

**Kimberley Development Commission —**

Mr S.J. Price, Chair.

Mr D.T. Punch, Minister for Regional Development.

Mr C. Berger, Chief Executive Officer, Kimberley Development Commission.

Ms H. Brayford, Director General, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

Mr P. Isaachsen, Deputy Director General, Industry and Economic Development.

Ms M. Carbon, Deputy Director General, Sustainability and Biosecurity.

Mr P. Gregson, Manager, Funds Management.

Ms C. McConnell, Deputy Director General, Primary Industries Development.

Ms L. Williamson, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr B. Mezzatesta, Executive Director, Operations and Compliance.

Ms M. Teede, Chief Executive Officer, South West Development Commission.

Mr J. Gardner, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Great Southern Development Commission.

Mr C. Syers, Principal Fisheries Management Officer.

Mr P. Spalding, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Mid West Development Commission.

Mr R. Cossart, Chief Executive Officer, Wheatbelt Development Commission.

Mr T. Palmer, Chief of Staff, Minister for Regional Development.

Mr A. Buck, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr G. Grounds, Senior Policy Adviser.

Mr A. Skinner, Senior Policy Adviser.

**The CHAIR:** This estimates committee will be reported by Hansard. The daily proof *Hansard* will be available online as soon as possible within two business days. Questions must relate to the operations and budget of the off-budget authority. The chair will allow as many questions as possible. Questions and answers should be short and to the point.

A minister may agree to provide supplementary information to the committee. I will ask the minister to clearly indicate what information they agree to provide and will then allocate a reference number. Supplementary information should be provided to the principal clerk by noon on Friday, 31 May 2024. If a minister suggests that a matter be put on notice, members should use the online questions on notice system to submit their questions.

I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I understand the structure of development commissions is that the staff are all employees of the minister's department rather than of the development commissions. Is that correct?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** That is a question for the division that we have just voted on.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** All right. I will rephrase it. Does the Kimberley Development Commission have any employees or are the staff who are assigned to it employees of the minister's department?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** We have already voted on the division.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am asking the minister about the Kimberley Development Commission.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am saying that we have voted on the division.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Okay. What staff does the Kimberley Development Commission have allocated to it?

[5.30 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am not sure of the standing orders of these proceedings, but we have voted on the division that encompasses the commissions. I might seek a ruling from the chair on that question.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Further to that question —

**The CHAIR:** Hold on two seconds. Minister, the development commissions are considered off-budget items, so the opposition is allowed to ask about operational questions relating to them, even though there is not a particular line item in the budget that covers them.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Thank you for your advice, chair.

The member's question on the Kimberley Development Commission was about the total number of staff. Is that correct?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I asked how many staff it has allocated to it.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It is 11.9 FTE. I defer to the CEO on whether that is correct. Yes, it is 11.9 FTE.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Of the 11.9 FTE, how many of those positions are filled at the moment?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I request the CEO to respond.

**Mr C. Berger:** Thank you, minister. Currently, 9.6 FTE out of the 11.9 FTE budgeted for are employed at the commission.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Thank you. For how long have the 2.3 FTE been unfilled?

**Mr C. Berger:** That is a complicated question because, of course, we are always adding staff and staff also leave. There is a constant fluctuation in the number of FTEs as the number of people employed goes up and down, as does the number of full-time versus part-time staff. It is not a straightforward question, I am afraid.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Are all the FTE now employed based in the region?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes, they are.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Does the Kimberley Development Commission have a strategic plan; and, if so, when was it last updated?

**Mr C. Berger:** Yes, we developed our strategic plan covering 2024 to 2026. That was finalised earlier this year and has just been made publicly available on our website.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** What input did the Kimberley Development Commission have into the regional development framework that was published a month or two ago?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Thank you for that question. I am very pleased the member asked me. As I mentioned to him in the Parliament, all the development commission chairs and development commissions participated in the development of an overriding document that gave structure to the regional development portfolio. The *WA Regional development framework* sets out the broad priorities for regional development in Western Australia. Each of the development commission chairs are members of the Regional Development Council. The regional development framework was developed in conjunction with the council. Each of the development commission CEOs form part of a network that supports the council, and that framework was provided to me as the recommended position for regional development in WA. It is a broad framework document that sets out some important principles for regional development. Those principles include the quality of life in regional WA, which I do not think the member would disagree with; it includes the diversification of regional economies, which I do not think the member would disagree with; it includes responding to climate change, which I am very sure the member would not disagree with; and it also incorporates supporting Aboriginal empowerment and involvement in economic life, which I am sure the member would not disagree with. Its final point is promoting organisational excellence to promote teamwork between the regional development commissions and the department, which is also part of that regional framework, unlike the frameworks that the member established that pitted commission against commission in the competition for funds. The member for Roe would recall, as a member of the southern funding group, when each of the development commissions had to compete with each other. As a consequence, there was a very fractured approach to regional development.

I was very disappointed when the member waved that document around in the Parliament and said that it was just full of pretty pictures, because it represents the collective wisdom of people who live and breathe regional WA. There is no point in the member rolling his eyes because that framework provides a document that each of the development commissions use to reflect their own strategic planning and the projects that their boards developed. It is based on local decision-making, which is something that the member's party espoused but which, I have to say, it did not practice very often, whereas we have a framework that unites regional development. That means all the commissions are working in the interests of the whole of WA.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Thank you for the lecture.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** You are welcome. Come and talk to me anytime.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can the minister enlighten me about the role the development commission played in the recovery from severe tropical cyclone Ellie when it went through and devastated the Kimberley? What role has the commission had in planning for the recovery from that event and in securing some of the critical transport infrastructure to ensure that we do not see a repetition of the food security issues and other problems that existed in the wake of that event?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** As I think I intimated before, the Kimberley Development Commission is part of a network but it is also part of the whole of government. It worked closely in the recovery process for the Kimberley. Importantly, it led —is the member listening?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am listening.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It led the process of engaging with local businesses, particularly in the East Kimberley, that led to the development of the freight subsidy that supported the East Kimberley through those initial periods, and it was received extraordinarily well by the business community and the broader community in the East Kimberley. The commission continues to play a role in looking at the resilience issues for the future and at the opportunities for the local community to be involved in contracting and supporting works in the Kimberley to build that resilience and at further economic diversification opportunities across the whole area. It is a very active commission and I am very pleased with the work that it does. It is a small team, but it is fully supported by the regional development network and the whole of government in the work that it does.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Given the nature of the Kimberley's demographics and the many different ownership structures of land et cetera, what formal relationship does the development commission have with any of the traditional owners throughout the Kimberley?

[5.40 pm]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It has very close relationships with traditional owners right through the Kimberley, and, in my view, it is very difficult to work effectively within the Kimberley without those positive relationships. My understanding is that the Kimberley Development Commission works hard on those relationships. There are often tensions in managing those relationships around particular issues, but all the feedback that I have received is that it is very positive engagement, and the development commission continues to do some great things in areas such as supporting the development of the cotton gin in the East Kimberley. Development commissions play a very important role in helping to problem-solve on the ground because of the relationships that they have built with local people, including traditional owners.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Can the minister enlighten me as to whether the commission has had any discussions with the Djarindjin community about its land tenure problems and desire to build more community housing?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am advised that there have been no discussions.

**The CHAIR:** That completes the examination of the Kimberley Development Commission authority.