

Division 15: Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation — Service 1, Science, \$109 324 000 —

Mr R.S. Love, Chair.

Mr D.J. Kelly, Minister for Science.

Ms R. Brown, Director General.

Ms F. Roche, Deputy Director General, Science and Innovation.

Mr S. Melville, Director, Corporate Services.

Ms N. Arrowsmith, Chief of Staff, Minister for Science.

Mr T. Grey-Smith, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mrs T. Bensley, Senior Policy Adviser.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIR: This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available the following day. It is the intention of the Chair to ensure that as many questions as possible are asked and answered and that both questions and answers are short and to the point. The estimates committee's consideration of the estimates will be restricted to discussion of those items for which a vote of money is proposed in the consolidated account. Questions must be clearly related to a page number, item, program or amount in the current division. Members should give these details in preface to their question. If a division or service is the responsibility of more than one minister, a minister shall be examined only in relation to their portfolio responsibilities.

The minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee rather than asking that the question be put on notice for the next sitting week. I ask the minister to clearly indicate what supplementary information he agrees to provide and I will then allocate a reference number. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek the minister's cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the principal clerk by Friday, 31 May 2019. I caution members that if a minister asks that a matter be put on notice, it is up to the member to lodge the question on notice through the online questions system.

I give the call to the member for Swan Hills.

[8.00 pm]

Ms J.J. SHAW: Minister, I refer to page 189 of budget paper No 2, volume 1, under the section "New Initiatives", and the third line item. Could the minister explain how a future energy exports cooperative research centre will benefit the state?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Since we have been in government, one of our emphases has been to get more cooperative research centres in the state. We have been successful with the cybersecurity research centre at Joondalup, but a new energy CRC will build on the natural advantages that we have here in Western Australia. As the member may be aware, we are one of the world's biggest producers of lithium, and we reportedly have all the elements of a battery. It is not easy to convert those natural resources into industries. As members know, we are quite good at digging things up. What we want to do is ensure that here in Western Australia we move as far as we can down the value chain as possible. That CRC will ensure that the money is available in the state to do research around various elements which might bring that together. That is another example of the success that we have had in making use of the CRC process to give industry and local jobs a great boost here in WA.

Ms J.J. SHAW: The research centre is aimed at energy exports. What is the minister anticipating the export items will be and where does he think the markets will be for those?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Again, there are options. Obviously, the whole lithium battery potential is there, but also hydrogen. We have put together the Hydrogen Council, as members may be aware. Hon Alannah MacTiernan is very keen to see whether we can be part of the hydrogen economy as well. Japan and Korea are very set and are looking to use hydrogen in a significant way as an energy driver in those economies. We will see where it goes, but as a government, we want to make sure that we are not left wondering what the possibilities are for Western Australia.

Ms J.J. SHAW: Where is it proposed that the CRC will be located?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It will be hosted by the University of Western Australia, but there will be a facility in the Pilbara.

Ms J.J. SHAW: Fantastic. Thank you.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, I refer to page 200, "Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies", and the science and agribusiness connect program. What is the status of the \$1.5 million Premier's agriculture and food fellowship program, which is funded through the science and agribusiness connect grants?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I think we have recently announced some grants under that program. I will ask Fiona Roche to give some details of that.

Ms F. Roche: Thank you, Chair. I thank the member for the question. The science and agribusiness connect program has been going now for two to three years. It is a program designed to develop WA's excellence in agricultural science. We have attracted international Premier's Fellow Professor Simon Cook to Western Australia, and recently Curtin University announced the establishment of an office of digital agriculture, which is associated with his work and the work of the food agility CRC, of which WA has a significant node. Part of the program also includes grants to tertiary students and supporting entrepreneurs and the like. We have rounds of programs that the Minister for Science and the Minister for Regional Development announced, and there were some recent ones. I do not have the details of those, but I would be more than happy to provide them if the member wants details on exactly what grants we make.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, I would like to take that as a supplementary, if that is okay.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I am happy to provide that.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister indicate the status of the \$1.5 million Premier's agriculture and food fellowship program; a breakdown of where that is going?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Can the member be a bit clearer? He said "the status of", but it is still going.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The reason I say "the status" is because it has no funding after the 2019–20 year, so I do not know where it is going to be funded from.

Mr D.J. KELLY: That is not further information. There is a budget allocation for it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister detail where the \$1.5 million is going?

Mr D.J. KELLY: What grants have been made?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I am sure we are happy to provide that for this financial year. We will provide information on what grants have been made in this financial year under that program.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Also for 2019–20?

Mr D.J. KELLY: We have not made those grants yet, so we cannot tell the member what they are going to be.

The CHAIR: What was the program name?

Mr D.J. KELLY: It is the science and agribusiness connect program. We will provide the member with the grants that have been made under that program in this financial year.

[*Supplementary Information No A43.*]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, what is the status of the \$880 000 tertiary program connecting Western Australian university students with regional experiences?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Sorry, which page is the member referring to?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is a further question to my original question, page 200, under the science and agribusiness connect program.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Sorry, what is the question? I do not understand the question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: What is the status of the \$880 000 tertiary program connecting WA university students with regional experiences, which is funded through the science and agribusiness connect program?

Mr D.J. KELLY: I will defer to Fiona Roche.

Ms F. Roche: Again, we have rounds where tertiary students apply for those grants, and we connect the work that they are doing at their tertiary institution to various regional areas and make sure that they have the opportunity to travel to those regional areas. Again, the ones that have been announced publicly in which there have been award recipients, we would be more than happy to provide those details as supplementary information.

Mr D.J. KELLY: We are happy to provide details of the recipients of those grants that have been made in this financial year.

[*Supplementary Information No A44.*]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer again to page 200, under the science and agribusiness connect program, following on from the last two questions. What is the status of the \$360 000 agriculture and aquaculture entrepreneurship program, which provides scholarships of up to \$30 000 for those sectors and was funded through the science and agribusiness connect program?

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A — Thursday, 23 May 2019]

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Ms Jessica Shaw; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr Vincent Catania; Chair; Mrs Jessica Stojkovski; Amber-Jade Sanderson

Ms F. Roche: Again, we run grant rounds. Particularly under that program, there have been recipients of funding that have been announced on occasion by both ministers. That is very much in the public arena, and I would be more than happy to share with the member those grant recipient names and details as supplementary information.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Again, we can provide the recipients of grants under that program that have been made in this financial year.

The CHAIR: Could you restate the programs for Hansard?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: It is the agriculture and aquaculture entrepreneurship program.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I do not have the name of it here in front of me.

Ms F. Roche: That is the correct name. Thank you.

[*Supplementary Information No A45.*]

[8.10 pm]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Minister, the science and agribusiness connect program has an allocation of \$710 000 for the 2019–20 budget estimate. The programs that I have just listed total \$2.74 million. Where is the \$2 million coming from, or has that been cut from the program? It has no funding after 2019–20.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Like anything else, those decisions are made on a year-by-year basis, so, no, there have been no cuts.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There is no funding.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Is that a question? I have just answered that question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Can the minister explain it to me? The budget has \$945 000 in 2018–19 and \$710 000 in 2019–20, but from 2020–21 to 2022–23 there is nothing. I have just spoken about those programs and asked for the status of the \$1.5 million for the Premier's agriculture and food fellowship program; \$888 000 for the tertiary program connecting WA university students with regional experiences; and \$360 000 for the agriculture and aquaculture entrepreneurship program. The total cost of those projects is \$2.74 million, but the budget has only \$710 000. I am wondering what has been cut and left off, because there is obviously a gap of \$2 million.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I will ask the director general to provide an update on those.

Ms R. Brown: Effectively, the four-year program distributed a series of grants. Grant recipients applied for those and the funding was distributed to deliver against those programs or research projects —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So it has been cut.

Ms J.J. SHAW: No! Let her finish answering the question.

The CHAIR: Members! All members, let the director general answer the question. Do not interrupt her.

Ms R. Brown: The grants are allocated to the recipients on the basis of a time period. To the extent that there is no continuation of funding, those grant programs have been completed and the recipients are aware of that. There is no effective cut in service delivery. It is that those grant programs have —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Have finished completely.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Decisions will be made about funding in future budgets, the same way they always are. If it were such a great program when the member was in government, the former government would have given it ongoing funding. It gave it limited funding and a decision will be made —

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Really? Does the minister practice that in the mirror? He must practice that in the mirror.

The CHAIR: Member for North West Central!

Mr D.J. KELLY: As I said, I do not have to answer the member's questions. If he lets me answer them, I will. If he interrupts, I will not. It is as simple as that.

Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI: I refer to paragraph 22 on page 192 of budget paper No 2, volume 1. Can the minister explain how the national collaborative research infrastructure strategy will benefit the research community here in Western Australia?

Mr D.J. KELLY: Yes. That is a really good news story for science in Western Australia. We have committed \$10 million to that commonwealth program in this budget. Given the mess left to us by members opposite, \$10 million for science is not easy to find, but we have found it. The important thing about that \$10 million is that it enables us to access \$19 million of federal funding. When we put together \$8.8 million in funding from tertiary institutions, we get a really solid improvement and a funding program that will enable institutions to purchase scientific equipment here in WA. Now, I think about eight or nine projects will be funded under that program. This

funding usually becomes available once every 10 years. I think it might have been seven or eight years since the commonwealth last made this type of money available. It is \$19 million from the commonwealth, provided that the state kicks in \$10 million. I will ask Fiona Roche to give us some more information on what type of scientific equipment will be purchased under that program.

Ms F. Roche: The only point I would add to the minister's comments about the funding is that on top of the \$10.5 million of state funding and \$19.8 million of commonwealth funding, we have leveraged an additional \$8.8 million of funding from WA research institutions. This will see a \$39 million boost in state-of-the-art equipment in WA for use by the research sector, industry and government. We have worked really closely with the university sector and research institutions to work out where the correct allocation of funding in priority areas should be. We will see some equipment for advanced fabrication of sensors, including for defence applications; ecosystem observation infrastructure to help protect and manage WA's unique terrestrial ecosystem; and the latest tools for genetic protein and metabolite research, with health, agriculture and environment applications. This funding has been really well received by our science sector and we are delighted to achieve this outcome.

The CHAIR: The opposition would like to move on. Do you really want to ask a question?

Ms A. SANDERSON: Yes.

Ms L. METTAM: That is ridiculous.

The CHAIR: The member is entitled to ask a question.

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is my prerogative to ask a question.

Ms J.J. SHAW: This is a fascinating topic.

The CHAIR: She wants to ask a question. Member for Morley.

Ms A. SANDERSON: All right. I will move on.

The CHAIR: We are allowed to move on.

The appropriation was recommended.