

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GRANTS PROGRAM

32. Ms J.L. HANNS to the Minister for Regional Development:

I refer to the McGowan government's continued support for the development of regional projects. Can the minister advise the house how this government is creating new economic opportunities and supporting the development of businesses in regional Western Australia, and can the minister advise the house whether he is aware of any other policies or positions across regional Western Australia?

Mr D.T. PUNCH replied:

Absolutely I can, and I thank the member for Collie–Preston for her incredible work in helping to build new economic futures not only in Collie, but also right across the electorate.

I want to particularly talk about the regional economic development grants scheme, known as the RED grants program. Since 2017, we have seen an impressive 331 individual projects in regional Western Australia receive a total of \$33 million. That grants scheme was championed by the former minister Hon Alannah MacTiernan. She was passionate about it. What an amazing legacy she has left! In the last round of the RED grants, the member's electorate of Collie–Preston did particularly well, with three very solid, thought-out projects in the south west receiving grants. Capel Marron Farm, which supplies a large number of marron to outlets right across the region, received \$323 000 to develop a large-scale hospitality venue and tourism experience based around the iconic marron. This incredible initiative is a fantastic opportunity for the people of Capel. Tangled Investments in Donnybrook received \$100 000 as part of a \$1 million project to renovate the first floor of the old hotel to create 15 bedrooms that will offer premium hotel accommodation in the town. That is another great project. Lennard Waste in Dardanup also received a \$100 000 contribution towards a \$1.1 million upgrade of its wastewater resource recovery facility.

We are very clear about our vision for regional economic development, and the RED grants are an important part of that. The government is about building resilience, innovation, new opportunities, diversity and taking advantage of new industries in renewables and particularly manufacturing right across regional Western Australia. We have empowered the development commissions to drive that agenda. We want strong regional communities to develop strong local economies because we know that the two go hand in hand. Supporting business directly unlocks incredible opportunities. This fits with our broader vision of having strong investment in hospitals, transport infrastructure, schools and community safety in regional Western Australia. There has been a record \$12 billion of investment right across the regions.

In response to the second part of the member's question, no, I do not know of other policy options. There is a policy-free zone out there. In fact, when I go to regional WA and mention the opposition—in fact, I do not have to mention the opposition as people mention it to me—people say that the opposition whinges, complains and has no ideas. That is the feedback I get. Where is the opposition on regional development? Only this week, a person purporting to represent the Liberal Party's policy division called the regional development commissions, letting them know that they were currently drafting a policy on investing in regional towns and seeking input on renewable energy, water, gas, electricity and streetscape improvements in the regions. Imagine the Liberal Party admiring this government's policy so much that it contacts the development commissions for ideas! I bet the Nationals WA had no idea about that. I think there is a bit of a cunning plan out there. I know that an alliance is being developed about who might go for what seat, and some little deals are being done to protect upper house members, but they are out there looking for policies from the Labor government. I thought about what advice I could give to the Leader of the Opposition on this issue, so I looked around and went to horoscopes.com. His horoscope today —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I took the lead from the Minister for Transport and it is a little bit off the mark. The horoscope started off by saying —

Your warm, sensitive nature is perfectly suited to today's aspects ...

I am not sure about that. It continues —

Your emotional energy is strongly tied to your heart, and you will find that there's a longing to be close to others. Indulge in conversation with close friends and let your imagination run wild.

I suggest that the Leader of the Opposition have a chat with his Liberal colleagues and see whether they can let their imaginations run wild and create a few opportunities for policy development. There is one last comment on the horoscope. It said —

Your creativity is especially piqued today, so start an art project or write a song that inspires or perhaps changes the world.

I think he might have a bit of competition from the member for Dawesville in that respect!

The SPEAKER: Unfortunately, that is weirdly reminding me of the member for Southern River yesterday. There has been love in the room on both days! The last question goes to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.