

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD — MANAGEMENT

Motion

HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan) [10.12 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house condemns the Liberal–National government for —

- (a) dropping the ball on agriculture and, in particular, the cuts, waste, lack of direction, poor leadership and staff freezes; and
- (b) putting at risk our biosecurity and the future of agriculture in Western Australia.

It is with regret that I move this motion, because agriculture is one of the great industries of Western Australia. It is an industry that has been actively supported by governments of the day for over 100 years, but this government has dropped the ball. We will wait and see whether it can sparkle today and demonstrate that that is not the case. I use the term “dropping the ball”, which is a football analogy, not because that is what the Labor Party says, but because that is what the government’s own backbench says about the way in which this government has handled the agriculture portfolio.

I take people back to an estimates hearing on 13 June 2014 during which Hon Nigel Hallett was given the call. We were talking about effectiveness indicators and he said —

I think they are pretty alarming when you see them sitting around 30 per cent.

They have not gone up since that time. He went on to say —

As a department, I would be pretty concerned at those low figures. When you look at those, we have seen lots of good headlines come out recently of growers managing better risk and seizing the opportunity, but I suppose, in football terms, the agriculture sector is saying that the department has dropped the ball.

They are the words of a backbencher, and that is why I use the term. Since that time, have things got any better? No.

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Exactly, Leader of the Opposition, soon to be Leader of the House; they have got worse. Let us look at the budget and the cuts that have occurred under the Barnett–Redman Liberal–National government. In the last full year when Labor was last in office, the appropriation for the Department of Agriculture and Food was \$176 million. It was a year in which the appropriation was particularly high. It was also a year with a high level of income for the agency. The more traditional amount of money that was being spent at that time was around the \$150 million mark; in fact, that is exactly what was allocated in the 2008–09 budget—\$153 million. I might add that on top of the recurrent expenditure of \$153.7 million, over \$160 million was allocated in that budget for the construction of new headquarters for the Department of Agriculture and Food, which is crucial to ensuring that the facilities are available to us to maintain the state’s clean image and to protect the biosecurity risk. The total cost of services for the department was \$301 million, with \$120 million in income. Much of that came from growers and the like.

Let us rapidly transition to the last budget put forward by the Barnett Liberal–National government of Western Australia. The appropriation for 2015–16 is \$120.3 million and the capital works budget is \$4.8 million. That might sound a bit alarming in itself, but the forward estimates do not go up; they go down. In 2018–19, the government is expecting that the Department of Agriculture and Food will have an annual appropriation of only \$117 million, and there is no money in the outlying forward estimates. I will talk about this in a bit more detail later, but the agriculture department identified land to sell to help fund its new headquarters. What did the government do? As soon as the land was identified, the Treasurer and the Minister for Lands, interestingly enough, were out there with the For Sale sign up at the land at Baldvis and Forrestfield. In fact, the government is selling the headquarters even before it has built a new one. I do not know where it is going to put the staff, although there are so few of them left that the minister might be able to squeeze them into his ministerial office. That is the situation. It is a sad indictment.

In 2008–09, there were 1 591 staff at the department. In 2015–16, the number of staff has been cut to 998. My understanding is that when crisis meetings were held with the industry last year after the budget came down, and the industry was looking for direction from the department and the minister about where it was going, the only meaningful contribution that the industry took out of those meetings was that the department was expected to be halved over the next couple of years. That is this government’s approach to one of the great industries of

Hon Ken Travers; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; President; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Mark Lewis

Western Australia, which has so much opportunity, as people like Hon Nigel Hallett have identified so eloquently, yet this government has dropped the ball. It has made cuts and it has wasted money.

I want to quote a bit more from some of the estimates hearings. In June 2015, questions were asked about how the government was going to handle these cuts. The head of the department said —

Minister Baston has given me a direction to initiate an expert panel review of the department, which we will kick off in the next few months. It will look at what is really the core DAFWA, if you like, and it will be a zero-based function and resourcing approach. We will draw on expert people to assist us and to make recommendations to the minister and the government as to what a future department must be, needs to be and should be.

I have contacted industry people over the last few days to ask them whatever happened to that expert panel and whether we ever heard what came of it but no-one could tell me. The only thing I have seen since then is that the director general of the department left and headed off to the Department of State Development. I wonder whether he turned the lights off as he left the department because there does not seem to be much left in that agency.

With all these budget cuts, I would have thought that some important areas needed to be funded, like the Department of Agriculture and Food. In the old days, it was pretty clear from looking at its budget service summaries what the department's role was. Service summary 1 was "Food and fibre industry development", which is absolutely important. One of the great traditions of the Department of Agriculture and Food was to conduct research and development to help the promotion of agriculture, horticulture and the very broad range of industries that is so crucial to us. Service summary 2 was "Agricultural Resource Management" and service summary 3 was "Biosecurity". In those days, the department also had a fourth area for services provided to "Rural Business Development Corporation". Rapidly coming forward to the modern day, we can look at the department's current service summary areas to give us an idea of where the department now sees itself. Service summary 1 is "Business and supply chain development". Having dropped the ball on research and development and having assisted the industry, this government has transferred the issue back to the growers themselves, even though the department now gets more money out of growers than it ever has. Service summary 2 is "Transformational development". I can only assume that transformational development means how a department is halved and we hope for the best.

Hon Sue Ellery: Or you could get rid of the minister; I think that one is going to happen.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Yes. Service summary 3 is "Resource risk management", which I assume is just another name for biosecurity. Each of those areas will see cuts over the coming years.

Hon Mark Lewis: No, it's not another word for biosecurity; it's about environmental risk.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: Exactly; so it is not clear.

Hon Mark Lewis interjected.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: My point is that I assume that is where biosecurity will be picked up. Having spoken to the minister in the estimates committee, the member is right: one of the department's problems is that it has to try to do a whole range of things with the same budget allocation that it uses to protect the environment and protect our future industries.

Members would think that, in those circumstances, the government and the minister would have gone through with a fine toothcomb to look at ways to better ensure money was not being wasted. With all these cuts, the department put out a tender for weekend vehicle cleaning at its South Perth site. It will cost an estimated \$90 000 to clean vehicles. The minister should go and tell the police who have to clean blood out of their vehicles that they can get a contractor to come in and do it for them! Seriously, the department is cleaning vehicles with the few dollars that it has left.

Let us look at another area of waste under this government. Does the minister know how much his government has spent on planning a new headquarters for the Department of Agriculture and Food?

Hon Ken Baston: Is it \$250 000?

Hon KEN TRAVERS: No, minister. I wish it was only \$250 000. Since the government came to office, the previous Labor government had already spent \$3.395 million and we worked on a plan to co-locate the department at Murdoch with the university. That would be a fantastic opportunity to get some common symmetry between academic research and the work that goes on in the department.

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon Ken Travers; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; President; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Mark Lewis

Hon KEN TRAVERS: There is still only one government, Hon Darren West. There is one budget, one cabinet and one Premier; there are not two governments, two budgets and two Premiers. There is only ever one.

Hon Sue Ellery: Some people think there are two.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: They might pretend there are two, but there is only ever one.

In its first 2.75 years—its first three years of office—the Liberal–National government spent \$12.3 million on planning the new headquarters. It is gone! That is what we see! Poor old Dean Nalder cops it because we see the money that is wasted in the transport portfolio on planning with no outcomes. The Department of Agriculture and Food is no different. I have never seen a government that has wasted so much money or made so many mistakes that cost the taxpayer and the community money. I know what we are going to get, Mr President. I am not sure how the minister will defend it —

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! Constructive interjections, to an extent, are tolerated in a debate like this but when there is just noise, that is not correct when there is a time-limited debate because all you do is eat into a member's time, which is not fair on the member on their feet; it is not fair to everybody in the chamber.

Hon KEN TRAVERS: I am not sure what the minister will say on the government's behalf, but I am sure that there are fringes of the government backbench who will stand up and talk about how this government is seizing the opportunity in agriculture planning and \$300 million will be spent on agriculture. At the last election, that \$300 million was going to be spent over four years, if I remember correctly. It then became five years and then six years but there is still no sign of when we are going to see the \$300 million. Even if that money were put back into the budget—I have gone through and worked it out—since the budget is \$151 million, without even allowing for growth in real terms, the Department of Agriculture and Food's budget is still being cut. The other thing that government members will try to argue is that the Labor Party had no policies for agriculture at the last election. What nonsense! The greatest challenge facing the grains industry in Western Australia at the last election was the supply chain to port. Only Labor had a proposal to fix that problem to make an affordable, cheap and fast supply chain to port that would work. We also had policies about fixing dangerous country roads. Unlike members on the other side who want to spend the money but do not want to defend their expenditure or the Liberal–National government's debt that runs for miles, we took hard decisions and were open. I expect that we will have a debate later today about genetically modified crops. We were prepared to go out there and defend the hard decisions, which many members in this chamber run away from as soon as the going gets tough; they do not want to take or defend tough decisions, as the Treasurer pointed out on the radio this morning.

We took the hard decisions but, more than that, we have already started releasing policies for the next election that are going to be absolutely crucial for the agricultural industry. "Brand WA" is absolutely a key part of how we will move forward and support the next generation of growers in Western Australia to maximise not only their exports, but also the value of their exports—to value add. We have already put that policy out there. We have made a commitment to get science back into primary schools. Where do members think the scientists who will help us protect the biosecurity of the future will come from? Let us not have that nonsense about our policies. We had policies not only at the last election, but also going forward that we have already put on the table.

In the time that I have available, I finally want to talk about the biggest issue here, which is the threat to biosecurity that we saw played out on the pages of *The West Australian* this week. An article on Monday, 21 March highlighted —

A State Government staff freeze had exposed WA to disease outbreaks that could devastate the livestock industry and also threatens vital grains research, according to Agricultural Minister Ken Baston.

They are the minister's own words. He stood by those words despite having been attacked by the Treasurer who was claiming he was just being a *Yes Minister* and uttering the words of his own department. The minister was right: the Treasurer was putting the state and the agriculture industry at risk. I note that after that was raised in the media, Dr Nahan said he was reconsidering the position. What would have happened if that had never been leaked? I do not know whether the leak was a good act by the minister, because he found he could not get any headway—I know government backbenchers cannot get any headway with the Treasurer—or whether the department leaked it, but I say thank God they did, because nothing would have happened without that being leaked. Yesterday a question was asked in this place about those positions. It was a very simple question with one of the most complex, confusing answers I have ever heard. It was a very simple question that, if it had been answered in a proper way, would have been very easy to understand. Having delved through that answer, it would appear that some of those positions have now been approved. I assume that between the publication of the

Hon Ken Travers; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; President; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Mark Lewis

article on Monday and the question being asked yesterday, the Treasurer quickly approved those applications. That is good, and I welcome that, but it should never have got to that point. This shows how little this government cares about the agriculture industry.

However, I am still none the wiser as a result of the minister's answer about the ability of the important veterinarian positions he highlighted to meet our obligations under biosecurity and animal welfare laws. Having re-read his answer numerous times, I am still not quite convinced that we have all the positions in place to ensure we have the necessary protections for our industry. Let us be very clear: biosecurity would be really easy to cut, because in the first stage of the cutting, no-one would see anything different. People would say the positions were not needed because nothing had changed. But at some point in the future when we have a biosecurity breach, when we have an outbreak of disease or a pest takes hold in Western Australia, we will suddenly look over our shoulders and say that we should not have cut those positions, but that will be too late. We will say that we should have built the new Department of Agriculture and Food headquarters with the right facilities to manage the modern pathways going forward. We will understand when it is too late what these cuts have done to biosecurity. None of us are confident—I know the industry is not—that this government has biosecurity covered front and centre. Industry has almost given up on the government doing anything else for it, but one thing industry does want is for the government to care about biosecurity, and there is still no confidence that that government will protect biosecurity going forward. That is a danger, not just for the farming community of Western Australia, but the whole state.

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Agriculture and Food) [10.34 am]: I thank the member for bringing this motion to the house. I would like to start from 2013 when I first became the Minister for Agriculture and Food, and Fisheries, of course, when I asked the department what the priorities were. We were in a pretty dry time at that stage, and it allowed me to get out there into the wheatbelt area and listen to some of the farm businesses. From that, we came up with the main reasons that farmers were coming to government. There are usually a couple of simple answers. First, there is drought, which is obviously very tough, and, having experienced many myself, I do not wish them upon anyone. Second, there was the question of whether they had markets, and markets, of course, are the whole crux of production. The direction I gave my department was that I wanted it to look at growing markets, therefore increasing profitability to farmers and thus increasing productivity and developing people, and wrapped around that was biosecurity, as Hon Ken Travers was just talking about. My job has been to extract the maximum out of the department even in the difficult environment that we face today. Any farmer running their business has to operate at maximum efficiency and at all times has to ensure that they are able to do that job. As the economic and operating conditions change, farmers have to change how they operate, and that is what the farming industry has done for many years. The department today is like that modern farm; that is where it is directing its attention. It operates with fewer people than it did 10 years ago. Hon Ken Travers is absolutely right; there are fewer people. However, I will get back to the budget a bit later. The department does more with less. It uses different methods and systems, and engages more external consultants and contractors. The veterinarian position is present now. The Treasurer has approved funding for a senior veterinarian with the ability to bring any other veterinarians in, like consultants, if there is an issue of biosecurity. That, of course, goes through the wage freeze that goes until 1 July.

Hon Ken Travers: Are you confident we can meet our statutory obligations?

Hon KEN BASTON: Yes, I am confident we can meet our statutory obligations with that negotiated settlement that occurred, I think, just yesterday.

Hon Ken Travers: There are lots of caveats.

Hon KEN BASTON: Rather than knocking us, we should be getting on with it.

Like any good minister, I have managed to change the demands of agriculture by changing the department. We have moved to a more dynamic approach. This includes project by funding that ensures that the state is investing in real outcomes that are important to the sector and the industry. In case some members have not been paying attention in the last three years, let me remind them of some of these projects. We have boosted grains research and development to help grain growers capture new markets—that is a \$20 million commitment to help farmers boost productivity and profitability through research and development. There is the eConnected Grainbelts, in which we have invested \$10 million to provide information to growers about paddock records, weather forecasts and research outcomes. We have turned our attention to the beef industry, which has been very important to the northern beef futures. The state government has committed some \$15 million—admittedly it is over four years and it is taking time, but it is still \$15 million for a purpose—to take better advantage of new and growing markets —

Hon Ken Travers: That will become five years and six.

Hon KEN BASTON: No; it is set for four years.

Hon Ken Travers; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; President; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Mark Lewis

This project also includes a review of the infrastructure required to support the trade as well as investment in ground-up development. I have to say that I was up in Karratha only about 10 days ago where I attended a beef forum enabled by this funding. Great Giant Livestock from Lampung, which is a very big cattle exporter in Indonesia, was there. One thing that I believe is important is we must get that linkage between the country we are sending beef to and us as the country of origin. We should both be visiting each other and there should be an understanding of what the product is. The member's reference to "Brand WA" that he is going to push sounds very good—if Labor ever gets there! There are supported irrigation trials to boost the northern cattle industry. The stand-and-graze irrigation trial was a partnership between the state government and the Mowanjumb Aboriginal Corporation. That forms part of a \$40 million Water for Food project in Derby that will help develop a template for the West Kimberley pastoral project to bolster the state's international beef trade. That also includes funding for Indigenous land-use agreements to source the use of rangelands throughout the Kimberley and Pilbara regions. Indigenous land-use agreements are important to open up that land, so they have to be cleared first. An Aboriginal corporation is going to be doing that. We are investing \$10 million to establish the sheep industry business innovation project to build industry growth. I do not know whether members are aware that sheep numbers in Western Australia are the lowest they have been for a long time, at 14.2 million sheep. Back in the 1990s before the wool market crashed there were 38 million sheep. That presents a difficulty for the industry and government and it is very important to increase productivity. There is demand for sheep from around the world, including Iran, the United Arab Emirates and Malaysia. They will all be looking for an increase in sheep numbers. The ambassador of Iran came to see me and said he wanted sheep. Of course, there has been an embargo on Iran for 30 years and it has just come out of that embargo. He said that he wanted three million sheep, and I smiled and said I could not give him three million sheep. To me, we need to be focusing on those markets and making sure that our farmers understand what markets are out there, so they can invest in their business.

Hon Ken Travers: Isn't that what the Department of State Development is doing now?

Hon KEN BASTON: That is the move, the shift and the linkage—the member is right.

We have delivered new saleyard facilities at Katanning to meet the industry's requirements. The state government contributed \$17 million towards a \$25.4 million state-of-the-art facility, which was officially opened in May 2014. The interesting thing is that it was on time and on budget and required no royalties for regions funding, Hon Ken Travers.

Hon Ken Travers: Just call me Kenny 2.

Several members interjected.

Hon KEN BASTON: I think I like "Hon Ken Travers" better.

In biosecurity, I have had the department identify and focus on strategic priorities. Today it focuses on supporting the protection of our agricultural industries, including border protection, weed and animal control, and animal welfare, along with agricultural science. Last year's biosecurity budget was \$33 million, and another \$20 million was added over four years to boost biosecurity. This ensures the productivity and profitability of our farms and reinforces the social licence need to continue to farm. Only a fortnight ago I opened the sterile Mediterranean fruit fly facility, which will eradicate fruit fly in Carnarvon, where there is an \$80 million to \$100 million industry that cannot export at present because it has fruit fly. We have to get that level down. That will be our first trial using sterile fruit fly, which will be bred in South Perth and then sent up there.

Hon Ken Travers: I think we called for that—how many years ago was it?

Hon KEN BASTON: I do not know; I have been minister for only three years.

Hon Rick Mazza: What is the actual cost to the state of dealing with fruit fly?

Hon KEN BASTON: That program, over three years, will cost \$4.3 million, including some local government money, and some from the biosecurity fund. We will use that as a trial for the Perth hills, and eventually use it there.

Hon Rick Mazza: That is \$4.3 million from the department, but what is the actual cost to the growers in this state of dealing with fruit fly?

Hon KEN BASTON: We have set up a recognised biosecurity group, which is entitled to dollar-for-dollar grants, so the growers put in a dollar and the state puts in a dollar to match that.

Hon Ken Travers: Is that formula the total sum of the state's contribution?

Hon KEN BASTON: That formula includes some shire contributions as well. That is not the dollar-for-dollar grant; that is money already going in there. They have only just set up the dollar-for-dollar scheme because they want to have input into that as well, and I commend the growers for that. Some years ago Carnarvon actually led

Hon Ken Travers; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; President; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Mark Lewis

the way in controlling fruit fly, and 30 years ago it actually eradicated them, but it was let go after that, which was disappointing.

As I said, the \$20 million state biosecurity fund provides grants to biosecurity groups working to help keep Western Australia free from pests. In June 2013 we upgraded the barrier fence and closed the Yilgarn gap. An upgrade to the state's fence, which was a 112-year-old barrier fence, was completed to better protect farmland from wild dogs and emus. About 820 kilometres of the 1 206 kilometres is now completed, and it stretches from north of Kalbarri to east of Ravensthorpe. In November 2014, the 170-kilometre Yilgarn gap fence was closed. Both undertakings were part of a five-year, \$10.3 million state barrier fence project that will help farmers increase profitability in the Agricultural Region. That is very much for small stock units.

We have introduced a successful dog bounty trial, which I ran for one year. It is just one tool amongst all the others that are needed. In that year, we posted a \$100-a-head bounty on wild dogs. In that year, 520 dogs were caught in the southern Mt Magnet area; in the previous year the number was 300. Members can say what they like about whether that worked, but 200 more dogs were caught than in the previous year. I believe it was successful, and can be used again in the future. The wild dog action plan was completed, with significant industry input to ensure that we got it right. That document will now set up how we handle wild dogs in Western Australia in the future. It was a condition of attracting federal funding that we had a wild dog action plan. I am surprised that we did not have one before.

Some members may have forgotten how the state was in drought in 2012, so we also had to negotiate with the commonwealth in rolling out the drought investment loan scheme. Then there is the trade and market development—I am running out of time. During my term I have travelled to countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, China, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Each of these countries has its own issues with the way in which we are dealing with their trade, particularly countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It is important for our trade development that we have offices in as many of those places as possible.

Then there are initiatives such as Doppler radar, which is a \$23 million project to install new radar in Newdegate, South Doodlakine and Marchagee. The first of those should be finished by the end of June this year.

Hon Ken Travers: Now you are just trying to wind up Hon Nigel Hallett.

Hon KEN BASTON: Hon Nigel Hallett is very much an instigator of getting those Doppler radars installed.

Hon Ken Travers, the new Department of Agriculture and Food headquarters is another exciting development that I have driven, and the Premier has made a statement referring to that. Of course, we have sold the land to build the building, and I do not have a problem with that. I believe this has been on the budget for some 18 years. It was a \$236 million building, but we are now talking about a \$220 million building, and we are looking at sharing it with other departments.

Hon Ken Travers: When will construction commence?

Hon KEN BASTON: I would like to see some concrete poured by the end of this year, but it is in the planning phase, and I am going to go back and question the \$12 million for planning, which I find amazing.

The department is indeed very different from how it was when the Labor Party was last in power. In fact, it is markedly different from where it was three years ago, and I do not apologise for that. I am proud to be the Minister for Agriculture and Food, and I am proud that so many new projects have been rolled out. The department, like modern farming, is changing rapidly and must remain relevant to the industry.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural) [10.49 am]: I thank Hon Ken Travers for bringing this very important motion forward. It is clearly a motion that I find most interesting, as a member of the agricultural community and a farmer. Under this government, the way that agriculture has been treated has certainly been a very sad and sorry tale. Agriculture was once a prized portfolio, I would have thought, for ministers. They would have keenly sought the agricultural portfolio, but now, under this government, the agriculture portfolio has become something of a poisoned chalice. I have a deal of sympathy for the Minister for Agriculture and Food. I am sure that he has the absolute best of intentions for the portfolio, coming from an agricultural background himself. I believe that he has the best interests of agriculture at heart, but such is the difficulty with the internal bickering in this government, and the chest-pounding and finger-pointing that goes on within the government, that he must despair. Recently, we have seen the extraordinary measures of the Premier, directly meddling with the internal operations of the Department of Agriculture and Food. How can the minister do a good and competent job in such an environment, when we see the internal bickering between the coalition partners, and the constant meddling in the portfolio of the Premier, the Treasurer and other cabinet ministers? It is a very important portfolio and it needs to be treated with much greater respect than this government has given it.

Hon Ken Travers; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; President; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Mark Lewis

On this matter, I think Hon Ken Travers has some very unlikely supporters—people whom we would not expect to be supporting a motion about agriculture moved in the Parliament by the Labor Party. I heard recently the WAFarmers Grains Council president, Duncan Young, being interviewed on the *Country Hour* about a letter that he sent to the minister regarding the repeal of the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act. Towards the end of that very awkward interview—that letter and the whole situation were a bit of a shambles, and I know that that will come up perhaps later today or next week when we discuss GM—Duncan Young was pressed by the interviewer when the interviewer asked him whether that was really the most important issue facing agriculture today. He conceded that it was not the biggest issue. The biggest issue facing agriculture today is the future of the Department of Agriculture and Food. For someone to say that on the ABC *Country Hour* in front of a farming audience was quite extraordinary, I thought. The WAFarmers Grains Council president, Duncan Young, agrees with Hon Ken Travers.

Hon Ken Travers: Duncan is a good bloke.

Hon DARREN WEST: He is a very nice man, a very good farmer and a very competent operator. He does a really good job and he knows his stuff. We disagree on a couple of things, but given Duncan’s comments on ABC radio, in the main he agrees exactly with the motion of Hon Ken Travers. The motion has another unlikely ally in a member of the government backbench. I refer to an article in the *Countryman* of 9 July 2015, headed “Nats MP bags Barnett cuts to agriculture”, which reads —

Colin Barnett has been accused from within his own Government ranks of being responsible for an agricultural sector con-job in the wake of recent vicious cuts to the Department of Agriculture and food.

I would love to read all of this article, but I have limited time. The article later reads —

Nationals WA member for the agricultural region Paul Brown told *Countryman* the Premier had misled the electorate about what he had in mind for agriculture in WA.

“With the Premier saying he was going to prioritise agriculture because we were entertaining the ‘dining boom’ and exiting the ‘mining boom’, I think once again the ... sector was conned.

There is some very unlikely support for Hon Ken Travers’ motion today that the Liberal–National government has dropped the ball because members from within the government are saying exactly the same thing. I note that Hon Ken Travers quoted Hon Nigel Hallett, who certainly has more than a passing interest in agriculture. He is also involved in the farming industry and knows full well the effects that the meddling, mismanagement and internal bickering of this government have had on a once proud department—the once mighty Department of Agriculture with 2 000 employees has now been reduced to a shell of its former self because of the incompetence, mismanagement and mistrust within the government. Hon Nigel Hallett has not been afraid to ask the hard questions and push for advances in agriculture such as Doppler radar. During estimates we heard Hon Nigel Hallett ask the government what is left of agriculture, such was his exasperation with the way his own side has mismanaged it. Liberal backbenchers and National backbenchers—both government backbenches, as Hon Ken Travers pointed out—agree with this motion in a roundabout way. I thank the member for bringing such an important motion to the house.

Agricultural areas are generally conservative areas, but when I visit agricultural areas, it is often conceded by conservative voters that Labor puts up the best agriculture ministers. They often quote stories about the late Ernie Bridge and the important changes he made to the agriculture portfolio and the way he was able to get water to a lot of communities that did not otherwise have it. Is it not good that he did, because in a drying climate, a lot of those communities would have been totally unviable without water? It is often said to me that ministers Chance and Bridge were some of the best agriculture ministers.

Hon Ken Travers: They sing Ernie’s praises.

Hon DARREN WEST: They sing Ernie’s praises; that is a very good point.

The late Ernie Bridge was a great agriculture minister. When Labor is in government, it unites behind this important portfolio. It must be remembered that the Labor Party was formed in outback Queensland by shearers, members of the agricultural industry. It is a very dear and important portfolio to us and we unite behind our agriculture ministers of the day, which is why they have been so successful in that portfolio.

I take the minister’s point that the agriculture department is like a modern farm. In some ways it is much like a modern farm. It is true that efficiencies in farming have enabled farms to run with fewer people. It is also true that they do more with less. I know—I will use the example, sadly, of our farm—that there is often bickering, infighting and arguing among the operators of a farm, which generally leads to negative impacts. I take the minister’s point that this government has been like a dysfunctional family farming operation and has had the negative impacts of that—wasted money, wasted opportunities, a lack of direction, a lack of leadership and a very sad outcome.

Hon Ken Travers; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; President; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Mark Lewis

Hon Helen Morton: You'd know what it's like.

Hon DARREN WEST: I do know what it is like to have internal family division. What we did, minister —

Hon Helen Morton: You'd know what it's like—a dysfunctional family farming business. You'd know what it's like.

Withdrawal of Remark

Hon SUE ELLERY: Hon Helen Morton just said probably some of the most offensive personal comments I have heard by way of interjection when she said, “You would know”, in respect of Hon Darren West about dysfunctional farming families.

Hon Helen Morton: I said “business”.

Hon SUE ELLERY: That is not what you said.

Hon Helen Morton: It is what I said; I said “business”.

Hon SUE ELLERY: It is my point of order and I am talking to the President. I am asking you, Mr President, to ask the member to withdraw those comments. They are offensive and absolutely unnecessary.

The PRESIDENT: In this case, the tone of the words may well have been offensive, but the member who was making the comments had already referred to that situation and admitted that he knew what it was like to be involved in a difficult family farming environment. It is not a point of order but, as a general courtesy, if somebody takes offence at a reference such as this, the member who made that reference is invited to withdraw. Does the Minister for Mental Health wish to say anything?

Hon HELEN MORTON: Thanks, Mr President. I withdraw for repeating the comments of the honourable —

Hon Ken Travers: That's not a withdrawal; that's a joke.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! Minister, a withdrawal has to be unconditional.

Hon HELEN MORTON: I unconditionally do that.

Debate Resumed

Hon DARREN WEST: I do think those comments were quite unnecessary, but I will make the analogy that, in our family, I had a difficult experience with my brother, which ended up in a very bitter internal division. What you do in that instance, minister, is address and sort out the issues, get everyone happy, move on and work together as a collective, which is exactly what we have done in our family. That may be a lesson for the minister. I am happy to talk to members opposite about how they might go about getting the ship back on track and working in the best interests of agriculture. That is what we have done on our family farm. These challenges arise; I do not accept that they are not able to be fixed.

I will take it away from the personal and get back to the industry, because the industry is clearly very important to me, as is the biosecurity aspect of the motion. The review of the department has been labelled a shambles. The department was six months late in reviewing itself. Certainly, there are issues in Western Australia regarding the future of our biosecurity. I refer to an article by Brad Thompson and Rueben Hale in the *Countryman*, headed, “WA biosecurity services set for the chopping block”, which reads —

Department of Agriculture and Food WA executives say they are committed to biosecurity, despite recent revelations of funding cuts to the sector.

Biosecurity services to protect WA from devastating pests and diseases are facing big cuts, despite a warning from department director-general Rob Delane that they are already at minimum levels.

I think Hon Nigel Hallett brought out that issue quite well during estimates. There certainly are a lot of other important issues facing this portfolio.

I will come back to where I started. I think that Minister Baston has certainly done his best in a very adverse environment. The government has lost all respect for the agriculture portfolio and has made this important portfolio a poisoned chalice. I acknowledge that the minister has done his best, but he has lacked support from within his own government. Internal divisions within his own government have plagued him every step of the way. He has had to contend with budget cuts. He has had to put good people off, including Dr Rob Manning from the bee sector. Good people such as that are lost forever and we will not get them back.

I thank Hon Ken Travers for bringing forward this very important motion. It is a very important issue for Western Australia and we must do better.

Hon Ken Travers; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; President; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Mark Lewis

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [11.01 am]: I thank Hon Ken Travers for bringing this motion to the house. The first part of his motion refers to waste and lack of direction. It is a little hard to have waste when the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia's budget is cut on a regular basis. The department is trying to do the best it can with the budget it has. There is a lot of talk about moving from the mining boom to the dining boom, and agriculture has always featured as a major economic sector within Western Australia. To see the department having its budget constantly cut is very alarming. A lot has been said about biosecurity and the fact that biosecurity in this state could be at risk. The reason I asked the minister what the cost of the Mediterranean fruit fly pest was to Western Australia is that I think it is much higher than what a lot of people understand. The minister said the department is investing some \$4 million in it. However, what is the cost to growers in sprays and lost fruit in dealing with the Mediterranean fruit fly? I would say that it is in the tens of millions of dollars. That is just one pest. If we get more serious pests into this state, the cost could be enormous.

Even today in *Farm Weekly* WAFarmers president Tony York expressed his concern and condemned the staff freezes within the agriculture department, particularly in the area of biosecurity. He also goes on to say that if DAFWA is left ill-equipped to deal with a potential outbreak of a disease affecting livestock, it could mean a disaster for the state. What could the cost to the state be if there happens to be a biosecurity breach and outbreak? Last year in August, the Victorian Auditor-General reported on biosecurity in that state. In the front of his report, he wrote —

I found that a decline in financial and staff resourcing for core biosecurity functions has weakened the state's capacity to detect, prepare for and respond to emergency livestock disease outbreaks. This increases the potential for a major disease outbreak going undetected until it has become established.

I think there are a lot of similarities between that and the circumstances in this state because that could also be a problem for us here. Concerning the actual cost, the Auditor-General goes on to say —

The 2001 foot-and-mouth disease ... outbreak in the United Kingdom resulted in economic losses totalling US\$12 billion and the slaughter of more than six million sheep and cattle. While Australia is free of FMD, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences estimates that a large scale, multi-state FMD outbreak would result in economic losses totalling \$52 billion over a 10-year period.

That is an enormous cost to the state from one serious disease such as foot and mouth. If this state is not prepared and is not vigilant, the cost to the state could be absolutely crippling. I know Western Australia is seen as a relatively disease-free state. We have only a few pests, although those pests cost us tens of millions of dollars. We have to be very, very mindful. It is alarming that the government is reducing DAFWA's budget. I think DAFWA deserves more than that, particularly in the area of biosecurity. We need to remain vigilant about these diseases.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [11.04 am]: I rise to support the motion as well. Unfortunately, the Minister for Agriculture and Food is not seen by industry as its strongest advocate. This Liberal–National government is quite happy to target the Department of Agriculture and Food for cuts. The commentariat, if you like, in the agriculture industry describes a lack of leadership on really key issues within the department and a general kind of dithering about making decisions. Most recently, of course, an announcement was made about a major review into the future direction for the department and then there was a nine-month wait until people were appointed to the panel to conduct that kind of review.

Four hundred and fifty jobs have gone and there has been a 10 per cent cut to the budget. We find ourselves in a position in which the Liberal–National government's own friends are describing this government as having a lack of interest in agriculture and an intention to close down DAFWA. Other members have referred to the internal bickering and reports that the National Party is unhappy that it does not hold the agriculture portfolio. We have seen evidence more recently of trouble in paradise between the Liberal and National Parties. I will refer to some of the commentary in a minute. The commentators are smart enough to recognise, though, that it is a Liberal–National government, despite attempts by National Party members of the government to pretend that they are not part of decisions made around budgets and they are not part of decisions made around the cabinet table. In fact, a large number of the commentariat, whom I will refer to in a minute, are accusing both the Liberal and National Parties of overseeing the demise of the agriculture portfolio.

It is a sad state of affairs when the government's natural base thinks it has deserted them, and that is what is happening with the people in the agriculture industry looking at who they would see as their natural parties of choice, the Liberal and National Parties. Today, we heard the Treasurer's assessment that he thinks the Leader of the National Party "is not in control of his own domain". They are the words he said on Macquarie Radio this morning about the decision announced yesterday that, despite the fact the Nationals were part of the budget,

Hon Ken Travers; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; President; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Mark Lewis

which had at its core the decision to sell Fremantle port, the National Party will rip the guts out of the budget and not support that.

I turn to some of the commentary that has been made already. Hon Ken Travers referred to *Hansard* from estimates in June last year and I want to refer to that as well. On Friday, 26 June 2015, a series of questions were asked about the new business structure and direction for the Department of Agriculture and Food. Hon Nigel Hallett asked questions about a crisis meeting of the industry that had been called that afternoon to give a clear indication of where agriculture is going. He made the point —

We are in uncharted waters and it is a disgrace the waters we are in.

Essentially, that is what we heard here in March. The answer to that question is about the department —

... working very closely with industry, as we have always done, to ensure that our funding and delivery partners and our client representatives are fully informed of where we are at.

Here we are in March 2016—that was June 2015—and no-one in the industry is any the wiser about what direction the Department of Agriculture and Food is taking. No-one is any the wiser.

Hon Ken Travers: They know it's going to harm them.

Hon SUE ELLERY: People in the industry know there have been cuts and those cuts will continue in the budget into the out years. There have been staff cuts; really senior positions will be cut, including, for example, positions in particular areas of expertise. I attended a high tea last year and I was sitting next to a woman I had never met before, and we were talking about the fabulous range of food available to us. This was in a cafe in Maylands. She told me that she has bees and she is really concerned about what this government has done to the expertise in the bee industry in Western Australia by not making sure that when this man—whose name escapes me for the moment, but I am sure the minister will remember—who is an internationally recognised expert in the industry left the department, was replaced. That level of expertise, which was critical to maintaining that industry, was not replaced. That is what ordinary people are talking about when it comes to the Department of Agriculture and Food.

The minister and his then director general of Agriculture and Food were at pains in June last year to satisfy the estimates committee that it should not worry about it and they were concentrating on setting the right direction so that everyone will know where we are going.

In March 2016, he announced the people who would be on the panel. For goodness sake! How does it take nine months to pick the people to sit on the panel to set the direction of the Department of Agriculture and Food after the government has been in office for seven and a half years?

Hon Samantha Rowe: Lack of leadership.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Exactly, Hon Samantha Rowe; it is a significant and damning lack of leadership. The Liberal–National government has nothing to feel proud of. I quote from commentator Peter Lee's regular column "View from the ridge" in *Farm Weekly*. In his article "Agriculture leaders deserve more support", he says the following —

It is becoming harder for farmers to even attract the attention of both federal and state politicians with their fixation with "the numbers", for as everyone knows, the "numbers" live in the cities.

The current Liberal–National alliance running the State at the moment has just about destroyed DAFWA, with its poorly thought out move to relocate the core of the old DAFWA to Northam being condemned by an industry committee set up to comment on the proposal.

The Liberals and Nationals are supposed to be agriculture's special friends, yet the lack of interest in solving the rail transport issue shows that the special relationship no longer exists.

They are damning words indeed. Earlier this year, in his "View from the ridge" article headed "Inquiring DAFWA out of existence", in the *Farm Weekly* of 7 January this year, Peter Lee says the following —

Earlier last year, during one of the usual slash and burn exercises that the government performs on the Department of Agriculture and Food ... some brave soul asked whether there was enough of the old ag department left to perform even its core functions?

Further on he asks —

If it is to be a public inquiry —

He is referring to the department, and says further on —

The basis of the answer is very simple, for DAFWA's director general alluded to it on day one, namely that the core duty of DAFWA is to carry out the instructions of the minister.

Rather than asking his director general the question, the minister should have been up front and told him the answer.

But we have a fair idea what the answer really is, given the information revealed back in April/May last year on what has happened since the election of the Liberal/National government.

Staff numbers have been cut ... with a further 300 to go before the next election and the department will become "only a regulatory body from now on" with "virtually no research and development and no market research".

We also know from the last budget papers that increasing involvement by the private sector will see "a greater reliance on industry and the public in the area of biosecurity".

DAFWA's plant breeding division was sold many years ago, dairy industry research has been hand-balled to a local committee, DAFWA is in the process of giving up all involvement in the sheep industry, while apparently, its participation in the grains industry is being privatised.

From the outside, it would appear that there is no other explanation than that the Liberals and Nationals, political parties considered the friends of agriculture, have decided to close DAFWA down.

The question remaining is: Why?

They are damning words indeed out of *Farm Weekly* about the lack of leadership in this portfolio. It is a damning indictment because these are the people the government would see as its natural constituency and natural friends.

I look forward to a member of the National Party perhaps standing to defend the government's position on agriculture because I am really interested to hear what they have to say today. We need to keep asking that question because it appears that every single day, maybe three or four times a day, the Nationals make a decision about whether they are part of the government or not. A wise man, Hon Norman Moore, once said to me, "Remember who the real enemies are in the chamber, Sue. It's not you; it's not me; it's the National Party"!

Several members interjected.

HON MARK LEWIS (Mining and Pastoral) [11.13 am]: I rise to contribute to this debate today because I think it needs some context.

Hon Ken Travers: Someone's defending the minister!

Hon MARK LEWIS: I hope to do that in the few minutes I have. At the outset, although I am uncomfortable with the trend of funding going into agriculture, unfortunately not only Western Australia is affected; it has been an international trend since I can remember, certainly since about the 1980s when I got into this game. Worldwide, there has been reform in agriculture. In the United Kingdom, Europe, America and even New Zealand we have seen significant reform in agriculture. At home, states such as Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania and, to a lesser degree, Queensland and, unfortunately, Western Australia have to meet the worldwide trends facing us in agriculture. The grants system in the United States fed a whole heap of money into research and development but the university sector has virtually dried up. In Victoria, due to the amalgamation of departments, the original Department of Agriculture is almost now undiscernible. Primary Industry South Australia is now a commercialised model of the former South Australian agriculture department. Internationally, I guess a range of strategies have been put in place over the years in which I have been involved in this game. Western Australia has had a high dependency on external funding—what we call soft funding. I could go through them, but they are not there now. There were exceptional circumstances; the old drought provisions. When I came to WA, \$55 million was sitting in the Rural Adjustment and Finance Corporation—sorry, I lie; it was more than that. I put the \$55 million out into the industry so it would have been a hell of a lot more than that. The national soil conservation program was a huge commonwealth funder for WA. That merged into what was called Landcare Trust, a billion-dollar trust that was there every year. Incidentally, our share of that was about 17 per cent each year, with the normal breakdown between the states. Out of that billion dollars, we would have received \$170 million during the Landcare Trust days. That was followed by the national salinity program. WA would have received 17 per cent of that also. More recently, with the whole climate change debate, we have been receiving funding from the commonwealth through those sorts of mechanisms that are over there at the moment. As I said, of the government programs, 17 per cent of that would have been coming to WA. Those programs are not necessarily there now. It is not unremarkable that there has been a decline in the number of staff in the department. That has happened not only here but also right across Australia and worldwide.

I will go on a bit more because there are other rational reasons we have seen a decline in departmental numbers. We have adopted a range of functions over time that did not necessarily sit with the ag department; for example, the Pastoral Lands Board. All the administrative functions for that board sat with the Department of Agriculture and Food. When I got into the job, there would have been at least 20.

Hon Darren West: It's about to be abolished.

Hon MARK LEWIS: That is another story, but at least 20 or so people were in ag, who are no longer with us because that is now seen directly as a lands department function and, quite rightly, the functions have gone back to Lands. They do not necessarily sit comfortably with the department of ag. As I said, it is very unsurprising that there has been this decline in numbers. In my own program, when I was in the department of ag, over 50 per cent of that was external funding, so 50 per cent of those people are probably no longer there—again, unremarkable. As I said, where it has been appropriate, we have commercialised as, similarly, has every other agency not only in Australia but also internationally. As I have said, the amalgamation process has been happening. For example, the domestic animal welfare section now sits with the Department of Local Government and Communities. Those staff have gone from the Department of Agriculture and Food to that department. We have devolved responsibility to other more appropriate departments. We have rationalised to industry groups. Members may remember Kondinin and they may have heard of the Mingenew Irwin Group. The staff who are now with that group are probably ex-agriculture department staff.

Hon Ken Travers mentioned environmental matters. A whole fleet of staff from the agriculture department are now working with local environmental groups. There is nothing wrong with that. The people with that skill base were trained in the department and are now in industry and embedded within local groups. There is nothing wrong with that.

We have set up a framework through the regional biosecurity group process. The industry called for this. A lot of the staff are now working with the industry to be closer to the ground and to the industry business. I cannot see anything wrong with that; in fact, I was part of the push for that to happen, because in that way people are closer to the deck.

DairyWest is a good example of industry development. Initially, there was a bit of push back, but all the staff have been taken out of the department and are now with the industry, and they are very happy with that model. Indeed, the federal dairy research and development corporations absolutely support that. The same applies to bees. The people who were in the bee section in the agriculture department are now with the industry, and it is likewise with pigs. Again, we have not lost those skills. Those people are in the industry doing the job that they were doing with the department. As I said, the industry is very comfortable with it and is pushing it.

Commonwealth research and development corporations are now doing a lot more deals with private providers. I do not know whether members know this, but Western Australia has the largest R&D regional provider—Kalyx Australia Pty Ltd, which is working with regional private providers to deliver R&D. It does not necessarily go through the department because of the on-costs that are involved with government. It can deliver those things more directly into the industry. Where does it get its people from? It gets them from the agriculture department.

Hon Darren West interjected.

Hon MARK LEWIS: As Hon Darren West will know, a lot of the R&D is now done on farms. The research and development corporations and the industry are driving this to be done on farms, not necessarily on research stations. Do members know why that is? It is because they get better value for money and better uptake of the technology if it is delivered on the ground by the farmers on their own properties. The issue really is who will best manage agriculture going forward. I rest my case by asking members to look at the experience on this side of the chamber compared with that on the other side.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon MARK LEWIS: When we compare the age and experience of those on this side of the chamber with the age and experience of those on the opposition side, it is a no-brainer on this matter.

HON KEN TRAVERS (North Metropolitan) [11.23 am] — in reply: I find it quite extraordinary that not a single member of the National Party contributed to this debate. I think it makes a very clear point about the division in and the problems that face this government today. We have often heard members of the National Party talk about their Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture initiative, but even they did not want to defend it today, because they know it has now been pushed out and will continue to be pushed into the outer years. I bet members that not one member of the National Party will put up their hand for the agriculture portfolio as part of the reshuffle. They want the minister to wear the pain, because they sit at the cabinet table that has inflicted the cuts on the minister.

I listened intently to the minister's defence of his agency. I think the minister has done his best to try to defend his agency, but this is at the highest level of government. The minister knows that that is why that letter was leaked. It is not understood by the Premier or the Treasurer.

The minister said that the department had changed and it was now more responsive and was focused on delivering what industry wants it to deliver. I ask members to look at the efficiency indicators in the annual report of the

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 24 March 2016]

p1832e-1844a

Hon Ken Travers; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Darren West; Hon Sue Ellery; President; Hon Helen Morton; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Mark Lewis

Department of Agriculture and Food. Last year, it said that it expected to reach its targets. As Hon Nigel Hallett has pointed out in the past, the targets that the department set itself are woefully low. The department's first outcome is to have a profitable, innovative and sustainable agrifood sector that benefits Western Australia. There are four areas in that outcome through which the department seeks to measure its success. The first is the proportion of co-investment in DAFWA-led activities. Its target last financial year was 38 per cent, but it achieved only 25 per cent, which was a reduction from 33.8 per cent in the 2013–14 year. The second area is the proportion of businesses that consider that DAFWA has influenced profitability, which is one of the things that the minister used in his defence of where he had taken the department under his leadership. The target was to have only 33 per cent of businesses consider that DAFWA has influenced their profitability. Hon Nigel Hallett has said that that is too low. In fact, the department could not even meet that target. It could get only 24.6 per cent of businesses, down from 29.3 per cent in the previous year. The department is not only not achieving its targets, but also going in the wrong direction. The third area is the proportion of businesses that consider that DAFWA has fostered innovation. The target was 33 per cent, but it achieved only 24.7 per cent, down from 29.1 per cent. Again, that is a reduction. The fourth area is the proportion of businesses that consider that DAFWA has influenced sustainability. The target was 36 per cent, but it achieved 28.6 per cent, down from 37.5 per cent. The minister made a brave claim that he was having a positive influence, but the industry figures suggest otherwise.

On the important issue of biosecurity, the key effectiveness indicator for the third service area, resource risk management, is public and private sector co-investment in DAFWA-led initiatives as a factor of the net cost of this service. The target was 35 per cent, but it achieved 22.2 per cent. This is a government that has, in the words of Hon Nigel Hallett, dropped the ball. Sadly, today, only one person in this chamber stood to help defend the minister, and that was Hon Mark Lewis. I congratulate Hon Mark Lewis for a sterling job of standing and trying to defend his good mate. We like him. I, too, like Kenny. He is a good man. He has tried to do his best for the portfolio, but he has not had the backup or the support. His backbench, his partners in government, the industry and the people on the street all know that this government has dropped the ball on agriculture. This industry is too important. As we set about the task of paying down the debt that the Liberal–National government has given us—that slow task of paying off the mortgage that we now have—we will need industries such as agriculture and food to perform. That is why we have brought this motion to the house today. Labor understands that the only way to get Western Australia moving again, to change this state for the better and to provide a positive future for the young people of Western Australia is to work with industries such as agriculture and food and tourism to get the economy going.

That is why as a metropolitan member, although one who has a fair chunk of horticulture in my region, I was very happy to go and stand with the farming champions last Saturday morning at the Farmer on Your Plate event. It was a good event. I love the people down there. I love what they are doing with family farms, and the innovation that they are bringing to WA agriculture is brilliant, but they are not being supported by this government. That is why I have brought this motion to the house. It is not because this Minister for Agriculture and Food failed. Like so many ministers before him in the Barnett government, it is because the Premier and the government have failed in their responsibilities to an industry, but it is the minister who wears the cost. When the government fails, the Premier does not accept responsibility for his actions; he turns around to Hon Simon O'Brien, Hon Robyn McSweeney, the honourable Murray Cowper and Hon Rob Johnson, who have all suffered at the hands of this process. When the government fails, even though the ministers have toiled dutifully in cabinet and tried to get the key people in government to understand the challenges, they are the ones who wear it and get the chop, and not the ones who should be getting the chop—the people who sit around the cabinet table who write the budget. Let us not forget that the people who sat around the table and wrote the budgets over the last eight years and the people who sit in the Economic and Expenditure Reform Committee, including the Leader of the National Party. Members should be under no illusion that it is not only the Premier and the many Treasurers we have had, but also the two Leaders of the National Party who signed off on those budgets. Those budgets included selling Fremantle port, which now the Nationals do not support, which is good; but the National Party has left this government without an economic strategy and no capacity to fund agriculture in the future. We need to change the government. We need a government that will focus on agriculture.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.