

Mr Shane Love; Ms Libby Mettam; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Peter Rundle; Ms Merome Beard; Dr Tony Buti; Ms Sabine Winton; Mr Simon Millman; Ms Hannah Beazley

FEDERAL-STATE RELATIONS

Motion

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Cook Labor government for its failure to manage state and federal relations, which is putting at risk the key industries that support our state and dismissing their significant social and economic contributions to our community.

In moving this motion, I point to the questions asked today in the house and the answers that revealed a state government that is struggling with its relationship with the federal government and is unable to provide answers to questions about critical industries, such as our nickel industry. Despite the fact that the Prime Minister is in Western Australia, he does not seem to be listening to the Premier, and the Premier refused to say whether he had directly asked the question about whether he would seek support for production tax credits for the Western Australian nickel industry. Nothing could be a more dire failure in the federal-state relationship than to see such a critical industry go into a decline and shut down because the Premier has not asked the question.

We also asked a question today about the so-called embassy in Canberra. That was an announcement—like many announcements this government makes about how it will change the course of history—yet, some time after, the embassy just seems to have dissipated into the ether and nothing has been achieved. I would like an update. The Minister for Culture and the Arts, who is listening, or one of the other ministers could easily find information or an update from the Premier's office about what is happening at the office, centre or embassy—we will call it what you like—that the Premier was establishing in Canberra. The embassy was being developed because, by the Premier's own admission, he could not get the message across to people in Canberra about the needs of Western Australians. This is despite the fact that many undeserving federal Labor Party members of Parliament represent Western Australia in Canberra. They are obviously pretty poor at their jobs because we have to have an embassy in our own country, but the Premier cannot even tell me where the embassy is, what it is doing and whether it is working, and he denies that it is actually an embassy, even though that was the word used in his initial expressions about the "office". So much for a collaborative approach!

The Prime Minister is in town, and there are two big news stories in Western Australia. One is about defence. We are yet to see clarity about the naval operations going forward. The contractors have nothing to hang their hats on about the continuity of work. There are a lot of empty promises and rhetoric about the money that will be spent on naval assets, well after the life of the Albanese government, but very little clarity about our industries here in Western Australia.

The other big story, of course, is the nickel industry. We would think that the Prime Minister would be listening to an industry that represents about 10 000 jobs in Western Australia. Many of those jobs are in places such as Kalgoorlie. The township of Leinster depends virtually entirely on the nickel mines in its area, as does Kambalda. Even in Kwinana, in the Premier's own electorate, hundreds and hundreds of people could face the loss of their jobs if the Nickel West operation shuts down. We know that production tax credits have been floated by industry.

I will read from a press report in *The West Australian* today. The Prime Minister has been in town for a number of days, and we still see a very worrying situation in which there is no clarity for the nickel industry. The article states —

Industry lobby groups have floated a Commonwealth tax credit of at least 10 per cent on nickel production to keep Australia's nickel mines—the vast majority based in WA—from succumbing to Indonesian competition.

It goes on to state —

But Prime Minister Anthony Albanese—in Perth on Tuesday—appeared to pour cold water over suggestions a decision on production tax credits was imminent.

“You haven't seen an announcement from the Government about production tax credits—you've seen speculation from journalists who keep trying to get ahead of themselves,” he said.

“I've said that we'll consider, in an appropriate way, measures in which we can support the industry.”

According to the chief of BHP, Mike Henry, the support needs to happen very quickly or there will not be an industry to support. We know that Nickel West, for instance, is not only facing a decision to close; it has also announced it is due to spend \$750 million. Another report in *The West Australian* titled “Big Australian in bad nick” states —

BHP is also due to spend ... \$750 million to refurbish its Kalgoorlie nickel smelter.

“The smelter refurbishment is well and truly part of the consideration of whether we maintain current operations at Nickel West or move them fully into care and maintenance,” BHP chief executive Mike Henry said on Tuesday.

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This is an urgent matter that deserves the complete attention of the Premier and the Prime Minister. One would think they would be working together; instead, today the Premier was not able to answer a direct question about whether he has asked for those production tax credits. It is irresponsible. I cannot believe that the Premier has not asked the Prime Minister to support tax credits, given that it was reported in the newspaper this morning that the Prime Minister is not considering it. He is considering “in an appropriate way, measures in which we can support the industry.” However, he is not directly considering the production tax credits that the industry has asked for. That is just treating Western Australians with disrespect and disregard.

Going back to that embassy idea, perhaps the Leader of the House—I assume he or another minister will be answering this—could update us on the state of the embassy. How much has it cost thus far? What are the expected costs of that for the life of the government? What are the expected returns? Who will actually use it and how will it contribute to the state’s relationship with the federal government when, even when the Prime Minister is in town, the Premier apparently cannot talk to him? Having the embassy will achieve what, exactly? I will leave it to the minister to explain exactly what that embassy might be doing.

Of course, we know that there is a complete misunderstanding in Canberra and by the Prime Minister about the need for skilled labour in Western Australia. This state government wanted 10 000 people put on the skilled migration list for the year. The federal government cut it to less than 3 000 people, down from over 8 000, as it was initially. We saw the federal government do the exact opposite of what the state government had requested on that occasion.

We know that the mining industry is highlighting the labour and industrial relations changes the federal government has pushed through. It is not some change from Fair Work Australia or a change in an award; it is the Labor Party directly attacking Western Australia’s mining industry by putting in place an irresponsible industrial relations change that will threaten the viability of industries, such as the nickel industry. Industry members are directly raising with the opposition just how worried they are about that, yet we do not seem to see any concern from the state government in expressing its support of and relationship with the federal government. It claims it has got a great relationship, when we in fact know the relationship is poor. The relationship does not yield the results that seemed to be yielded from the former coalition government in Canberra. There is definitely a change in the wind in the way Western Australia is regarded, and the way that the policy settings and decisions coming out of Canberra impact Western Australians.

Another example is the decision to cut back on the length of time that backpackers can work in Australia. That is a real issue for Western Australia because backpackers are a very important source of labour in country areas especially, working in hospitality, agriculture and other areas. Previously, they could extend their stay up to three years if they engaged in 88 days of specific work in regional Western Australia. That has underpinned a lot of the labour undertaken in Western Australia over the years. In some communities, it has also led to permanent settlement. In some of the small communities that I represent, a number of backpackers found partners in the community and are now the mothers of the next generation of children to go to the little primary schools and keep those country towns thriving. That is an ill-considered decision from Canberra that does not take into account the real world in Western Australia that we all live in. We know that in some areas there is simply not enough labour. That source of labour was very much appreciated and it contributed strongly to our economy, yet it is to be taken away.

The underlying point is that if we pare back Western Australia’s industries and hold back their ability to hire labour and make arrangements with the workforce that works in that industry and we do not put in place the appropriate settings around taxation, we will stifle the industry and have less money coming in. We know that Western Australia is the engine room of the Australian economy and that nearly half of all the goods that are exported from Australia come from this state—just under one-half. The federal government looks at us as a cash cow or golden goose. By threatening to make these changes—I will outline some other issues later—it could easily kill the golden goose. It could stifle the industries to such a point that we are not able to contribute in the way that we have been over the last number of years to ensure that the state and federal budgets are in surplus. They are in surplus not because they are great governments, but because of the hard work and initiative of people in industry who are making the revenue that flows to those governments as taxation, royalties, duties and other measures. Governments are not money makers; governments are money spenders. The money makers are the people about whom Canberra is making decisions. Those decisions are negatively impacting their ability to continue to make money now and into the future. By doing that, the state and the nation will be all the worse for it.

As I said, the skilled migration list has been cut back. The member for Bicton talked today about the Labor government’s commitment to the economy and the awful decisions that it made to overstimulate the building industry at a time when it simply was not necessary. Since then, the building industry has been struggling to get houses built. At the same time, the federal government has been cutting back on skilled migration. The very people who could come in and help complete some of these tasks are being denied access to the state, which is making the problem worse. The federal government made that decision and the state government appears powerless to make the case to, and interact with, Canberra in a way that would lead to better results. It seems to be a complete change from

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the days when the coalition government was in office in Canberra and the Western Australian MPs were concerned about and understood the need for the coalition government to support Western Australia.

We now have a federal Labor government that pays lip-service to Western Australia. It sends its cabinet over here to make decisions that are detrimental to the state and then goes home, or it makes no decisions, as seems to have been the case with the nickel industry. There is a lot of concern about the industrial relations measures that I have mentioned.

Another concern that I want to talk about is in the area of environmental law. Last year, the Premier announced some changes to the operations of the Environmental Protection Authority, ostensibly because approvals through the organisation were very slow. News flash—they have been very slow for the last six or seven years of this government! It has got worse under this government. Industry is being strangled by red and green tape under this government, and it gets worse every year. We can look at some of the changes the federal government is making, despite our government apparently not supporting them—at least, that is what I have been told. The federal government has established its own Environment Protection Australia, which will sit on top of Western Australia's EPA when considering matters to do with the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and make its own determinations and assessments. For years, the state and federal governments had a bilateral arrangement that assessments would be done by the state and then looked at by the federal department and a decision made to approve, not approve or make some recommendations around what might be required. Instead of that continuing, what has been threatened, as far as I can see, is that the EPA in Canberra will do its own assessment, which will run parallel to what the state is doing. That will double the work required and lead to unnecessary duplication and confusion for industry. The federal government seems to have an agenda to stifle primary industries and the mining industry—all the industries in which Western Australia excels. The federal government is no friend of our state.

The establishment of the federal EPA is directly contrary to the system under the coalition, in which our EPA did both the assessments and approvals under the EPBC act. That was one of the major impetuses for change to the environmental act in the last term of government, but that is not being lived up to by Canberra and has now been shelved altogether while Canberra embarks on empire building. When we read on the website what Canberra proposes for the newly established EPA, it is more than a little concerning. Time and again we have seen that the federal government does not have the boots on the ground to do the work in the community. It does not have the staff, knowledge or presence in the area to do the things that it says it wants to do. The website talks about the federal EPA making and monitoring conditions. That is a furphy. The federal department does not have the infrastructure to make that work. We know that there are not enough skilled people to fill the approvals roles in the federal EPA and other government departments. Where are all those people who will do this extra level of approval going to come from? We will see time lines blow out further and further. It will reach a point at which industry will decide that it prefers to go to West Africa. The politics of that region might be a bit wild and there might be uncertainty about governments, but at least the industry knows that it could get its projects approved and off the ground there.

That is something that has never been a consideration under a coalition government in Canberra, but it is something we are seeing coming to the fore with a Labor government in Canberra and a Labor government in this state.

We also saw the Environmental Defenders Office being supported by the Canberra government to actively go out there and concoct stories to make sure that important energy sector projects in Australia were stymied, and that is a disgrace. If anyone thinks that is an appropriate use of taxpayers' funds, I would say that they are mistaken—sadly mistaken. That should never have been allowed and it should not be allowed to continue. An organisation that takes taxpayers' money and calls itself the Environmental Defenders Office should, at least, act with integrity and honesty. That apparently did not happen, and that was made very clear in the judgement that was finally brought down on that case. Even the federal government now has an understanding that it cannot continue to allow that level of uncertainty. As a result of that original Santos decision, Western Australian organisations involved in that sector virtually created entire divisions to try to work out how to continue operating within the uncertain consultation arrangements that they were being asked to make.

I suppose that, for Western Australians, that story is not dissimilar to the debacle that was the Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation that this government tried to foist on Western Australians. That also had a devastating effect on Western Australian industries that require the use of land. It also had a devastating effect on local governments and small landowners with blocks of land of around half an acre in size. That was another example of a government that put ideological considerations ahead of real-world considerations. That is what we are seeing with the federal government in Canberra at the moment—a government that is more concerned about making sure that it represents the green inner-city vote; it is more concerned about that than about ensuring that Australia maintains its great reputation as an investment destination.

Western Australia, in particular, has long been held to be one of the most attractive destinations in the world for mining investment, but thanks to the combined efforts of this state government and the federal government, that

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has turned around. I am glad that the Minister for Mines and Petroleum is in the chamber because he is probably very aware of the industry's concerns about these matters. I would be very obliged if he would respond to that and outline his position. I am sure he would have to confirm that there is a worrying trend with regard to the perception of our state as an investment destination. That will, in the long run, be to the detriment of all Western Australians. It is imperative for this government to make it known to Canberra just how important our industries are to the nation, and how we need the support of properly considered regulatory, taxation and industrial relations frameworks that actually create the necessary environment to enable our industries to thrive.

The member for Roe will talk at some length about his great passion, which is the sheep industry and the devastating impacts of Canberra's ideological decision to shut down the live export industry after the next election. We know that if those determinations are made loudly enough, we will drive away investment and investors' willingness to engage. The federal government could potentially kill that industry through the threats hanging over its head. One suspects that is possibly what was behind some of the very dubious decision-making around the vessel recently off the coast that had to come back to offload the sheep. There was a lack of any clarity from Canberra. There was a lack of any decision-making or any real action from the Western Australian government to try to clarify that and ensure an outcome in which those animals could be given a market to go to. Instead of that, they are still more or less marooned while people try to work out what to do. They have been brought onto land but their future is still very uncertain.

As I have said, the situation currently facing just one industry—nickel—is dire with 3 300 jobs at risk at Nickel West and other contractors are facing the prospect of losing their jobs. At other nickel mines, 1 200 workers are already in similar situations. A total of 10 000 jobs are at risk and people are really in peril. On top of all the concerns in the local industry and all the struggles it has been through, three tranches of workplace legislation have come through since December 2022—the same job, same pay and the right to disconnect legislation—adding complexity to industrial relations. They make the operating environment more difficult, not less, and I believe lead to a reduction in productivity, which is a very worrying trend in Australia. If we want people to enjoy better conditions, if we want to have stronger economies, if we want to have healthy communities, then we need to lift the productivity of capital and workforces in Australia. Instead of that, we are seeing a depression of those by government settings that are unnecessary, costly, complex and just based on someone from Canberra's view of the world. They have a very comfortable life, working in public areas in Canberra. They are disconnected from the real world, disconnected from the people in the suburbs who send their loved ones off to work FIFO or in industries. They are disconnected from the people who live in the regions, who work every day in our great industries to bring in the bacon for this country, to ensure that this country and this state are prosperous. That prosperity is under threat from a government in Canberra that is not listening, a government that is disconnected from the reality of what goes on here. It is apparently not listening to its own members of Parliament. It is either that or it is not onside with Western Australia; I do not know which is the case.

The state government is very much in a weaker position than it was under the former Premier who enjoyed such popularity. We had competitions between the former Prime Minister and the current Prime Minister as to who could get the most photographs with former Premier McGowan. I do not think anyone is looking for photographs with the current Premier and that is very telling. Western Australia is being taken for granted. Western Australia's concerns are not being put to the fore as they should be for a state which, although it probably has around 11 per cent of the population of the country, produces nearly half all the goods that are exported. That is a tremendous effort by the workers of Western Australia. It cannot continue if we are stymieing the future development of industry and if we are stymieing the approvals processes going forward. It cannot continue if we put in place settings that divert capital from coming to Australia and it goes elsewhere. Even our local companies are looking to offshore their mines. They are looking to invest in Africa, New Guinea, South America and various other parts of the world. They are investing elsewhere. Why are they investing elsewhere? A very big part of it is that they lack confidence in our government's commitment to their industries going forward. They do not feel that this government places value on Western Australia's great industries any more.

Even simple things, such as the ability for a company to talk to its employees, are interfered with by ridiculous industrial relations law changes made in far-off Canberra for the east coast, where companies do not have to operate over great distances or areas within which there are time zone differences and the like. It is symptomatic of a government that has its priorities wrong. The Canberra iteration of the Labor Party has its eyes set firmly on what is good for the east coast of Australia because that is the majority of its world. It listens to the majority of its members. The Premier flails about and says that he is in charge and he has a good relationship with Canberra, yet even by his own admission he has to try to set up some sort of half-hearted embassy in Canberra so that he can interact with the very people who he claims to have a good relationship with and who are over here at the moment not listening to Western Australians or our Premier, ignoring the pleas of the nickel industry and carrying on with their destructive policies that will ultimately be to the detriment of our state.

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MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party) [4.30 pm]: I rise to contribute to the debate on the motion about the handbrake that the Cook Labor government is putting on state development in Western Australia. Western Australia, with its abundant natural resources and immense potential, stands at a crossroads. It possesses significant potential and the ingredients for growth, innovation and sustainable development. However, recent actions, or rather inactions, by the Cook government have raised eyebrows and sparked real concerns about its commitment to harnessing these opportunities, which are ours to lose, for the benefit of all Western Australians. Despite the involvement of various organisations, from the state and federal levels of government to the private sector and the community, there is limited collaboration and coordination amongst these entities, which has resulted in economic development policies and funding being scattered across different agencies and tiers of government and a disjointed approach to economic development.

The need for a coordinated and collaborative approach to economic development in Western Australia cannot be overstated. The state's potential for growth and development is immense. With the right policies, leadership and direction, it can become a major player in the global economy. Every day we hear the frustration from industry. What has played out this week in the nickel industry has been absolutely devastating. We need to see a concerted effort from all stakeholders, led by government, with private sector organisations and the community. It will require a willingness to work together towards a common goal and a recognition of the importance of economic development in the state. This appears to be out of reach for our Premier, who is struggling to fill the boots of the previous Premier. Clearly Western Australia needs to be an open, competitive and trade-oriented jurisdiction that is nimble and responsive to the changing markets and global demand. We are not operating in a vacuum in Western Australia. We are certainly not isolated in the context of our resources sector and the challenges of continuing to be globally competitive.

The aluminium story in the 1950s to 1970s highlights how aluminium was a great disrupter to steel at a time when there was a significant structural change in our economy. The immense wealth that WA has generated in the south west region from the alumina industry and bauxite operations has been quite significant. In gas, WA led the way with the development of the Dampier to Bunbury natural gas pipeline in 1984, the largest gas pipeline project in the world at the time, which hosted the first LNG production in Australia at the North West Shelf in 1989, and the goldfields gas pipeline in 1996, becoming Australia's leading natural gas production jurisdiction. Arguably, we should be doing this with lithium and critical minerals to meet the needs of electrification into the future for transport and stored energy. However, we are facing significant headwinds, and the opposite appears to be occurring. We have already heard about significant job losses and potential job losses here in Western Australia.

Alcoa's recent announcement sent shockwaves throughout the economy and was particularly felt by those who will be directly impacted by its decision. Although the government has attempted to spin the news in a positive light, it is widely understood that the issues and challenges of red and green tape, and the ability to access higher quality grades of bauxite, have had a significant impact on the operation's ability to remain viable. This is particularly concerning given that the Kwinana refinery has been operating successfully in Western Australia for about 60 years. Alcoa's announcement earlier this year represents about 1 000 job losses. The closure of the refinery will not only be a blow for the local community, but also a damning legacy for the state government, which has been unable to prevent the loss of jobs and the closure of a major industrial estate. It is important to recognise that the 1 200 direct jobs at the refinery in technical, manufacturing and mining industries in turn generate a further 5 000 jobs across the wider economy, demonstrating the significant impact that the operation has on the local economy. Given the current economic climate in Western Australia and the cost-of-living pressures, it is essential that the state government takes action to support the Kwinana refinery going forward and ensure that it remains viable and thriving for many years to come. That will require a concerted effort from this government, which we are yet to see. Ultimately, the future of this facility rests in the hands of the government. These are not new issues. We know that the issues surrounding environmental approvals are significant. We have heard talking points from the Premier about what the government is doing in this space, but \$318 billion worth of projects have been held up seeking environmental approvals, of which 40 per cent are looking at walking away. That is just one example. Twelve hundred jobs—5 000 in total if we include indirect jobs—will be lost.

Speaking of jobs, as I alluded to, the nickel industry has been a significant contributor to the WA economy for decades, providing jobs and wealth to the regions. The industry is facing a range of challenges, including those associated with the decline in global nickel prices, which have fallen by more than 30 per cent since 2018, and competition from countries such as Indonesia, which have lower production costs. The COVID pandemic impacted the industry, reducing the demand for nickel, and manufacturing activity has slowed down globally. As a result, since September 2023, WA's nickel industry has seen five mining companies close or scale down their production, including Panoramic Resources, BHP Nickel West, Wyloo Metals and First Quantum Minerals. Thousands of jobs have been lost and more are at risk, with BHP alone representing about 3 300 jobs, and we are looking at about 10 000 jobs all up. Ninety-nine per cent of this industry is here in Western Australia, and we cannot continue to ignore the human cost of this neglect by the state and federal governments. As the Leader of the Opposition has

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said in this place, and further to questions asked, our Prime Minister has effectively walked away from any support for production, such as tax credits. The Premier's failure to answer questions about the advocacy and production tax credits for an industry that is on its knees raises questions about the Premier's leadership and lack of advocacy on this matter. It also raises questions about the Prime Minister's interest in Western Australia and jobs here. As I said, thousands of jobs have been lost—about 10 000. It is no secret that the world is moving towards a cleaner and more sustainable future. It is our opportunity to lose if we do not utilise the resources in our state and ensure that there is a viable future for this important industry.

There are flow-on effects to associated businesses. Lynas Rare Earths, an operation in the goldfields, is an example of a company that provides much-valued support for Nickel West and associated nickel companies. It is concerning that the Nickel West facility is the only downstream processing facility of its kind. Battery minerals and critical minerals play a crucial role in empowering the electric vehicle industry as well as the renewable energy sector. The role Western Australia plays here is not just about jobs in Western Australia or that Western Australia hosts 99 per cent of this industry, but about the role that Western Australia can potentially play globally. The government at a state level clearly does not recognise this and the Prime Minister is crab walking away from any real support for this industry.

The Western Australian government recently announced its decision to adopt the Chamber of Minerals and Energy's recommendation for a nickel royalty relief package. This has been hailed as a promising measure and the opposition welcomes that. However, according to the CME, targeted and evidenced-based government support such as temporary royalty relief makes sense for the sector in the near term, but it needs more support in the broader policy settings. Furthermore, battery minerals represent a strategically important sector for the state, and it is crucial to ensure that a range of options are explored for both the short and medium term and to ensure that the policy settings are viable and sustainable in the longer term for industry in Western Australia.

The absence of a critical minerals strategy to part-pave a way forward for an industry that is willing to invest and innovate and, importantly, employ our people illustrates the government's complete lack of real ambition to see the next stage of resource growth and downstream processing develop further and ensure a sustainable future in Western Australia. The state government's nickel finance assistance program is just one of many measures needed on the path to net zero. We need to see further strategies and actions to ensure and secure longevity in this sector, and they include removing inefficient government processes and developing the competitive fiscal settings essential to attracting investment into Australia's battery and critical minerals industry and to achieve the 2030 and 2050 decarbonisation targets.

As outlined in the Australian Energy Market Operator's latest report, gas shortages are forecast in Western Australia in the very near future. Couple this with state government's plan to close all state coal power by 2030 and it becomes quite clear that energy security will be further exacerbated. It would be good to see this government demonstrate that it is a good manager and to stop a crisis in this state before it happens. We have already seen the significant impact that power outages can have on a community when a government ignores in budget after budget recommendations for effective backup supply, management, investment and maintenance in our energy grids. Furthermore, there are real headwinds that have not come without warning. The gas statement of opportunities sounds an alarm bell, warning of a 56 per cent increase in gas use over the next decade, with a 27 per cent shortfall in supply. Gas is a major part of our energy mix, and if our state faces a shortfall of 27 per cent, it will mean constrained demand and higher prices. This should not have come as a surprise to the government, and I am sure it has not. AEMO has been warning the government for years that we are on course for a shortfall, but it has taken an election creeping up around the corner for those opposite to seemingly wake up.

Western Australia is heavily reliant on industry, and we must continue to play to our strengths. The great bulk of energy consumption in this state is not by homes or businesses connected to the electricity network but by large-scale industrial operations. There is no doubt that the federal government's policy settings coupled with a state government that does not raise these issues on behalf of the resources sector raises the question of whether this state government is serious when it comes to supporting industry and opportunities for downstream processing and manufacturing in this state and acknowledging the opportunities we have to lose here in Western Australia. The large carbon emitters in WA such as mining companies and oil and gas producers will be the ones most affected by some of the policy settings.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L. METTAM: Significant support needs to be provided if we are to meet the targets set by the federal government. A significant body of work will need to be done to offset emissions or we will have to pay a tax to the federal government. We have yet to see the work that needs to be done to ensure industry can be sustainable in the face of some of the current job losses in this state as a result of policy settings and governments that are not

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willing to better support industry. If the government does not act further, there could be wider implications for the WA economy, which is heavily reliant on these industries. We must continue to play to our strengths.

I know other people want to speak, but some other significant issues in this state include access to industrial estates. I caught up with the regional cities alliance today. Dealing with Development WA has been an issue for local governments across the state. Lack of access to developable land has put a significant handbrake on investment and opportunities to further develop housing and the industrial estate for industry in regional WA and across the state. A significant issue remains with headworks, and in particular with Western Power. We know that under this government more jobs have been brought in-house under Western Power, but there are significant inefficiencies with wait times of up to 18 months for people who are seeking to develop their land. This has put a massive handbrake on development in Western Australia, again having an impact on jobs, the viability of the state and our regions, and housing and accommodation opportunities right across the state.

Despite the government's claims of having a hydrogen strategy, it is also clear that little progress has been made in developing the Oakajee estate. The government has failed to take proactive action on this issue and work towards developing this site to its full potential. As I have stated, the access to industrial land issue has been raised with me by a number of stakeholders.

Western Australia is a state of significant opportunity. We have seen inroads with our many resources and our ability to adapt, improvise and innovate, but we are challenged by Labor governments at both state and federal levels. We have already spoken in this place about a Premier who is unwilling to stand up for Western Australia when it comes to some of the issues raised on a daily basis about the federal government. Issues such as the right-to-disconnect laws, which will certainly challenge the relationship between employers and employees and impact Western Australians due to the time difference; the industrial relation laws; and the environmental laws, will have an impact on the WA economy and resources sector. Those are significant challenges. It is certainly a product of this government and a failure of the Premier to stand up for Western Australia.

We have seen Labor repeatedly blindside sectors that are major employers in this state. I have talked about the 5 000 jobs at the Kwinana estate and at least 10 000 jobs for the nickel industry and its flow-on effects. We have seen Labor's attack on the gold industry, the crayfish industry, the oil and gas industry, and, of course, our farmers. We have heard industry raise concerns regarding the government's failure to provide much-needed skilled workers to this state and the failure of the Premier to ensure that we have the workers we require, with a 70 per cent reduction in our skilled migration intake for this year. Again, the Premier is weak in standing up for Western Australia. The potential benefits for the government to stand up for WA are immense. The Premier cannot afford to let those opportunities slip away. The government needs to work to ensure that WA industries thrive, provide job opportunities and continue to contribute to WA's state economy.

The Premier needs to lead by example and put Western Australia first. I only hope that the Premier will take heed of the concerns raised by the opposition, and, more importantly, the cries by industry about the potential job losses that have been flagged over the last week, as well as the jobs lost at the beginning of the year. Quite clearly, Western Australians deserve better and a Premier who will stand up for the state, economic development, industry, farmers, fishers and a better future.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt) [4.55 pm]: I rise to contribute the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, which I have temporarily misplaced.

Mr K. Michel interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Sorry, the member for Pilbara is muttering away at the back of the chamber, and I am not sure whether he is talking to us or to his colleagues. If he would like to ventilate what he is saying more loudly, I would be happy to respond.

Several members interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have admitted that I could not find the piece of paper with the motion written on it. I have it now; thank you, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party. I am happy to speak to the motion, which states —

That this house condemns the Cook Labor government for its failure to manage state and federal relations, which is putting at risk the key industries that support our state and dismissing their significant social and economic contributions to our community.

The Leader of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Opposition again touched on the concerns as mentioned yesterday in the matter of public interest about the nickel industry, its challenges and the significant headwinds it faces at the moment. We have asked a number of questions about that sector. As the shadow Minister for Mines and Petroleum, I will focus most of my comments on this matter. It is an important opportunity to take a little more

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time than what we had with the MPI yesterday to expand on some of the challenges and why we need to see the state government take a more proactive approach in dealing with the federal Labor government.

Having sat in this chamber for some years now, I have seen this government make use of its time in Parliament when it had a political point to make when the federal government was of a different colour from the current one. I see it do that less in this current iteration. This is the time when we need the state to put its cards on the table and be very forthright with Prime Minister Albanese and his colleagues, including those from Western Australia, such as the likes of our Minister for Resources, Madeleine King. She needs the backing of the state government when she walks into federal cabinet to say, “We can’t just pay lip-service to the issues that our Western Australian colleagues and constituents are facing.” We all know, because we hear it ad nauseam from those in power and from industry, that we are the engine room of the nation. It is great to stand beside industry to point out when things are going gangbusters, but when things are challenging, we need to redouble those efforts. The Premier needs to make sure that everyone in Western Australia knows that he is on their side and is not just placating or providing muted advocacy to Prime Minister Albanese and the federal government.

We have been criticised over the last week for saying that some of these issues, without doubt, lay with the commonwealth government. The challenges are, quite frankly, of its making and include many of the subjects that industry is raising with us around industrial relations, the prospect of having a duplicated environmental approvals process and the fact that we are likely to see a duplication of the Aboriginal Heritage Act process—heaven forbid. Surely there are members in this chamber from the Labor government who are speaking to their federal colleagues about the problems faced when that particular matter is not dealt with appropriately.

Regardless of how it is dealt with, it would be a complete failure if the federal government were to impose its environmental act and Aboriginal cultural act on an industry that is already suffering significant international headwinds in being competitive with companies and countries that can produce at a lower cost. Duplicating what we already have in Western Australia would add to that challenge. Industry will always point out where we can do better, and in Western Australia they regularly do about the timeliness of approvals. Despite the government’s announcements around some red tape reduction strategies, there has not been a significant change in the turnaround for those approvals. That compiles —

Mr S.A. Millman: Compounds.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, member. That compounds the issue when an industry is trying to remain competitive in a global market. We pride ourselves on being competitive and providing a quality product. Of course, we are conscious of the fact that we have signed up to environmental, social and governance requirements. Federal and state governments are working towards putting the frameworks in place, which I think people agree with in principle, but the reality is that we do not want to create a red and green tape mess for those companies that provide the income that state and federal governments use to deliver services and infrastructure and that generate jobs and essentially underpin the prosperity of our nation. That is the risk.

Yesterday I said that the state and federal governments have dropped the ball when it comes to nickel and that there were warnings and challenges. That was refuted by the Premier. It was said that this is a very short-term issue that escalated quickly, but industry had been quite public in its commentary around the challenges it was facing, the markers it was seeing and some of the issues more broadly that needed to be addressed by the government to make sure that there was confidence from not only the nickel industry, but the critical minerals industry to continue to make investment decisions. Industry was quite up-front about it. I go to a June 2023 report that was published more than six months ago by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy titled *Accelerating opportunities in Western Australia’s critical minerals sector*.

When I talked to the chamber in more recent times, its focus had completely switched to short-term advocacy to make sure that we do not lose the capabilities we have in Western Australia in relation to nickel and the flow-on effect if BHP were to follow through with the decision it spoke about in the last week. We want the state government to turn its mind beyond the short-term relief that it has provided. At the very least, we want it advocating to the commonwealth to augment the relief in the short term beyond what has been made available by putting the sector on the critical minerals list. That, again, was a missed opportunity. We were critical of that as well as industry because it had been advocating for that prior to December. The previous Minister for Mines and Petroleum was, as I said yesterday, at an October conference about nickel and was quoted as saying that the government was advocating for nickel to be placed on the critical minerals list. Obviously, that fell on deaf ears. Now we have the federal Minister for Resources, as I said yesterday, shutting the barn door after the horse has bolted. It is very nice that those players can access what the critical minerals list unlocks, which is a number of loan facilities and funds that may assist companies down the track. Will it change the way that BHP and others are thinking about their decisions now? When I read what has been reported and when I speak to industries that are very close to those decisions, they say, “Probably not.” Those decisions are made well in advance of being announced. This is a knee-jerk reaction from the state and federal governments, when they could have been working more closely to identify other issues that

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would keep this industry competitive. The state government has responsibility along with the commonwealth to ensure that we are not wholly focused on this short-term response. Somebody needs to keep an eye on the medium to long-term. If we are not doing that, we will miss another opportunity to bolster or sandbag what is an amazing opportunity—quite frankly, an essential opportunity—for our nation to be a part of the future battery and downstream processing opportunities that will come from being able to play into the broader market.

The challenge is, and it is outlined very succinctly in this report—I would hazard a guess that it has not changed, albeit all the focus is on making sure that we hold on to what we have got. The Chamber of Minerals and Energy has been arguing for some time about the need for significant investment in strategic industrial areas. I have touched on the environmental and regulatory framework that is a serious risk in industrial relations. There has not been enough done and there has not been enough investment in this area to de-risk decisions for companies to invest. We are talking about major investments—port investments, water infrastructure, de-constraining land. I am aware that there is some work being done in government about this, but clearly the Chamber of Minerals and Energy as far back as June last year was confident enough in its assessment of the government’s performance to put it in black and white and say that there is simply not enough and that it is underdone. It is concerned that investment decisions will be made, and companies will choose to go to other jurisdictions. I would have thought that that is the kind of investment that we would see when a state government has the budget surplus that we have seen delivered by the resources sector over at least the last three to four years. The strategic industrial area needs to be developed with urgency. Without it, we will miss those opportunities. As others have commented, they are our opportunities to lose.

I point to this report from 2023 and I think it is worth putting some of this on the record. A concern that was raised in this report and within other areas of the state government is that there seems to be a shuffling of the decks. When something arises within government, when there is an immediate issue, another taskforce is created. I am interested to know how many taskforce advisory committees and senior groupings have been created in the last seven years. I know that there was a ministerial taskforce established in 2020, which was to drive the future battery industry strategy. Then, in November 2022, two years later, the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation proposed that it would reshape the way that industry was engaging on this. It replaced the taskforce with a working group model and an annual round table, and it had different groups for industries to come together with. Of course, industry will do whatever it can to get its foot in the door with government, but to me this is shuffling the deckchairs somewhat. The players in the industry do not necessarily change significantly. Certainly, the message from the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies and other industry representative bodies is pretty consistent on things like this, and it is along the lines of what I have outlined today. When I speak to them, they all admit that there is no silver bullet to this issue. We all understand that, but they are concerned that they are not seeing urgency in dealing with some of these challenges.

I point to a paragraph in this report from June 2023 and I quote directly —

However, in the context of potential midstream and downstream critical minerals-exposed manufacturing, the overall quantum of government support is low. For example, the largest grant source available to industry is the potential \$13.2 million set aside to incentivise domestic cathode material manufacture. By way of comparison, the New South Wales State Government has allocated \$30 million under its own Future Industries Investment Programme. For more defined programmes, the largest Western Australian Government grant source available is the geographically restricted Collie Future Industry Development Fund, offering up to \$2 million in matched funding. These examples stand in stark contrast to incentives offered by other regional governments, such as South Korea’s recently announced US\$15 billion in funding to develop advanced battery technologies.

Further, much of the Western Australian Government’s focus to date has been on start-up, small-scale and niche enterprises. While such enterprises are a valuable sector of an overall State economy, and, if successful, are likely to grow over time and enable an ecosystem of supporting service providers, delivering significant multipliers and co-benefits, they are unlikely to dramatically shift the dial on the overall structure of the Western Australian economy. The quantum of support offered, together with the time and phase-limited nature of its restriction to early-stage enterprises, may restrict the ability of any resulting enterprise to achieve a scale beyond what the Western Australian economy could naturally support.

The report goes on to refer to the efficiency in project approvals. Again, in referring to the motion we are talking about, this is within the state government’s responsibility, but certainly the risks stand at the federal level as well.

[Member’s time extended.]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The chamber is concerned about the costs and the time that it takes for approvals for these types of projects. It refers to, and makes comparisons with, the US economy. It mentions Korea. Obviously, we have a very different population base here, so we could not possibly have the types of investment funds that are seen in the US, but if we are serious about being a player, it is going to require the combined effort of the state and

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federal governments. The hard infrastructure that will be required in those strategic industrial areas will most certainly require combined investment from the state and commonwealth governments. I would like to know from whomever will be responding to this private members' business motion exactly what has been put on the table for those strategic industrial areas. There are industrial areas in our state that are completely underdone; they are un-serviced and do not have links to any ports or key transport. It is left to the first mover in the private sector to essentially absorb those costs. I would think that a pro-development state government would see that as a risk that it should take to encourage individual companies to put their capital into developing their projects and businesses. When we were in government, we certainly had a focus on trying to identify how we could de-constrain land. We understood, particularly in regional areas, that it is expensive to do business in a state the size of Western Australia, and no individual business should have to foot the bill for that. It is an interesting scenario in that we have discussions about BHP. BHP sits as a very large player in the market across the nation, but we should be doing more to try to incentivise and encourage investment from a number of smaller players and potential investors. Those businesses certainly will not invest if they do not see the state government standing up to the federal government to ensure that they do not face approval duplications and a fight for critical infrastructure.

Page 14 of the report goes directly to what I have just been talking about, which is access to turnkey-ready serviced land. The heading is "Access to turn-key ready serviced land is limited". It is not Mia Davies, member for Central Wheatbelt, saying that; it is the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, in black and white in this report. It quite succinctly points out that although the Western Australian government has allocated funding —

... in the 2023–24 budget to support business case development, Native Title and environmental de-constraining of industrial land, —

This is in the latest budget —

CME considers additional investment is likely to be required to establish Western Australia as a competitive investment destination for value-add processing infrastructure.

There is plenty in this report that I hope the minister and the government have considered when making their advocacy and representations to the Prime Minister. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, when some of the solutions put forward by industry—the production tax credits and other matters—were posed to the Prime Minister, they were put to the side. There was certainly not resounding support coming from the Prime Minister or the federal government on the matter. It will cost money, but if we do a cost–benefit analysis of the costs of the opportunity lost, the immediate job losses and the flow-on impact to our downstream processing industry, and the costs to our strategic position and the entire supply chain, surely it will outweigh some of the costs we require the commonwealth and state governments to put up at this point.

As I finish, I would like to touch on the other issues because this is about the state–federal nexus. The lack of some supporting infrastructure, particularly in regional communities, is quite regularly raised by industry bodies. It sits outside the direct membership of industry bodies like the Chamber of Minerals and Energy and the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies, but they talk to us about it because they see it as something that really has an impact on their ability to secure their workforce and continue to grow and make solid investment decisions in the future, and it is the likes of child care, aged care and access to health care. State and federal governments have a dual role, albeit that funding and how those industries—particularly aged care and child care—are regulated is set at a federal level. Those regulatory frameworks rarely suit our state. In fact, in spite of those frameworks, the lack of investment and the unsuitability for Western Australia, we have managed to find workarounds, but it takes an enormous amount of effort, and we usually find solutions to some of these challenges at a very granular level.

I speak from experience in relation to child care and aged care. If we were reliant on those models for funding and that regulatory regime, we would simply not have a single opportunity to look after our elderly or have child care outside the metropolitan area. It is a very challenging environment. We need continual advocacy from our state MPs and federal Western Australian members of Parliament on those issues to ensure that people understand the uniqueness of Western Australia's geographical diversity, and the fact that without those types of investments, supports and structures, we will not see businesses identifying Western Australia as an attractive place to invest into the future. People might say that I am over-egging that situation, but I absolutely hear businesses on a regular basis talking about struggles to attract a workforce, because if workers are able to identify alternative markets with more attractive places to live and work, they will choose them. Western Australia needs to remain competitive on all fronts. That requires the federal government's understanding to be more than just the Prime Minister flying in for a whirlwind visit. That is when we need to see those federal ministers and members, and our Premier, identifying at every opportunity what we want our commonwealth government to prioritise for this state.

I know the member for Roe will stand to speak about our bitter disappointment about the state government's lack of support for the live export industry—another critical industry that the state pays lip-service to. The federal government does not even have the courtesy of doing that. In fact, the agricultural sector, as an industry, could not

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get a meeting with the Prime Minister when he was here just moments ago. He refused to meet with representatives from the farming industry. When the Prime Minister of the nation is making a decision that will impact hundreds of people, create uncertainty over a prolonged period, and impact on international trade relationships with a number of our trade partners, one would think he would have the time and courtesy to meet with those who will be impacted the most or at least those representing them. It is incredibly disappointing from our perspective that the Prime Minister did not find time in his most recent visit to at least have that conversation. He does not have to agree. We know he is not going to. In fact, we know that if we want a different outcome on live export, the only way that will happen is a change of government federally. I say that quite bluntly to everyone in the industry.

Just as we talk about the nickel industry and some solutions put forward by those in Western Australia, the state government should take every opportunity to furnish the Prime Minister and his cabinet with those solutions—and also to do it publicly. We do not want muted conversations behind closed doors to not embarrass the Prime Minister because both the Prime Minister and the Premier are from the Labor Party. Like he is keen to speak about issues upon which there is furious agreement on both sides, we want the Premier to stand up and have a conversation when there might not be agreement—and to do so vigorously on behalf of Western Australians. When it comes to these issues, transparency is needed so everyone understands that this state government is doing everything it can to protect the thousands of jobs we see teetering in the balance at the moment.

I will let the member for Roe now speak about the live export industry, as he has done so many times before in this chamber, and I then look forward to the response from the government.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.24 pm]: I thank the member for Central Wheatbelt for that lead-in to one of my favourite subjects in this chamber. I rise to support the Leader of the Opposition's motion —

That this house condemns the Cook Labor government for its failure to manage state and federal relations, which is putting at risk the key industries that support our state and dismissing their significant social and economic contributions to our community.

Quite frankly, live exports fit the bill exactly on that motion. The problem I have is that I have too much information on this because over the last year and a half or two years the state government has shown that it will not stand up and be counted when it comes to its federal counterparts. We saw that recently with the arrival in Western Australia of the Prime Minister and the federal cabinet. That was a great opportunity to stand up and be counted on issues such as nickel, lithium or live exports. That is the type of opportunity the state government needs to take.

I will talk about a couple of events that have happened in the chamber. Some of them are quite upsetting. I remember the arrogant response from the former Premier, Mark McGowan, when I brought up the issue of the live export industry and the electronic identification system for goats and sheep. He made a mockery of it. The funny thing was that his own state budget had allocated \$22.4 million for it. He was cracking jokes here in the chamber and all the rest of it, but he was arrogantly talking about his own budget allocation, if you don't mind, of \$22.4 million. That was one episode. We have an unelected Premier, Premier Cook, who was not even elected by his own union, who is giving lip-service to our sheep farmers, our export supply chain and transport and feed operators—you name it—and anyone involved in the supply chain for the live export industry. We regularly hear comments from the government—we heard it the other week—that it stands ready to help out. That was the comment we heard when the ship was off the Fremantle coast recently. The line that the government is running is, “We stand ready and we support live export, but we're not actually going to do anything about it.” This week and over the last couple of days was the opportunity for the Premier to stand up and be counted.

As I said last week in the debate on the Premier's Statement, regional people have had enough. Hon Darren West has stood up over the last few years and said, “Look at us. We're the regional party. We've got more regional members than you.” I tell you what, the people of regional Western Australia know exactly what is going on. They are horrified by the attacks on many fronts, whether it is farming, live export, obviously, or fisheries. The Minister for Environment stood up today and proudly read out the ban on logging timber from native forests. Do not worry about the communities in the south west and the member for Warren-Blackwood's community. Do not worry about the 100-year-old intergenerational businesses that have been wiped out. Some of the packages were supposed to help, but those communities have been messed up, and that flows on to other sections of the community. There was a Dorothy Dixer in question time today to the Minister for Environment about the proposed south coast marine park. That is one of the worst instances of consultation we have ever seen in the Parliament. The lack of consultation was a disgrace. The one group that was consulted, of course, was the Pew Charitable Trusts—an outfit that evolved out of Boston with about \$7 billion in its back pocket. That organisation is dictating the play down on the south coast. We do not need to worry about members of the Esperance or Bremer Bay communities because the Pew Charitable Trusts is front and centre. I heard a representative from the Pew Charitable Trusts say on *Country Hour* last week that the organisation is not satisfied with the 25 per cent sanctuary zones and that we need more. That sort of

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consultation really leaves the people of regional Western Australia cold. Of course, electoral reform goes without saying; the Attorney General could not put that on the radar soon enough.

I had a meeting this morning with some regional people from Newdegate, Corrigin and other areas, and the first thing they brought up was the attack on regional WA by the state government. They referred to what is happening in Europe at the moment. Farmers in Europe have had enough. Most members would have seen the footage. In Spain, France, Germany, Poland, Scotland, Belgium—the list goes on—farmers have had enough. The government in Holland started trying to dictate to farmers about when they could spray, fertilise and harvest their crops. It does not work like that. Government cannot get involved and start reaching its tentacles into everyone's life. That is what this state government is doing. It is not standing up for Western Australia and talking to the federal government on our behalf, but it is reaching into our lives and trying to dictate what is going on. We saw that happen in Sri Lanka when the government told farmers to go organic. What happened? There was a 30 per cent drop in the supply of food and food shortages. Sri Lanka soon straightened that out. Of course, we had various contributions in the last term of Parliament about banning glyphosate. I remember that the member for Belmont thought it would be a good idea to ban glyphosate, which is the most important chemical to regional Western Australia in producing food.

I thought it was appropriate to go back to the *Hansard* from when I was talking about live exports. My question to the relatively new Premier at the time, Hon Roger Cook, back on 20 September 2023 was —

I refer to grave concerns within our sheep-farming sector, which is grappling with a loss of confidence and a dramatic fall in sheep prices, an example of which is young wethers falling from \$150 a head this time last year to just \$5 for similar stock now, as well as the inability to find markets due to federal Labor's impending live export ban.

- (1) Does the Premier acknowledge that his failure to successfully lobby his federal colleagues has caused this lack of confidence?
- (2) Does the Premier have any idea of the potential crisis that is looming, with rapidly declining sheep prices and limited markets in which to sell sheep?

Hon Roger Cook replied —

- (1)–(2) The member seems to be conflating two completely unrelated issues. One is the issue of the price of sheep, and I will come to that shortly. The other is to do with a federal government inquiry into the potential for a ban on live sheep exports, which may or may not come into being in 2027 or 2028.

There is no sign of any lobbying on that issue. He also stated —

It is wrong to say that this is somehow impacted by a government decision that has not been made and will not be implemented for another four years.

The Premier was rolling over and accepting that that was going to happen, with no lobbying and no support for Western Australian sheep farmers. His answer continued —

The other issue the member raised was the price of sheep, which of course is completely decoupled, delinked and unattached from the confidence of farmers. That is a ludicrous suggestion. This is called a function of the market.

I can assure the Premier that he could not be further from the truth. As soon as this talk of live export bans began, prices started falling. More recently, as soon as the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Hon Murray Watt, came in, he basically said that the federal government had committed to this in the last federal election and that it would not be changing its mind. What happened with the stage 3 tax cuts recently? The federal government changed its mind. This is a federal government that seems to be able to change on some things, which is why we call on the Premier and his Minister for Agriculture and Food to stand up and be counted. Federal government members turned up in Western Australia over the last few days, and that was an opportunity for the Premier and his senior ministers to stand up for WA.

I would say that the federal agriculture minister, Senator Murray Watt, is the most disappointing minister in the federal cabinet. How do members think the sheep farmers of Western Australia feel about having a lawyer from Brisbane telling them what he thinks needs to be done to satisfy animal activists and the inner-city Melbourne and Sydney vote? What a disgrace. There are people out there trying to earn a genuine living, but we have a Premier who does not understand. I wrote a letter to the Premier inviting him to the Katanning saleyards to give him an opportunity to have a look at a sale, see how the prices have fallen over the last few weeks and talk to transporters and farmers. I can assure members that the last time I was at the Katanning saleyards, it was clear that confidence had fallen out of the market. This is an opportunity for our Premier to stand up and be counted.

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The Prime Minister and the federal agriculture minister did not want to give our farmers the time of day, as the member for Central Wheatbelt mentioned. They did not want to give our farmers or the people representing them the time of day; they just said, “Sorry, we won’t have time on the agenda.” But as I pointed out during question time yesterday, the Prime Minister had time to go to Hyde Park and have a few photos taken eating ice creams and kissing babies; that was not a problem. He had plenty of time for that, but no time to talk to our farmers, who are hurting. I can assure members that farm budgets this year are not looking that good, and a big part of that is the livestock part of their budget.

We all saw the disgraceful performance of the federal minister and his department in the handling of the MV *Bahijah* off Fremantle and we have all seen the footage. On 5 January, the *Bahijah* departed, bound for the Middle East, loaded with 17 000 cattle and sheep, and on 19 January the federal department called it back. Between 19 January and 29 January, the federal government, the federal agriculture minister and the federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry had an opportunity to make a plan: what are we going to do with this ship and these animals when they come in? What happened? The *Bahijah* returned to Fremantle on 29 January, and on 5 February, a week after it had arrived back, the federal department denied its redeployment. Luckily, the animals on board were comfortable and well managed. The mortality was a very low four cattle, 0.18 per cent; and 64 sheep, 0.45 per cent, both well below reportable levels, despite the actions of various interest groups and animal activists trying to point out what was going wrong when they did not even have access to the vessel. Despite all that, it was announced on 11 February that the animals would be offloaded sometime in the coming week with Premier Cook refusing to comment on whether the livestock would be processed in Western Australia. On 14 February, from the department’s website, after five and a half weeks onboard the vessel, the remaining sheep and cattle were offloaded successfully.

That is the standard we are seeing from the federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Basically, he just said that the next step for the livestock would be a commercial decision for the exporter. He said, “We’ll call it back. We don’t have a plan. Then we’ll put it back on the exporter; it’s their problem.” Hon Colin de Grussa pointed out in his opinion piece that whether it was “an act of breathtaking incompetence, or cynical political opportunism”, it must fall on federal agriculture minister Hon Murray Watt. Hon Colin de Grussa stated —

As soon as the decision was made to turn the vessel around the minister should have taken control of the situation to make sure the animals involved were protected.

A responsible minister would have directed his department to come up with a plan of action that could be enacted as soon as the vessel arrived back in Australian waters.

...

Whispers among those in the industry suggest this was not an act of incompetence, but a minister playing politics, using the plight of 17 000 animals as pawns in a bigger political game, as he works towards the Albanese government’s long-held agenda of shutting down WA’s live export industry.

I could not agree more with Hon Colin de Grussa. He was spot-on in his assessment.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: This is what we have seen from the federal government. As I said, we need some backup from our Premier and our Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Our farmer representative groups want to talk about biosecurity risks, but it is the same thing. What has the federal government done? It said it would make a \$1 billion investment over the next four years, but some of it would be put on producers—10 per cent. That is not very good consultation. This is about imports and it is putting a levy of 10 per cent on our exporters. The federal government does not want to talk about it. That is the worry. We have seen the federal government’s pretty ordinary biosecurity scenario, along with border security issues in the last week. There are other worries for biosecurity when boat people come in, whether it is foot-and-mouth or lumpy skin disease, or whatever it might be. They are a biosecurity risk and this federal government needs to be right on top of it. That is an issue in itself. It is another thing that Hon Murray Watt and the Prime Minister do not want a bar of.

I want to highlight a couple of other things that have happened over the last couple of years, which have created a lot of disappointment. There is none more so than in the letter I have from Hon David Littleproud, congratulating Hon Roger Cook on 12 June 2023 on his appointment as Premier of Western Australia.

I am seeking a meeting with you to discuss an important and urgent issue in your state—the phase out of live sheep exports by sea. As you would be aware, the former Premier, the Hon Mark McGowan MLA, and the Minister for Agriculture, the Hon Jackie Jarvis MLC, have been consistent and clear in affirming the WA Government’s support for the continuation of the live sheep export industry.

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There is supposedly support but we have not seen any real public display of our Premier out there, making a joint press conference with the Prime Minister to say “We are standing up for WA.”

We have not seen that. There is one example.

Another example is that I had 2 250-odd signatures on our petition on the live export industry because people at the Newdegate Machinery Field Days and in Wagin, Narrogin, Lake Grace and beyond have had enough of this government. Another example is the federal petition, which gathered 10 000 signatures. I remember the Livestock Collective and many concerned growers and industry people were in the public gallery when the member for Central Wheatbelt and I moved a motion about the line of attack from this Labor government. We said that we are here today to send a message to the Premier and his agriculture minister, Hon Jackie Jarvis, that this industry deserves more than lip-service; it deserves a state government fighting for it in Canberra. That is exactly what this motion is all about. Murray Watt owes it to WA producers to look them in the eye when he decimates their industry. To hide behind the panel is gutless. Not only is he hiding behind the panel, but the panel submitted its report to the minister on 25 October 2023—all the growers and supply chain people made their submissions in good faith—and we are getting towards the end of February and he still has not released the report. What a disgrace!

I refer to the NEWROC report. The North Eastern Wheatbelt Regional Organisation of Councils includes the local governments of Dowerin, Wyalkatchem, Nungarin, Trayning, Mt Marshall, Mukinbudin and Koorda. The member for Central Wheatbelt, the Leader of the Opposition and I met with NEWROC. It put together its own report to demonstrate to the state government the damage that it is doing in its part of the world, which is only a small part of the agricultural region of WA. It wanted to emphasise the damage that the state government is doing, along with its lack of consultation with the federal government, and it came up with an estimated 19.19 per cent reduction in the per head value of male sheep due to the phasing out of the live export market, which equates to \$21.84 per male sheep. That is the first thing. When the Premier says, “Oh, this has nothing to do with the confidence of the sheep market”, unfortunately, he is out of his depth.

Then we have the sheep flock. The critical mass of the WA self-replacing merino flock is around 13.5 million sheep. As soon as we start getting below that, we are in danger of the whole merino sheep industry being phased out. We have already gone to below 12.5 million, according to this report. I can tell members that over the last few months, a lot of producers are not mating their ewes. They have lost confidence and they have no leadership from this state government or the federal government. In the NEWROC area alone, producers have had a gross value reduction of \$3.725 million. That is the value impact for them. It is disappointing. I applaud NEWROC.

Ms M.J. Davies: In relation to the advocacy that we want from the state government, NEWROC, which is local government and is voluntary, have travelled to Canberra themselves because they do not feel like they are getting the representation they deserve from their state government—at their own cost.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Absolutely. I congratulate the likes of Caroline Robinson. I know Peter Klein, who is now the CEO of Katanning, was in amongst it there. I know Quentin Davies was in there. Many of those CEOs and presidents out that way did a great job. They had to travel, as the member for Central Wheatbelt said. They are the ones out there advocating for WA’s sheep industry. When I look at the advocacy of this state government, it is very disappointing. As I said, this motion is very appropriate. It really does speak to the lip-service of this state Labor government and its failure in managing state and federal relations, putting at risk key industries that support our state. The live export industry is one of those key industries for which the government has no regard. It does not want to stand up and be counted. I could not be more disappointed with its effort.

MS M. BEARD (North West Central) [5.50 pm]: I rise to support this motion. I realise I have only a short amount of time. I will highlight a couple of issues that have come to light. Many members on this side of the house have raised a lot of issues that cross over all our regions that I and many people in the regions find frustrating. Our state boasts an array of vital industries, from mining to agriculture to renewable energies, each playing a critical role in driving economic growth, creating jobs and sustaining tourism, all of which is vital for the regions. All the regions provide for the metro, and we need to keep this in mind.

A common comment from people in the regions is that there is a definite need for a combined federal and state government effort in key infrastructure, which the member for Central Wheatbelt touched on. Without key infrastructure development in the regions, we are going backwards at a rate of knots. It is disappointing that infrastructure investment is not there. Many people want to invest in the regions, but the infrastructure they need and expect is not there. If they want to undertake housing development in the regions, the lack of headworks means that it is not sustainable. It is exactly what the member for Central Wheatbelt said; they will not get their money back. Slowly but surely, the regions will disappear because small businesses, jobs and local economies will slowly dwindle, and people will not live there.

I will focus on some of the basics that are needed in the regions. I understand that the responsibility for communications lies with the federal government, but we need a push from our state government to help with this issue. Every day,

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someone in my electorate either has no Telstra connection or the ability to operate their business because the power has gone out. To achieve the necessities, we need a collaborative investment across the regions. It is something that the Cook Labor government must stand up for.

Some people in the regions perceive the problems to be the result of bureaucratic inefficiency. In previous presentations this afternoon, opposition members spoke about red and green tape. People are trying to get hydrogen and carbon projects up, but no matter which they turn, they hit roadblocks. We need to unblock those to make it easier for people and find a way to collaboratively work together to push these things along.

Immigration is an issue that everyone has raised; in my space in the north, it is enormously important. The internationals who work in the north do so on a working holiday visa. A lot of people ask why we cannot employ local people. We cannot employ locals because a lot of the work in the north is seasonal. People who live in those regions want full-time work. They do not want to do two weeks picking here or six weeks packing there; they want continual work. A lot of the industries in the north are seasonal. Farmers need workers when they take their crops off. Pastoral people need workers when they muster their cattle. These jobs do not provide year-round employment. That is something that people are missing, because they just assume that when a person has a job in the bush, they have a full-time job, but they do not. I wrote to the federal Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs last July to highlight what impact the recommendation to wind back international visas and remove the 88 days in which people have to extend their visas would have in the regions. It would be catastrophic. If that happens, there will be no incentive for visa holders to work in the regions. I can tell members that the ones I speak to often come to Australia wholly to work and travel, so they cannot work in those regions to extend their travel and the ability for them to stay in Australia for the length of time that they need to is diminished. Let us not forget the staggering figure that was cited recently that backpackers injected up to \$360 million into our local economy last year alone. That influx of revenue is not just a statistic but a lifeline to countless businesses, communities and jobs, and it sustains livelihoods and fuels growth in most regional areas. Many of these backpackers I speak to would not travel if they were not able to fund their travels. I implore and ask the Cook government to thump the table as hard as it can to make this change to backpacker and immigration provisions because otherwise there will be a detrimental effect. I go further than that and ask the government to try to get backpacker visas extended. We have roadhouses in the middle of nowhere that are the wrong side of the twenty-sixth of parallel and they cannot find staff. We have regional areas that do not feature on the lists of skilled migration visas, which needs addressing. I assume and hope that that was picked up in the last round of consultation. Hairdressers need to be added to the 88-day visas. It is something I get all the time. I do not believe this issue is fully understood in lots of spaces. It will really put the clamps on lots of our regions.

We are spending a lot of money promoting international tourism and pushing tourists to the regions, which is fantastic, it is fabulous, there is so much on offer, but when a visitor comes to town and three cafes are closed because they have not got a chef or a waitress, it has a detrimental effect on overall spend on promotion of tourism in the regions because there will not be the people to work in those spaces. Some of our growers employ up to 50 workers for three or four months at a time. They work through the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility program, which, again, is a commonwealth program. I ask the state to step into that space to try to make things easier. One big grower has said to me that they will put their business on the market because it is all too hard—it is so cumbersome and hard to deal with. What we need to put in place for the visas is critical. I cannot suggest enough that somebody from the Cook Labor government take the time to speak to the right people about making this change because if not, we will curtail the influx of backpacker labour and risk not only losing contributions to our workforce but also deprive our regional areas of much-needed support and investment.

As well as that, there is the issue of visas for people who came to work over COVID. I have an example of one person who worked at Gascoyne Junction. He and his wife ran a whole operation by themselves. They have now had three children. They are struggling to stay as permanent residents in the town. She is a nurse, he runs an accommodation centre and their three children are at school. They were all born here, yet every time he turns around, he receives a letter saying that he has to leave the country. His children were born in Australia. He is a significant contributor to our town and community, yet he is really struggling with this. It has cost him an enormous amount of money. These are real examples of people who want to contribute, want to grow these regional towns, and they are really struggling to get into that space.

Exmouth, Kalbarri, Shark Bay—all of those towns—are usually reliant on skilled migration people and working holiday visas. We cannot have this issue stifling these regions. If someone is removed and lives a long way from the issue, they will not understand. One of the things I read in the review was that there is mindfulness of cultural exchange. I argue that cultural exchange in the regions is enormous. As one member has already noted, we have people who have married locals and have had children. They meet new people. There are people who travel for weddings now. They go overseas for the weddings of workers they have employed in the past. I urge the Cook Labor government to please get on the bandwagon before it is too late.

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The member for Roe mentioned live exports. People regularly come to me about that matter. In my space in the north, cattle farmers regularly raise this—rightly so—as they fear that their industry may be affected at some point. I remember when their livelihoods were seemingly disappearing in an arbitrary way when the Australian government in June 2011 temporarily banned live export to Indonesia. That caused enormous grief. There is a lot of nervousness within the cattle industry as they watch what is happening to the sheep trade.

The cashless welfare card is a commonwealth government lever that was removed. Everyone knows about the youth crime situation across the state, particularly in some communities, not only in the north. We need multiple prongs to solve the problems. I know some people believe in the cashless debit card and other people do not, but a middle ground is needed. We saw positive outcomes in some regional towns that trialled it. We have a social responsibility to the regions to consider tools that can help, even if for the short term and even if they are targeted. We need to readdress the cashless welfare card.

We are still waiting for the Tom Price and Meekatharra hospitals. I am big on maternity. In terms of funding, I think we must collaborate to get the critical infrastructure needed and the wraparound services that go with those hospitals through the spend that goes with them. Without that spend, the programs we are putting in place will not be fully effective.

Safe houses are needed. I know there is an argument that we cannot have them. I believe that we need them, and people I speak with say we need them. I can see that we need them. A holistic raft of services is needed, including transitional housing, men's refuges—the list goes on. The police and frontline workers do a wonderful job, and wraparound services are needed to support the groups working hard at the coalface. The groups already on the ground are working hard, but they need additional resources to help them.

I go back to the cashless welfare card. We have the banned drinkers register, which everyone is pleased is in place. Couple that with things like the welfare card, which was once hailed to be a beacon of hope to deal with antisocial behaviour. Some of the programs that were working but were taken away need to be reconsidered.

In 2016, 80 per cent of the welfare payment was quarantined with the aim to prevent funds being used on things like alcohol and gambling. This had some positive effects. I ask the state government to work with the commonwealth government to find a solution in relation to the cashless debit card.

Looking to the future, a number of projects in my area are in limbo or waiting for approvals or some kind of connectivity. The processes to get industries moving quickly from one space to another need to be streamlined. Nothing happens quickly, but people are finding roadblocks along the way. People come to me regularly saying that they are finding it difficult to navigate their way through that process.

In summary and in closing, our world is clearly changing and we need to change, too, and work out how to best coordinate and collaborate with industry to get development happening. I am speaking from a regional perspective. We must work out how our state can push hard with our federal government to try to overcome some of those issues. I now have people contacting me and saying, "It's all too hard", "I keep asking", "This is not going to happen" and "If I don't have workers, I just won't be able to continue."

We just need to ask the Premier and the government to stand up on behalf of the people in the bush who are facing all the issues that have been raised today. We need to move forward. We need to make sure that we are planning for the future and are being strategic in terms of change and growth and development within our state.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armada — Minister for Education) [6.04 pm]: Deputy Speaker, can I ask for your clarification? Does the motion that we are debating today state —

That this house condemns the Cook Labor government for its failure to manage state and federal relations, which is putting at risk the key industries that support our state and dismissing their significant social and economic contributions to our community.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I believe we are still on motion 1.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is the one; right. I also seek one other bit of clarification. Is this the Legislative Council of the Western Australian Parliament at 4 Harvest Terrace, West Perth, in the state of WA? We are in the state Parliament; is that correct?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: We are in the Legislative Assembly.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are in the Legislative Assembly in the state Parliament; that is correct. Apart from the member for Central Wheatbelt, opposition members did not stick to the motion; they just talked about federal issues. They are the Clayton's federal opposition. It was quite amazing. Even more so, the member for Roe went on about the Netherlands and Sri Lankan Parliaments. I have no idea what they have to do with the motion in front of us. For instance, the member for Roe mentioned "federal minister", "federal department" and "federal government" about five or six times in one sentence, and then repeated it. This is the state Parliament of Western Australia. He is to

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hold the state government accountable for state government issues. Go ahead; keep using this as a de facto chamber to criticise the federal government. That is fine, but I will tell him one thing: it will not help him at the state election next year.

What that points to is that this is a great state government. Members opposite cannot criticise us, so they have to spend their time criticising federal ministers, federal departments and the federal government. It is truly amazing. As I said, aside from the member for Central Wheatbelt, nothing that they criticised related to the motion in front of us or to the state government. The Leader of the Opposition's contribution was the same. Of course, he made his contribution and off he went, which is his normal way—he does not stay for the debate.

Let me now address the motion. As the Minister for Education, I will try to address the motion that members opposite put up but decided not to speak on. The motion says that the Cook Labor government should be condemned for its failure to manage state and federal relations. That is pretty hard to do in the education space, member for Roe. A few weeks ago, we signed a statement of intent. We are going to be the first state in Australia to have full funding of public schools, and that is through the very good management of the relationship between the state Minister for Education and the federal Minister for Education. I am not sure how the member is going to condemn that. I am sure he will find a way, because he finds a way to condemn everything, but I think that will be really hard.

To make sure that the member understands, because he is liable to ask a question tomorrow that he got from the media but did not look at the facts behind, we have the National School Reform Agreement, which is a financial agreement between the commonwealth and the states on how the commonwealth funds the schools in Australia. As the member will know, from the Gonski inquiry there is the Gonski index called the schooling resource standard. That is what Gonski determined is needed to fund schools or students to ensure that they have a proper education. At the moment, under the Gonski index, the commonwealth funds 80 per cent and we fund 20 per cent of the schooling resource standard of private schools so they have 100 per cent funding. In some cases, they have more than 100 per cent funding. When it comes to public students, the commonwealth funds 20 per cent because the states have always been the major funder of public education.

The problem is that state governments around Australia have been funding only to the level of 75 per cent that we agreed to a couple of years ago. To his credit, the opposition did not criticise Minister Jason Clare when he became minister. We did not hear it from the Morrison, Turnbull or Abbott governments or from members' National Party colleagues—definitely not from Barnaby Joyce, who seems to have other issues on his mind or from the other federal National Party member in the Senate. I think opposition members should be worried about criticising them more than the federal Labor government. Under the Howard government, opposition members did not worry about the 100 per cent funding of our public school students.

Jason Clare came in and said that this had to change. He said that and decided that funding would reach 100 per cent, but he wanted both the state and federal governments to increase funding. To me, that seems to be reasonable. He initially offered to increase commonwealth funding by 0.5 per cent for the next five years, starting from next year, which would take the federal funding of public students to 22.5 per cent of the Gonski index, but he said that the states would have to increase funding by 2.5 per cent as well. Under his original offer, we would have reached 100 per cent of the Gonski index in 2029, but because we have such a good relationship with the federal government, I sat down with the minister and said that we want to negotiate now; we do not want to wait until 2029 to get to full funding. Some of the other states were equivocal about it and wanted the federal government to put in all the funding. We have great financial management in Western Australia, after we overcame the eight years of economic mismanagement by the last government, which opposition members were a part of—not the member for Roe, personally, but his party. We had to overcome that. We had very good financial management and a really good set of books, and we were in a position to say that we could increase our funding, but we said to Minister Clare that we wanted the 2.5 per cent extra within two years. By the end of 2026, we will have 100 per cent of the Gonski funding, and that is because of the great economic management in Western Australia and the very good relationship between the federal and state governments. Also, it will mean that the most disadvantaged schools will get to 100 per cent funding at the end of next year, which may include schools in the member for Roe's electorate. Is that not a good thing! Even the member would have to admit that that is a good thing.

Mr P.J. Rundle: I'm happy with that.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is good to see. I am glad to hear that the member is happy with that.

Ms S.E. Winton: It is pretty good state–federal relations, wouldn't you say?

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is very good state–federal relations. I have to say that it is not just the good relationship I have with federal Minister for Education Jason Clare, but also the very good relationships that the federal Treasurer has with our Treasurer and the Prime Minister has with our Premier that ensured we could reach this agreement.

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The funding will be tied to certain reforms, which still have to be settled, such as catch-up tutoring so students who are struggling will receive extra tutoring. It will also go to the wellbeing of students and teachers, and to the attraction and retention of teachers. All are outstanding reforms. That blows a hole in the motion before the house today, which the opposition decided not to address.

This is our second week back for the year. Most of the questions in question time have been about the federal government. I have now been in this place since 2010, and I have to say that I have never experienced a party such as the opposition that has used question time the way that it uses it. It is truly amazing. I encourage opposition members to keep going like this. I know that it is difficult when the opposition does not have a lot of bodies on its side; I will give them that. It is also difficult to attack a state government that is doing so well; therefore, the opposition uses the federal Labor government as its target of attack because it thinks it might be more vulnerable. That will be determined at the next federal election.

When it comes to education, there are other examples of a great relationship between the state and federal government. The Scaling Up Success in Remote Schools program is one that the member would surely see as being beneficial. Under the preschool reform agreement, we secured \$1.3 million for WA's early childhood education and care. This funding will be distributed to that sector for the first time through supporting children in the Early Childhood Education and Care WA grants program. The WA and Albanese governments have been working together.

As the member for Mount Lawley would know, the Albanese government had financial support for measures at schools following the Hamas attacks on Israel and ongoing conflict. The federal government provided nearly half a million dollars for mental health and wellbeing to support students in Jewish and Islamic schools, and for students of Jewish and Islamic faith in government schools, recognising the impact of the conflict on young people in those communities. Also, the commonwealth commenced an initiative of school upgrade funds. I hope that some of the schools in the member for Roe's electorate applied. I know at least one school in the electorate applied, and I imagine there would have been more than one. This is a great federal government initiative, but the member does not mention the very important capital upgrades and funding being delivered by the federal government in consultation with the state government and state education department. It is a great relationship between WA and the federal government. It is because of our great financial management that we have been able to take advantage of the offerings, initiatives and reforms of the federal government.

The Deputy Premier is unable to be here at this stage, so I will talk a little bit about the GST. When the opposition was in government, it failed to reach this agreement on the GST floor that we now have. That agreement was made by the McGowan government, and the Cook Labor government has ensured the retention of that much better GST funding agreement with the federal government. In the previous Liberal–National government, even former Treasurer Christian Porter thought that money was being spent without a plan, or that it did not have a plan to secure a better GST agreement. Even Christian Porter said in his budget speech that his government did not have a plan to secure a better GST agreement. Our government achieved that fair share for Western Australia. It does not matter what questions the member for Roe or the opposition leader want to ask our Premier. The fact is that the Prime Minister, in Western Australia this week, reiterated that that GST deal, struck by a state Labor government with a federal government, remains. It was not struck by the former Barnett Liberal–National coalition, or alliance, or whatever it wishes to call itself. The member cannot criticise that because we are doing a great job in that area.

What about transport? I am really surprised that the member did not talk about transport. The member for North West Central never talked in her contribution, I do not think, about transport. The member for North West Central's contribution was really interesting. She was going on about the banned drinkers register, the cashless card, and that more hairdressers are needed in the town et cetera. That is all very true, but not really talking to the motion.

The member for Roe talked about immigration. Our government did not have people like Peter Dutton, who wanted to dog whistle many, many times throughout his time in Parliament. He has dog whistled on the issue of immigration; that is what he has done. The member might want to go talk to those who would have been his National Party colleagues, but who are now his Liberal Party colleagues, about why there may be problems in public policy when it comes to immigration—such as the member for North West Central. I think he will find that Peter Dutton was one of the major barriers to a sensible immigration policy in Australia.

Let us look at transport. As recently as Tuesday morning, the Deputy Premier and Minister King announced that construction had started on the new elevated train station at Carlisle. The Australian government remains fully committed to Western Australia's transformational Metronet program. I have to say that it is absolutely brilliant. I am on the Armadale line. Some amazing work has been done in such a quick period. The member for Darling Range is also noticing it out in his electorate. We have been able to secure over \$4 billion in funding from the federal government to help deliver Metronet, and the federal government will continue to support the delivery of the full Metronet program. That includes the construction of the Morley–Ellenbrook line, the Yanchep

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rail extension, the Victoria Park–Canning level crossing removal, the Thornlie–Cockburn Link and the Byford rail extension.

Mr S.A. Millman: And the list goes on.

Dr A.D. BUTI: And the list goes on. We have also secured equal commonwealth funding between the federal and state governments to build 130 new electric buses in Western Australia, and charging infrastructure will be deployed across key areas.

I think the member for North West Central talked about the need for energy. It is the federal Labor government and state Labor governments that are seeking to secure better energy sources. The contribution from the member's party at the federal level is about only one thing—nuclear power. Does the member want a nuclear reactor in Carnarvon? Will the member support a nuclear reactor in Carnarvon?

Ms M. Beard: I am open to energy.

Dr A.D. BUTI: So the member is open to having a nuclear reactor in Carnarvon.

Ms M. Beard: I cannot answer that right now.

Dr A.D. BUTI: But the member is open to the possibility. I reckon the Leader of the Opposition is listening to this very carefully. You will be competing against each other at the next election! The point is that people can talk about nuclear energy, but no-one ever wants to say where they will put the nuclear reactor.

Ms M. Beard: I did not talk about it.

Dr A.D. BUTI: No, but the member talked about energy. She said that she was open to energy sources.

Ms M. Beard: Hydrogen and carbon.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Okay, so the member is not supporting the federal opposition's program on nuclear energy. Take note of that, Leader of the Opposition, because that will be his opponent at the next state election, I understand.

Getting back to transport, the commonwealth government has provided over \$565 million to support the Western Australian government's development of the common-user facilities at Lumsden Point in Port Hedland. Through the Treasurer; Deputy Premier, Minister Saffioti, this government has secured hundreds of millions of dollars to deliver the extremely successful and cost-effective regional road safety program. That program has improved safety across the Main Roads network by installing audible edge lines and widening the road shoulders. The \$1 billion jointly funded program has upgraded more than 7 000 kilometres of the state's roads. That makes a mockery of the Leader of the Opposition's motion. The Nationals WA brought this motion to the house and did not talk about it. It forgot that we have upgraded and improved road safety on 7 000 kilometres of the state's roads. That program is delivering great results. Last year, we saw a 28 per cent reduction in the number of people killed on regional roads compared with the case in 2022. That is still far too many people who have died, obviously, but it was the lowest number of deaths in a decade.

I started off by asking the Deputy Speaker what the motion was, because the opposition did not speak to it. The opposition used it as an opportunity to criticise the federal government, which was quite amazing. May it continue that way for the rest of the year, as has happened for most of question time. I also asked whether we were in the Legislative Assembly of the Western Australian Parliament because it appears that we are in the federal Parliament. Maybe the National Party is doing a better job of criticising the federal government than the federal opposition. I do not know. It is rather confusing how the Nationals use question time and private members' business to attack the federal government. May that continue.

MS S.E. WINTON (Wanneroo — Minister for Early Childhood Education) [6.24 pm]: I, too, rise to make a quick contribution. I am aware that other members want to speak, so I will try to contain my enthusiasm to speak on this motion, which we of course do not support. As the Minister for Education aptly explained, it is almost a Dorothy Dixier afternoon for us, given the wording of the motion represents an own goal by the opposition. The motion talks about state–federal relations, which is one of the key attributes of the last seven years of this Labor government as it has been able to work with a federal coalition government —

[Interruption.]

Dr A.D. Buti: It's just a fallen chair.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Is there no-one in it?

Dr A.D. Buti: That was the fault of the federal government!

Mr R.S. Love: It's all right; I will fix it up.

Ms S.E. WINTON: Ha-ha!

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This motion allows us to clearly emphasise the important federal–state relations that we have been able to achieve over seven years in government, whether with the former federal coalition government or the current federal Labor government. As Minister Buti said, we can demonstrate how we work with our federal counterparts in an array of portfolios. I will take a couple of minutes to go through my portfolio area of prevention of family and domestic violence.

Before I do, I will comment on a couple of remarks made by the member for North West Central—in particular, her remarks about the cashless debit card. That program was not taken away from her electorate because it never existed in her electorate. The member raised concerns about children and youth and crime in her town. Despite her lack of support, the state government has restricted liquor access and instituted a banned drinkers register in her electorate. If the member for North West Central were being totally honest, she would know that those programs are making a significant contribution to service delivery in that town. However, she wanted to talk about something that does not even exist in her area as an example of us not having a good federal–state relationship. That was a pretty long bow.

In terms of my portfolio, only two days ago, I again met with my federal counterpart, Amanda Rishworth, who was here as part of federal cabinet. We welcome federal ministers coming to Western Australia regularly so that we can have face-to-face conversations. That is really important. Our government, together with the Albanese government, is working fiercely to address issues around family and domestic violence. We know that having strong relationships with our federal colleagues is critical to that end. We are working together on the national plan to end violence against women and children. Back in August last year, I travelled to Brisbane to be part of the launch of the first two action plans. Importantly, one of those action plans was the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander action plan. The federal and state governments are aligned in their determination and approach to end family and domestic violence. We will continue to prosecute our case to make sure that we receive support from the federal government to fully action the national action plan. By way of example, since 2021, the national action plan has been varied twice to allow more funding to flow to Western Australia, including some \$16 million to deliver 50 FTE frontline community workers. That is a really important resource for our services to help support victim–survivors in this state who are facing family and domestic violence. Of course, an announcement just two days ago is another specific example, with \$3.3 million of federal funding to come to the state to support innovative perpetrator responses. Although we need to continue to support victim–survivors and they are our number one priority, we also need to address perpetrator responses so that we hold perpetrators to account and challenge them to change their ways. These important investments by the federal government, together with state government money, will ensure that we have those programs in our state. I look forward to continuing to work with my federal counterpart, as do all my state ministerial colleagues with theirs. As the Minister for Education said, the Premier has a great relationship with the Prime Minister. The Deputy Premier has a great relationship with her federal counterpart. The Minister for Education explained his relationship with his federal counterpart; all members of the Western Australian cabinet have serious and highly functioning relationships with our federal counterparts.

I would like to pivot back to the GST, if I may, because it has been such a hot topic of conversation for the opposition in the first five days of Parliament this year. I would like to take two or three minutes to go through a bit of a historical exercise because that will clearly articulate how well we, as a government, have been able to forge state–federal relationships that achieve great outcomes for Western Australia, as opposed to the opposition. In the first instance, it was a federal coalition government and a state coalition government that hatched the botched GST deal that we have all been whingeing about in the first place. We cannot lose sight of where that deal originated.

The Barnett government had an opportunity to work with federal Labor governments, the Gillard and Rudd governments, and it also had the opportunity to work with federal coalition governments, but over the course of eight years, it was never able to achieve a better GST outcome. In fact, the then federal Labor government implored the Barnett government to get on board with Gonski. What did it do? It did nothing. We are talking about state–federal relationships; that did not happen in the eight years of the previous state coalition government.

Compare that with this state Labor government over the last seven years. We worked with the federal coalition government to achieve the much-needed GST floor. Members opposite might say, “Oh, that was a coalition government achievement”, but no; it takes two parties—as the opposition is trying to tell us—and it happened under our watch. Members opposite had a federal coalition government during their time in office, and they still were unable to achieve a GST deal. Our relationship with a federal coalition government achieved better outcomes for Western Australia than the previous state coalition government ever did.

We achieved a GST deal with a federal coalition government, and, as the Minister for Education outlined, we have now, together with the federal Labor government, achieved 100 per cent funding for state schools in Western Australia. That is an extraordinary achievement and a true demonstration of a state–federal relationship that is critical in terms of being able to deliver for Western Australians. We will continue to do that. We stand up

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for Western Australians, and when we do not like something that the federal government does, whether it is a coalition or Labor government, we will always stand up for Western Australia first.

MR S.A. MILLMAN (Mount Lawley — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.33 pm]: I rise to make a brief contribution, conscious of the fact that the two ministers who have already spoken have touched upon two of the key elements that needed to be addressed in contributions to this motion. With the possible exception of the member for Central Wheatbelt, not one of the opposition speakers spoke to the subject matter of the motion. The member for Wanneroo spoke on one of my favourite subjects, the GST deal.

Previously in this chamber, I have introduced the idea of Occam's razor—that the simplest explanation is probably the most likely one. In all the years that Christian Porter, Troy Buswell, Colin Barnett and Mike Nahan were Treasurer and/or Minister for Finance, they were not able to secure a GST deal. Mark McGowan and Ben Wyatt were elected respectively as Premier and Treasurer of Western Australia, and almost immediately, the federal government was prepared to sit down and negotiate the resolution of the GST deal. As the Premier said during question time yesterday, the most significant and substantial threat to the preservation of that GST deal seems to be Peter Dutton. We know that, not from anything we have said on our side of the chamber, but from what his very own former and current cabinet colleagues have said.

The other thing I want to pick up on, which the minister raised, was taking us back in history to the very poor relationship between the two conservative governments at the federal and state levels. The hallmark of the Barnett government when it came to relations with the commonwealth government was arrogance—nothing but unashamed arrogance. Government members were always thinking that they had the resources and capacity necessary to deliver all the critical infrastructure and services for the people of Western Australia without having to go to Canberra and without having to positively engage the commonwealth government. It was frankly astounding because they denied the people of Western Australia the opportunity to not only get their fair share back through the GST but also have the government contribute to important infrastructure funding. Day after day, the Minister for Transport comes into this chamber and provides another update on just how much money she has secured from the federal government. The minister did it during the course of the Morrison–Turnbull–Abbott governments, while we were in government, and has continued in the same vein. She takes great delight in continuing in the same vein to describe the money she is able to secure for the taxpayers of Western Australia, the people we serve, from the commonwealth government. That is a good budgetary process and it stands in stark contrast with the previous conservative government, which not only did not agree with Canberra on a budgetary process but also had its own separate budgetary processes within cabinet.

Let us talk about relations. Let us talk about the relations that we have with Canberra and compare that with the relations the Liberal Party had with the National Party the last time they were in government.

Ms S.E. Winton: It's not going too well now, either!

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: No. The member for Mid-West has been a member of both—sorry, the future member for Mid-West, the member for North West Central.

I want to focus on some issues relating to health because, particularly in health and in the challenging environment we face in maintaining and delivering a world-class health service for the people of Western Australia, there are a number of areas in which cooperation with the federal government is imperative. I will start with a brilliant forum that I was fortunate enough to be at last night in my capacity representing the Minister for Health. It was held by the Western Australian chapter of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. The chair of the college at the moment is Dr Ramya Raman. A few members in this chamber have probably met Dr Raman. To deal with the provision of primary care and the promotion of general practice as a field of endeavour for medical students, Dr Raman and the RACGP got together various stakeholders including federal members of Parliament, state members of Parliament, university deans of medical schools, RACGP fellows, consultants and medical students to talk about how we can facilitate, advance and encourage more students to get into general practice. The state government was there—I was there. Primary care, on a strict construction, is the responsibility of the federal government. It was a classic workshop with round tables and butcher's paper; the stuff that gives some of us nightmares! A consultant clinician who was sharing a table with me said that one of the most significant acts to damage general practice was committed by John Howard in 1996 when he removed provider numbers for general practitioners. I am not going to tell members who said that because I did not speak to him about doing so, but he said that act from 25 years ago is still the single most significant act to undermine the provision of primary care in the health system nationwide. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners quite appropriately identified the international context. I want to make sure that I represent its position correctly, so I am quoting from the presentation that Dr Raman did. To contextualise the event, she talked about the international context. She said that strengthening primary health care has become a key strategy for health systems to respond effectively to ageing populations, increasing health inequalities and a growing number of chronically ill patients and thus to an increase in demand on healthcare services.

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International comparative studies have shown that health systems with strong primary health care achieve not only better health outcomes but also better results in equal access to care and cost containment. To achieve the optimum balance between supply and demand of health professionals, we need development of clear pipelines into general practice, multifactorial support for key elements of the medical training journey, coordination of all efforts predominantly towards primary health care with prioritisation and workforce planning pivotal.

That is the sentiment that was expressed last night by the RACGP. We could not agree more, because it is imperative that the healthcare system is functioning efficiently and effectively between the state and federal levels. The point is that we are working collaboratively with stakeholders, universities, students and the RACGP to identify what we can do to facilitate and promote greater access to primary care for people to participate in delivering primary care.

One of the things we can do and that we are working on is placements for students in GP clinics and practices. I am glad that the member for Central Wheatbelt is here because a brilliant presentation was made last night by Dr Phoebe Blaxill. Actually, I do not know whether she is a doctor yet, but last year she was the RACGP WA student council rep, and her presentation was all about the importance of clinical placements for general practitioners on their pathway to general practice. She said that her favourite clinical placement experience was the rural and regional clinical placement. She said that more of her cohort have an interest in and a desire to work regionally and rurally as a result of the experience they have had on the rural and regional clinical placement. I know that the member for Central Wheatbelt has raised this issue because the provision of primary care services is imperative in small towns. We need proper funding and resourcing.

I do not know why they continue to do it, but one of my great frustrations with the Nationals WA is that they know we need primary care physicians in those towns and that the funding needs to be provided by the federal government, yet they sit idly by in complicity as the federal Liberal government time and again attacks Medicare and primary care and cuts funding and undermines the provision of primary care physicians. The Labor Party comes along, federal and state Labor, and we desperately try to find out what we can do, what levers we can pull and what changes we can make to encourage more people from the regions to study medicine and return, not as specialists but as general practitioners. GPs are the cornerstone of a well-functioning health system for the reasons that the RACGP outlined last night, which I agree with. That is the first thing.

Ms M.J. Davies: Can I ask a question?

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: I am sorry; ordinarily, yes, but the member for Victoria Park, the new minister, also wants to make a contribution. I am sure there will be another opportunity; I am happy to have the conversation with the member again.

I want to move on to aged care, which is again a federal responsibility. When Minister Amber-Jade Sanderson took over the health portfolio in the immediate post-COVID environment or coming out of the COVID pandemic, she and her office identified that one of the challenges that we faced was COVID in our aged-care sector. The state government did not have the responsibility for dealing with that issue because aged care is the responsibility of the federal government, but for every person in an aged-care facility who contracted COVID and needed to be admitted to the emergency department, that became an issue for the WA health system. It became an issue for each of the health service providers because it stretched their resources to deal with all the issues that they would normally deal with and this issue, which was added on top. How do we look after the most vulnerable people in our society, those in residential and aged-care facilities? Happily, thankfully, unlike other jurisdictions in which a lot of aged-care provision is done by state and local governments, the provision of aged care in Western Australia is mostly provided by the private sector. The Minister for Health convened a ministerial advisory panel with some of the significant players in the aged-care sector—some of the main CEOs. In addition to the private sector CEOs, the minister also brought together health service provider CEOs and, from an operational level, the directors responsible for dealing with stakeholder engagement in the various geographic regions. This included the WA Country Health Service, the East Metropolitan Health Service, the South Metropolitan Health Service and the North Metropolitan Health Service. We had a situation in which private sector providers had an opportunity to address their concerns with the way in which the Modified Monash Model funding arrangement was applied disproportionately and unfairly in Western Australia. The minister took up this issue and advocated on their behalf at the federal health ministers' meeting. That advocacy on behalf of the aged-care sector in Western Australia would not have been possible were it not for the actions of the Western Australian Minister for Health. That is the first point.

The second point is that even though aged care is the responsibility of the federal government, we have created a framework in which we are now completely across the issues that confront the aged-care sector in Western Australia, thanks to our close collaboration with the private sector. The fact of the matter is that this motion refers to relations. We have relations between not only the federal Minister for Health and Aged Care and the state Minister for Health, but also between the Minister for Health and private sector stakeholders. If members opposite want to talk about a government that puts a priority and emphasis on relations and the importance of building relations on the

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basis of trust and confidence, they can look to no better example than this government, whether it be Minister Buti, Minister Winton or Minister Beazley. All those ministers, including my minister, Minister Sanderson, are assiduous in making sure that they build, develop and maintain those relations.

I will make a couple of final points in rebuttal to some of the things raised by opposition members. First, there is an inconsistency in the narrative they advance when they talk about electoral reform. I am glad that the member for Moore is back in the chamber because last week he said, “The new Labor government took everyone by surprise by introducing electoral reform. It’s been in their platform for 120 years. It took everyone by surprise.” Lo and behold, when we came to government, we introduced a platform item that has been a part of our platform for 120 years! Members opposite do not necessarily understand how the electoral process works. The member for Roe said that the Premier is an unelected Premier. What a complete fallacy. The leader of the government in the Legislative Assembly is determined by the numbers on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. The people who elect the Premier are the people in this chamber. If the member for Roe thinks this is some sort of republican presidential-style system, he is completely right. As the Minister for Education knows—he picks up this point frequently—the member for Roe just wants to criticise the trade union movement. He wants to cite the Carmen Lawrence report—what a great report. Who was the organiser of that report? It was the State School Teachers’ Union of WA. It is like a poison word in the member’s mouth, because he cannot even express it. I am happy to say good on Carmen Lawrence, good on the State School Teachers’ Union—do your work, hold us to account, represent your members’ interests. I do not have a problem with that, but the member for Roe does.

One thing the member for Roe could learn is that the people who determine who is the Premier of the state are the people in this room. Last time I counted the numbers on the floor of this chamber I think the Labor Party was at about 53 and the opposition was at about six. We do not need to worry about whether or not Premier Cook was elected. He was elected 53 votes to six.

There is another thing, which has already been taken up by the Minister for Education. This was an opportunity for the opposition to talk about federal and state relations. Once again, the opposition has run out of material. As Minister Winton said, this motion was almost a Dorothy Dixier. So desperate was the opposition for material that the member for Roe was invoking the Netherlands and organic farming in Sri Lanka. All I can say is that I will vote no to this motion and I commend our cabinet and ministers for the work they have done in building and maintaining outstanding federal–state relations.

MS H.M. BEAZLEY (Victoria Park — Minister Assisting the Minister for Training and Workforce Development) [6.50 pm]: I am very pleased today to rise to speak to this private members’ business with its pretty ridiculous claim that this government is failing in managing state–federal relations and putting at risk the key industries that support our state. The only flashing red risk here is those opposite returning to government.

There are many things I could talk to to disavow members of this notion, but I will keep it to the work I do to support the Minister for Training and Workforce Development in my role as minister assisting the minister. Let me start with the historic national skills agreement reached with the Albanese government in just October last year. This five-year deal has unlocked billions of dollars to build the skills and prosperity of Western Australians. After years of interim agreements, the Cook and Albanese governments have achieved something that previous federal Liberal–National governments could not: securing a long-term agreement that all states and territories can sign up to. The \$1.3 billion in funding secured under this agreement is more than \$380 million above previous funding and commenced on 1 January this year. The agreement provides \$1.2 billion in flexible funding, as well as funding for specific policy initiatives. The \$125 million for these specific policy initiatives will allow our government to deepen our response to closing the gap for First Nations people, improve foundation skills and create TAFE centres for excellence that will help deliver on WA’s clean energy transition, making a huge social and economic contribution to our community. This injection of funds will help ensure that WA stays ahead of the game in skilling Western Australians for jobs of the future in the key industries that support our state.

Funding from the national skills agreement comes on top of a further \$44.5 million agreement with the Albanese government to continue our partnership to deliver fee-free TAFE and vocational education and training places to Western Australians over the next three years. I know this topic is a bit of an anathema to those opposite. Under the renewed joint partnership a further 22 000 fee-free TAFE and VET places became available for Western Australians from January across 130 priority courses. In 2023, we funded additional places to keep pace with student demand for training, which saw enrolments at TAFE and participating private providers soar to almost 39 500 students.

I am pleased that our government has committed to maintaining this investment into this year with more in ’24. Our TAFE colleges have seen a record number of applications for fee-free courses so far this year. Applications are up 29 per cent on the same time last year, highlighting the ongoing strong demand for affordable and accessible training. It is particularly pleasing that fee-free TAFE is helping get workers where they are they are needed most—in health and care qualifications, automation and construction. Fee-free TAFE is giving young people the opportunity

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to skill up for the jobs and demand, with 34 per cent of enrolments in fee-free courses in 2023 from people aged 15 to 24 years, which I am very pleased about as Minister for Youth, and 37 per cent in enrolments in skillsets or short courses. Fee-free training has provided greater access to training for under-represented groups, with 64 per cent of enrolments in 2023 by women, 66 per cent by mature-aged students, five per cent by Aboriginal students and eight per cent by students with a disability. Demand for fee-free training has also been strong in our regions, with 29 per cent of enrolments undertaken by people living in the regions.

We see many examples of how fee-free training is transforming lives. We have heard from enrolled nursing students like Helen Goh, who has been able to study her entire course—all three semesters—for free through TAFE. That is a saving of more than \$10 000 compared with costs before we came into government. Better still, fee-free TAFE allowed Helen to focus on her study without taking on extra hours of work. Helen will use this pathway to get registered nursing qualifications.

The diploma of nursing is not the only example from the health and care sector. Under the Liberal–National government, a diploma of anaesthetic technology and practice cost more than \$8 000; a diploma of early childhood education and care cost almost \$7 000. Imagine how many early educators we need and how many would have been priced out of the market. A certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander primary health care practice cost more than \$6 000 under the Liberal–National government. Under the Cook Labor government, these are all free. Under our government, enrolments and apprenticeships and traineeships are at historic highs.

Under the members opposite, in each training metric—apprenticeship and traineeship commencements, the number of apprentices and trainees in training, apprenticeship and traineeship completions as well as the number of publicly funded VET total course enrolments and TAFE course enrolments—levels fell significantly. They did not fight for better outcomes in our training sector, and they certainly did not fight to support key industries in our state. Our government has been busy repairing the damage done to the training sector by the Liberal–National government. We have invested significantly to rebuild TAFE and make it affordable for Western Australians to upskill and reskill for jobs. We have embarked on the largest TAFE infrastructure upgrade in our state's history. We have spent nearly a quarter of a billion dollars in upgrades to create world-class learning facilities at TAFE. When I travel around our TAFE campuses I see how incredibly proud the staff are of the new infrastructure. Our \$25 million modern TAFE equipment fund is ensuring that students are accessing state-of-the-art equipment that they will encounter in the industry, making them job ready when they graduate. Running in parallel with the fee-free program, our Lower Fees, Local Skills program attracted almost 60 000 enrolments in low-fee courses in 2023.

I take this opportunity to rebut some points made in contributions by those opposite. The member for Moore stated that there was not enough skilled labour coming into the country. In addition to skilling our own, we are providing opportunities for local businesses and skilled migrants. The Cook government is exploring all migration options to ensure Western Australia has the skilled workers it needs to help fuel our growing state. We continue to advocate for more places under the state nominated migration program and we have confidence that this message is being heard by our federal counterparts. This week, the Minister for Training and Workforce Development met with Minister Giles when he was in town—because that is what our federal Labor government does; it comes to Western Australia—to further explore what other migration options can help Western Australia meet its skilled workforce needs. We are doing everything we can to connect skilled workers with WA employers. We have the skilled migrant employment register, the construction visa subsidy program and the job connect program, which provide support for skilled migrants to settle quickly and find employment according to their skills and experience.

The member for Moore mentioned the loss of jobs in the nickel mining sector. Both he and the member for Vasse mentioned the Kwinana refinery shutdown and the subsequent loss of jobs, and implied our inaction in that space. Local jobs and skills centres have mobilised to support displaced workers and their employers as announcements to cease or pause mining operations have been made. There are currently 19 jobs and skills centres across the state. They are free and accessible to all members of our community.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Dr A.D. Buti (Minister for Education)**.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm