

HOUSING AVAILABILITY — REGIONS

**298. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:**

I refer to the housing crisis resulting in regional towns facing near-zero per cent vacancy rates, and a Pit Crew Management Consulting Services report published by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy in May this year that says the resources sector will require an extra 40 000 people to support operations over the next two years. Does the Premier agree that the outcome of the government's failure to invest in land, housing and regional communities over the last four and a half years will leave industry with no option but to increase its fly-in fly-out workforce?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

It is an odd question. We put in place last year the Regional Land Booster program that the Leader of the Opposition might recall with \$117 million to ensure that more regional land was made available in particular for industry across regional WA. A whole range of projects have gone ahead as a consequence of that initiative that we took as part of our recovery plan. We are also about to hold a skills summit next week to work with industry about how to provide for more skilled labour, and labour more generally, in particular in regional WA but all over the state, because there are demands everywhere. Basically, the state now has the lowest unemployment rate in Australia and the highest participation rate. We are down to a 4.7 per cent unemployment rate. Our participation rate is about two per cent above the national average. When you put those two figures together, we have the strongest and most successful economy in Australia—by a long, long way. That puts pressure on a range of industries.

I today stopped at a business at Bakers Hill on the way to Muresk, and the lady running the business said to me that it is difficult to acquire skilled labour. I understand that is a problem around the state, and it is because of a couple of things. First, the state's economy, as I said, is so successful and strong. Second, we have closed borders, which means that some of those skills are not available, in particular some people who work in regional WA—for instance, backpackers, who often fill some of those retail roles in regional businesses. I cannot do anything about that; that is a function of COVID. The idea that somehow I could have predicted this or that this is my fault is frankly preposterous, and it is embarrassing that the Leader of the Opposition even alleged such a thing.

We understand it is an issue. We are holding a skills summit; we are looking for alternative solutions for the state of Western Australia. But the good thing is that we have a strong economy. As the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia has indicated, it is because of the efforts of the state government. We have a strong economy, we have successful regional communities, we are investing wisely across the state, we have the best set of public finances of anywhere in Australia and we have the strongest and the most affordable training system. In fact, our training system and the cuts we put in place to the cost of getting trained have resulted in a boom in Western Australians undertaking training. As I outlined the other day, there is a 27 per cent increase in the number of Western Australians undergoing training since we put in place those measures. That is over the course of the last year. That is a remarkable increase in Western Australians taking advantage of the opportunities across the state. All those things are occurring. We understand that there are pressures out there, but the state government is doing its best to address them.