to go.

Hon Max Trenorden: In some cases, there was no public transport.

Hon MIA DAVIES: There was no public transport; that is exactly right.

However, many pensioners also use the card to enable their family to assist them and therefore do not feel themselves to be a burden. For me, that is a very special part of what we do.

Better Beginnings is another very important program and it receives \$2.8 million from the royalties for regions fund. Better Beginnings began as a pilot program targeting six metropolitan and regional communities, and it will soon reach most babies in regional Western Australia. Better Beginnings is improving literacy practices by actively encouraging parents and other family members to make time to read to their children and to read to their children more often. It also links families to library resources and services. Independent research has shown that, as a result of this program, 92 per cent of parents surveyed indicated that their toddler now asks for a book to be read to them and that, since being engaged in this program, 84 per cent of parents now read to their toddler more often. I think it is fantastic that Better Beginnings will be rolled out across the regions because, as a child, I was surrounded by books and, as an adult, I cannot fathom that families do not or cannot access services, or do not know how to access such services. This program will roll out those services to every family. It is a good thing that will set up children for a wonderful future.

I will touch on the regional grants scheme that is administered through the development commission and that is designed to provide financial assistance to regionally based organisations such as volunteers and business groups, educational institutions, philanthropic foundations and community organisations. Again, this is about social amenity or social infrastructure. There have been some fantastic projects—far too many to list, because every development commission runs a funding round—including the Smart Start Early Years program and the regional arts development initiative in Katanning. Hon Donna Faragher previously spoke in this house about Ngala; we recently funded the extension of that service through the community resource centre network, thereby linking regional parents to the wonderful services that Ngala provides. Funding for the Wheatbelt men’s health initiative, which is run by Julian Krieg, who is well known for his work in men’s health—I spoke about this last year—has been expanded and that service will continue. Julian has made great inroads to expand a highly regarded service in the Wheatbelt into the other regions in the state. He deals with the intractable issues of mental illness, suicide and wellbeing for men in regional Western Australia. Again, these are things that touch people’s lives every day and are not necessarily about bricks and mortar. They are just some of the very important programs that are being run through the regional development commissions.

I would now like to touch on a budget initiative that falls within Hon Terry Waldron’s sport and recreation portfolio. This budget contains a \$20 million boost for a program called Sport for All. Essentially, this program will pay the sports club fees for those kids who might otherwise miss out. We all know that playing sport is expensive—uniforms, club fees, and travel to and from games. By the very nature of those expenses, some kids do not get to participate in sport and therefore do not have the benefit of working with community members and volunteers. As a result, not only do they not learn how to play sport, but also they do not know how to engage in a community organisation. Kids should not be prohibited from participation and the opportunity to become leaders in their communities because they cannot afford club fees. For \$20 million, we will provide these children with the opportunity to participate in sport in their communities. Because we anticipate a surge in the number of kids who will play sport, some of that money will be needed to support the volunteers who run these organisations and has therefore been tagged to support clubs and volunteers. I congratulate Minister Waldron on this initiative; it is a fantastic program, and I am really looking forward to seeing the take-up and how it is going to make an impact on the communities of the Agricultural Region and beyond.

A flow-on effect of the program will be healthy kids. We had a briefing the other day from Minister Waldron and a gentleman whose name I have temporarily forgotten, but he said that inactivity is up there with smoking, diabetes and blood pressure as one of the four things that increase mortality rates. It is not one of the diseases; it is the fact that people do not move. This program addresses some of these issues at a very early age and also

teaches kids how to become engaged citizens, working with volunteers. The benefits are going to be immeasurable.

The last thing I would like to talk about today is a matter that has come through the Minister for Agriculture and Food's portfolio, and it relates to the significance of his negotiations with the commonwealth government to expand the drought reform pilot for Western Australia. Under last year's negotiations, some people were unable to access some of the more critical parts of the program. The pilot area, through negotiation, has now been expanded to cover the original shires, plus every shire in the South West region. The Shire of Williams last year suffered from very low rainfall but was unable to access funding through the drought pilot, even though its neighbours were able to. That anomaly has been removed this year through negotiation. Every family in the agricultural sector that is suffering hardship as a result of the tough year we experienced last year can now access food-on-the-table money through Centrelink, and support services such as rural financial counsellors—the number of which has been increased—and mental health counsellors. The impact of the expansion of the drought reform pilot cannot be underestimated in providing immediate support to those families in the Agricultural Region that are most in need as a result of a very, very tough year. I congratulate the minister for his negotiations and this outcome.

In addition to these critical components, the training and professional development aspects remain, although they have been slightly tweaked. A review and feedback were provided by everybody who had participated in the pilot. The pilot's key aims remain the same: they are to build the resilience of our agricultural sector through professional development and management; to build on the resilience that is already out there; to give people the tools that they may need going forward in a changing climate; and to assist those who would actually like to exit the sector with dignity, and there is a section of the pilot program that deals with that aspect.

This program is still a pilot program, and feedback is still being received on it. Western Australia is currently the only state that is running the program in conjunction with the commonwealth government. If it is to go forward, it will be a fundamental shift in the way that we deal with drought and the resilience of our communities that are impacted by drought. I commend the Minister for Agriculture and Food for his leadership in relation to this program.

I cannot miss an opportunity to also commend the minister on his leadership in the live cattle debate. He has played and continues to play a significant role in the resolution of this crisis, which is making a far wider impact than just on the north west of the state; the impacts are being felt right across the state.

Hon Robyn McSweeney interjected.

Hon MIA DAVIES: Absolutely, and the federal government should stand condemned by regional Western Australians for being distant, city-centric and clueless on this issue. It has put our relationship with Indonesia at risk and has ruined the livelihood of thousands of Australians, including farmers, contractors and small business owners. The tentacles of this decision by the federal government are far-reaching, and I commend Hon Terry Redman, Minister for Agriculture and Food, for leading the way on this issue. There is far more work to be done on this; we are in a great deal of trouble as a result of the federal government's decision.

To recap and come back to the budget papers, this budget is a good budget for regional Western Australians. I have spoken at length on the southern inland health initiative, which will bring about a fundamental change in the way in which we deliver health services into that region. I am very much looking forward to working with all stakeholders to ensure that we get this right, because the number one critical issues that come across my desk are health care and education. The days of chronic neglect are far behind us, and we are looking at a new way of doing things courtesy of royalties for regions. This is, without doubt, the standout initiative in this budget, and I applaud the Minister for Health and the Minister for Regional Development for their commitment to this project.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Nigel Hallett**.