

REGIONAL PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

Motion

HON LAURIE GRAHAM (Agricultural) [11.54 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house acknowledges the range of projects and programs being successfully delivered by the McGowan government across regional Western Australia and the positive impact they are having on regional communities and economies.

I am pleased to move this motion in support of services that the McGowan Labor government is delivering in regional WA. From time to time I hear much criticism from the opposition about the way we are delivering those services. I find it strange that it rarely takes the opportunity to acknowledge the benefits that regional WA has received from new and improved services and infrastructure that has been rolled out in the state by this government.

Before moving to the specifics, I would like to acknowledge Hon Alannah MacTiernan in her role as Minister for Regional Development; Agriculture and Food; Ports. She has committed herself fully to this role, and many country people acknowledge the fantastic job she is doing for regional Western Australia in those portfolios. The Premier, and ministers Hon Rita Saffioti, Hon Roger Cook, Hon Stephen Dawson, Hon Sue Ellery and Hon Bill Johnston, to name but a few, are also supporters of regional WA, and always look at ways to better deliver services in the regions.

I know some of my colleagues will be contributing to this debate, and I will therefore concentrate mainly on the Agricultural Region. At the time of my election, I was led to believe that planning by the previous government was well underway for the delivery of a new hospital for the midwest. I was of the view that the Labor commitment of \$45 million for the new emergency department and mental health beds was a good one, but became concerned when I learnt that over \$70 million was required for the initial stage. I was pleasantly surprised when the Minister for Health committed the additional funding in the forward estimates in the 2019–20 budget. It was a shock to find that, despite the commitments of well over \$100 million for a new hospital during the 2017 election, the Barnett Liberal–National government had not allocated funds in the budget towards this project. There was not even any planning money in the forward estimates.

I am pleased to report that plans for stage 1 of the hospital upgrade are nearing completion. The initial contracts will centre on new car parking and relocating services next year to allow the current emergency department facilities to continue to operate whilst the new ED is being built. It is a great opportunity for regional contractors to be involved, with the smaller packages being the core of these tenders. Initial plans provide for the integration of a St John of God hospital on the site, should St John of God wish to relocate. The operating model could be similar to that in place for Bunbury. With only two private hospitals in regional WA, it is important that the opportunity is available to St John of God at the regional hospital site, should it wish to relocate in the future. This needs to be planned in the next phase in more detail.

Whilst on the subject of health, I wish to acknowledge the forward commitment made by the former government to upgrade country hospitals in the wheatbelt, including Northam and Merredin, and the decision by the McGowan Labor government to continue the funding in the forward estimates. These have delivered much improved health services for the regions, which country people really appreciate.

Moving on to the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, the budget for 2019–20 provided \$131 million additional expenditure to support agriculture in WA, to grow export markets and create long-term jobs, including \$40 million towards boosting biosecurity defences, Asian market success, and grains research and development support programs. This is on top of \$45 million for the grains research and development program in the 2018–19 budget. There are some who are disappointed that the machinery-of-government changes have taken so long to roll out, but the rejuvenation of the agricultural section of DPIRD has had a significant impact on employment in regional WA.

I will read from the 2019–20 budget papers. A total of \$275 million has been allocated for the Bindoon bypass along Great Northern Highway; \$18 million to upgrade the Great Eastern Highway near Southern Cross; \$87.5 million for the wheatbelt secondary freight route; \$40 million to upgrade the Coolgardie–Esperance Highway; and \$7 million to build a state-of-the-art marine finfish nursery in Geraldton. I will talk more about that later. A total of \$6.9 million has been allocated to upgrade shed 4 at the port of Esperance; \$23.5 million for a range of upgrades to regional ports, including Bunbury, Esperance and Geraldton; and \$3.6 million to upgrade firefighting infrastructure at the port of Geraldton. These are all great projects for regional jobs and growth in the region. On the subject of driving growth and job creation in the region, the budget includes \$45 million for the employer initiative scheme in regional Western Australia, which will help employers who choose to employ more apprentices and trainees. The budget also includes \$19.9 million for the extension of regional arts and cultural investment; \$2 million for the establishment of the national park in the Helena and Aurora Ranges; \$10 million for the business centre and operations at the Houtman Abrolhos Islands, which I will talk more about later;

\$7 million to build a state-of-the-art marine finfish facility in Geraldton; and \$24.1 million ongoing funding for WA Open for Business. I know that many regional businesses have taken the opportunity to access this funding. In addition to those, the midwest has been allocated a step-up, step-down mental health facility, and although it has been used in this house as a political football from time to time, planning is well underway and the government will deliver a new mental health facility for people in Geraldton and the midwest by 2021.

A total of \$6.5 million has been spent to help complete the much needed upgrade of the Geraldton Airport runway. Although Virgin has recently withdrawn from the service, Qantas has scheduled extra services and its loadings have increased, which should offset the passenger loss from Virgin's withdrawal. The disappointing factor is that Qantas has taken the opportunity to leverage its airfares. I noticed that my airfares have gone up by about \$80 per service, which is disappointing, and we have heard about people being charged \$700 return to Geraldton at short-term notice, which is a very disappointing development. Pressure will need to be brought to bear on Qantas and others to try to increase the number of tickets. Despite that, this is great news for tourism. We have seen a huge increase in the number of international tourists coming to visit areas such as the Pink Lake, the Houtman Abrolhos Islands and places such as the Kalbarri gorge. We must be doing something right in Geraldton, as it is busier than it has been in recent years. Finding a car park in the CBD between 10.00 am and 2.00 pm has been most difficult, and the number of people shopping on Marine Terrace has increased markedly—certainly not to the levels of the old days, but something must be in the water in Geraldton because people believe that we have turned a corner.

Investment in amenities, interpretation information and services for tourists at Kalbarri National Park is being rolled out. A tender has been awarded for the skywalk construction and completion of the world-class Kalbarri Skywalk project is one step closer, with the contract to construct the two skywalks having been awarded. This is a \$20 million project, and I acknowledge that it was an initiative of the previous government that the Labor government has seen fit to continue. Kalbarri National Park continues to be a very popular destination for tourists with visits increased by almost 100 000 over the past five years, from 306 000 in 2013–14 to 400 000 in 2017–18. That is a very significant increase. The Houtman Abrolhos Islands are now a national park, with a \$10 million investment in infrastructure on the islands for tourists, fisheries and government departments. There are also new funds in the budget of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions to manage these beautiful natural resources in the future.

On Thursday, 25 July 2019, the Premier formally announced this project. I know that it had been announced a number of times, but it was great to be present at this announcement, at which a large contingent from the midwest and visitors from Perth were in attendance. They welcomed the announcement by the government. Midwest tourism, conservation and heritage will benefit from the new Houtman Abrolhos Islands National Park, which is the first park to be created under our parks initiative. The \$10 million invested in the national park will go a long way towards achieving this outcome. It was significant that the formal announcement of its creation was made in Geraldton at the time of the 400th anniversary of the European sighting of the islands by Dutch explorer Frederik de Houtman. There is great interest in how that name is pronounced, because I have heard it pronounced several ways. I will pronounce it "hootman" today. The islands were the site of a mutiny. They have been a popular destination for fishing and nature appreciation. The decision to invest in this area will open it up to much greater tourist activities. Over the next two years, the government will construct new jetties, toilets, shade shelters, trail walks and visitor interpretation signs on West Wallabi and Beacon Islands. The airstrip on East Wallabi Island will also be upgraded. It is great that the airstrip will now stay within the national park. Originally, it was believed that it would become part of the fishing lease area, but it is now in the national park. That is a great outcome.

I will move on to a few other matters in this area: recycling and the decision to enter the national scheme. I will talk about regional centres, because this decision will obviously produce plenty of jobs. I was at a forum last week at which a public presentation was made about the business opportunities for recycling. I was pleased to see the enthusiasm with which a number of people contributed to that discussion. A number of people travelled large distances to participate. People came from the very small communities within a radius of a couple of hundred kilometres of Geraldton to contribute. If there are 20 000 people in a major regional centre, they will get the opportunity to have a facility. In the outer areas, there will be flexible facilities as long as there are 500 people in the area. I believe regional WA is well placed to gain from the improved services and infrastructure that are being rolled out. I commend the motion to the house.

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral) [12.08 pm]: I thank Hon Laurie Graham for bringing this motion to the house. There is nothing I love more than to be able to talk up the beautiful electorate I represent, the Mining and Pastoral Region. It has been busy since 2017. Going off the motion Hon Laurie Graham has brought to the house, we are acknowledging the range of projects that have been successfully delivered by the McGowan government across regional Western Australia. I will focus on Kalgoorlie and the goldfields region because that is where I spend most of my time. It is a great part of Western Australia and has come a long way in two years. My office has worked very hard to ensure that we are out there, visible and delivering on the commitments that the government

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made at the 2017 election and the many other things that have popped up. I believe that the government is doing a good job to deliver what it set out to deliver.

One of the great things about these local projects is that many local people are heavily involved in them. Community groups, government departments and people on the ground make this work possible. I think that that also happens at a bigger level in Western Australia, because a lot of small projects end up having a huge impact on small communities. I acknowledge the amazing work Hon Alannah MacTiernan has done in regional Western Australia. It is well acknowledged in Kalgoorlie that she is one of the hardest working ministers. She is always in Kalgoorlie, like she is everywhere else in Western Australia. She gets out there and gets the job done.

One key project that kicked this off for me was the dog fence. Before I got into Parliament, a dog fence was not something that I had ever inquired into. Being from the maritime side of things, it was a new thing for me to talk about a dog fence. But I learnt quickly that pastoralists across my region had been upset for many years about the lack of investment in, lack of care for, lack of understanding of, lack of consultation on and lack of pretty much anything to do with a dog fence. This had affected sheep stocks in particular and a lot of other pastoral-type situations. The Minister for Regional Development was very quick to get up and running on the issue and held a wild dog forum, which I was honoured to attend. It brought together people from right across the regions who got to work very quickly. One successful project that benefited from the pool of funds the minister made available is the dog fence in Kalgoorlie, which received \$2 million, and not too long ago, I was happy to be with the minister to see a section of the Kalgoorlie Pastoral Alliance cell fence get underway.

A lot of things about this project go to the heart of how the McGowan government approaches such projects. It makes sure that there is local content, local providers and local procurement, and that everyone from the local area gets a go at that project. Local rangers did excellent work to remove the old fence, which was quite a job, and to clear the area the fence was to go through. Local contractors did the work. Some of the fence work in Southern Cross was done by a local Aboriginal contractor. These projects have been beneficial for small local businesses and give credibility to the organisations involved. Small local businesses are able to compete for state government work that will be done locally. I think is a really great thing that they have been able to capitalise on these local projects in their region.

Another great project we are full steam ahead on is Aboriginal ranger programs. These programs are amazing. Recently, I had the honour of attending the Southern Desert Ranger Forum with my electorate officer, George Foulkes-Taylor. We went out to Lorna Glen conservation reserve, which was amazing to say the very least. It was a great experience to be there with more than 120 rangers from around the state. There were also some from South Australia and the Northern Territory. They all came in their four-wheel drives, with their swags in the back, ready to go. We brought our swags along and were able to roll them out and sleep under the stars for the night. It was great to see their expertise and learn about their culture, and everything else that goes into land management and horticulture. It makes me proud to know that our investment is having a really positive outcome.

Whilst we were there the kids from the school in Wiluna came out on the bus. It was just amazing! They got off the bus, yelling and screaming, and went over to the rangers, who started to explain to them why they were out there and what they were doing. TAFE was there and the work that was being done was going towards some people's certification. Different services were taking advantage of this great initiative. The government has invested \$18.7 million in Aboriginal ranger programs alone. I think that is a huge success, and we need to continue to drive these types of projects. There are rangers in Wiluna, out in Norseman and in the Central Desert—they are everywhere. I think they are doing a fabulous job getting connection between departments and people who have thousands of years of history with the land we are on. The type of expertise they provide cannot be just bought; it has to be allowed to foster and grow. I think the ranger program will continue to be great moving forward into the future.

I do not have much time. There are many great projects and I get a bit passionate about them. We opened a great one the other day. I was with the Minister for Transport, Rita Saffioti, when we launched one of our election commitments, that being the road section between Anzac Drive and Gatacre Drive. I knew I would stuff up the pronunciation of "Gatacre" because I got it wrong on the day! It is a really dangerous section of road coming off Great Eastern Highway and heading into Kalgoorlie.

Hon Alanna Clohesy interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Yes, I did bugger that one up, but we will move on!

A lot of truckies and businesses—everyone—are really excited about that project. It is underway. Main Roads has done a lot of work to get it to where it is and I think it is going to be pretty good going into the future.

We also have \$160 000 allocated to the Aboriginal mining academy, which Carey Mining is going to run. This is critical, because we always ask mining companies about how much Aboriginal employment they have. I have seen across different industries how hard it is and how sometimes not enough effort is put into ensuring that the right things are being done, such as pre-employment, medical tests and all the other stuff that needs to be take place. There are challenges, particularly in Indigenous communities, with things such as drivers' licences and criminal

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records due to not paying fines—stuff that needs to be navigated through. Some companies just do not bother doing it and say it is too hard. Do not get me wrong; some other companies do a good job. Carey Mining originally came from Tropicana just through becoming a contractor. It is now massive. Daniel Tucker is doing a great job there trying to get together an academy where Aboriginal people in the area can train and be placed into mining companies. It is a really, really good scheme. It is \$160 000 very well spent.

We also have \$11.7 million for two family and domestic violence hubs. One of them will be in Kalgoorlie. It was very well accepted by the community. Domestic violence is not to be tolerated or accepted in the community and it needs to be addressed. This community hub is going to give more opportunities to people to get the services they require collaboratively in one hit, rather than having to go to different services. The services in Kalgoorlie at the moment do a fabulous job in ensuring that community members are being looked after.

It has been a very busy two years and there is a lot more I could go through, but I am running out of time. One thing I want to announce is that I am very happy that we have had ministers come and go through the region flat out since 2017. The Premier has been out there, as has the deputy Premier. Hon Alannah MacTiernan is always out there. We have a community cabinet coming up very shortly and all the ministers will be coming out to see some of the great projects we have been doing and announce where we are heading. As we have always done since we got into power, we will give the opportunity to community members in the goldfields region to have a direct voice here in Parliament. Regional WA is in a great position. I believe that the McGowan government is doing an awesome job in regional Western Australia and we will continue to do that whilst we are here in government.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [12.18 pm]: I thank Hon Laurie Graham and Hon Kyle McGinn for bringing forward this motion and speaking about the really important work we are doing in regional Western Australia. We went into the election with around \$800 million worth of commitments for regional Western Australia, and we are well and truly on target to deliver those. In addition, since we have been in government we have over time seen new needs and opportunities emerge, and we are certainly not confined only to our election commitments in regional Western Australia. Hon Laurie Graham spoke very well and he and Hon Darren West are really putting in a particular effort for the midwest. They have spoken about the investments that the government has made, and we have great optimism about that region. As has been mentioned, we have made a really important commitment of \$10 million for the Abrolhos marine park, which will be very important. Very early on in the piece we committed \$6 million for an airport upgrade at Geraldton and we are working very closely with the Mid West Ports Authority and the Mid West Development Commission to see how we can open up many more opportunities throughout that region—just as we did last time we were in government, through our very strategic investments in the Geraldton port and the southern transport corridor. We also opened up the iron ore industry and cut costs for the grain industry.

I want to run through a few other things. We made a commitment of some \$15.3 million for the upgrade of infrastructure and dredging at Broome port to enable large cruise vessels to reliably get in there. Broome is absolutely a tourism destination of choice for cruise vessels, and cruise vessel operators have for some time very much wanted reliable access to that port, but access has not always been possible due to the depth of the harbour, and that has proved to be difficult. We have committed \$15.3 million to a dredging project and I believe that is due to start very shortly. That project will drive tourism in that region. We are also working to provide a sealed road on the Dampier peninsula, and we are working with Indigenous communities, in great detail and with great care, to ensure that Aboriginal communities on the Dampier peninsula road will be protected and well placed to gain benefits from the tourism that will be opened up as a result of developing that road.

To flick down to the Pilbara, I turn now to the Karratha–Tom Price road. We completed the first two stages last time we were in government. In the eight and a half years of the Barnett government, not a single cent was spent on that road; it was absolutely bizarre. This was at a time when the Pilbara was providing funding for this state, yet the previous government would not move on that road. I am pleased to say that the government is now working with and putting pressure on the federal government for this road project, and we have secured funding for it.

Interestingly, we also have funding—part state, part commonwealth—for a really important road around Browns Range to enable a dysprosium mine. I note that an article on the front page of today's *The West Australian* talks about strategic minerals. The dysprosium, praseodymium and neodymium mine up in Browns Range is a fantastic case in point of a site at which there are these rare earth elements. Through the support we are giving the fantastic company Northern Minerals, it has been able to get its pilot plant and processing facility up and running, and hopefully now will move forward to the next stage.

We are also committed to the Port Hedland marina. We have been working with Kevin Michel and have brought the community along with us to deliver this facility. This facility in Port Hedland has been dreamed about and talked about for at least 25 years. This facility will greatly elevate the amenity of Port Hedland, which the community deserves for the contribution that area has made to the wealth of this state. This facility was promised by the Barnett government in both the 2013 and 2017 elections. However, between 2013 and 2017, virtually nothing happened. There was certainly no detailed planning. In the two years in which we have been in office, our

government has knuckled down and done the work, and under the guidance of Brendan Hammond, chair of the Pilbara Development Commission, together with Kevin Michel, we have been able to bring this project to the point at which we are optimistic that the physical construction of the marina will get underway next year.

I have only a few minutes left, but I want to talk about some of the issues raised by Hon Kyle McGinn. A properly trained and resourced local procurement officer is now located in each development commission, and working with a local procurement team within the Department of Regional Development, to ensure that we take advantage of every opportunity. I want to give an example of how it is possible to leverage off an opportunity. The government decided, as part of the wild dog action plan, that it would undertake a \$5 million renovation of the existing state barrier fence. We wanted to give Aboriginal communities in the regions an opportunity to participate in this significant state government investment, so we called together all the Aboriginal businesses along the existing dog fence, from the north of the state down to the east, and put to them that \$5 million was available over the next four years if they wanted to tender for this work, and set out a process by which that would happen. I have to say that Hon Kyle McGinn and I have seen the most amazing success stories. Linny Forrest in Southern Cross, and a group of young men who have come out of prison, have completed their 27 kilometres of fence. Grant Simpson and his team, including the notable “Mangoes” Mongoo, have completed their first 51 kilometres at Yalgoo and are now taking up further projects. Michael Hayden and his group further south have successfully completed their work. A project that was designed to help farmers and pastoralists deal with the problem of wild dogs has enabled local Aboriginal communities to train guys to run their own fencing business, and hopefully with a bit more training on the business side, that will be an ongoing asset and resource for those communities.

We are trying very hard to ensure that every dollar we spend in the regions is leveraged and that we provide the broadest possible opportunities. I thank members for raising these issues today. We are very proud of the work we are doing in regional Western Australia.

HON DR SALLY TALBOT (South West) [12.28 pm]: I want to speak very strongly in favour of this motion, and I thank Hon Laurie Graham for bringing it to this place. There will be a bit of a battle between the regional members on this side of the house to get the call today, because we all have a lot to say about this matter. I met Hon Laurie Graham only when he became a member of Parliament and came into this place, he being from the north of the state and me being from the south. I know him to be a very polite and courteous man. He showed that at the beginning of his comments when he said that he was surprised at hearing some of the negative commentary from members opposite about the extent of support and the number of resources that this McGowan Labor government is putting into the regions. I am not as polite as Hon Laurie Graham and I say that the peddling of lies and mistruths about this government’s spending in the regions is appalling; it is absolutely disgraceful. To members opposite who do not feel themselves constrained to tell the truth when they speak in their electorates, I repeat the distinctly unparliamentary words of former Prime Minister of Australia Julia Gillard who, when addressing the National Press Club, was asked for her advice to people in the community who were talking about things that were not true. She said, “Don’t write crap.” She went on to say, “If you do, retract it and correct the record.” I say that to all the Liberal and National Party members and the crossbenchers sitting opposite who go into the regions and talk about Labor’s level of spending on resources and projects, because it is simply not true. I am very pleased to have the opportunity today, in the limited time available, to very quickly put some of those issues on the record.

I also want to make some other comments about the approach that this government has taken to funding the regions. Although I will not spend more than half a minute talking about the past, the baton that Hon Alannah MacTiernan picked up when she became Minister for Regional Development in 2017 was a very grubby, small baton that had been used for all kinds of nefarious purposes for eight and a half years. The whole royalties for regions program was teetering on the brink of disaster, as the Langoulant report showed graphically in Mr Langoulant’s comments about the way royalties for regions funding was organised throughout the state. Indeed, I have made the point in this place several times before that I have heard many off-the-record comments from people in the South West Region that there was pressure from the previous government to dig around and find projects because the envelope of money was sitting there, waiting to be spent. That was not good enough. It was a real challenge for Hon Alannah MacTiernan, and one that she above anybody else I have seen in that portfolio was capable of picking up and running with and fixing, and she has indeed done that. When my regional colleagues talk about the high regard the community has for Hon Alannah MacTiernan’s work, I can only concur and say that it is breathtaking on occasions. I always used to say that I dreaded sharing a platform with Hon David Templeman, because he was always a very hard man to follow to the microphone, but now I have to say the same thing about Hon Alannah MacTiernan, because she is —

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: Because she won’t give it to you.

Hon Dr SALLY TALBOT: It is hard to get it from her; that is absolutely true. I thank Hon Matthew Swinbourn for that comment. I would not have said that myself, of course.

A few years ago when I was at a big celebration in Albany for the Centenary of Anzac, I was following Hon Alannah MacTiernan as she walked down the main street, and thousands of people who were in Albany that day were chanting her name. It was a bit daunting to be the local member for that region. I am pleased to say that

that respect and support for her has only grown since she has been in this job. I want to give one small example of that from where I live, in Denmark, on the south coast. We found ourselves in a very difficult position a few years ago when a number of good projects that had received funding from the previous government could not, for various reasons that I do not have time to go into now, meet their time lines. I was on the phone to Hon Alannah MacTiernan within hours of her being given the regional development portfolio to talk to her about ways in which we might help the local community to make the very best of the funds that it had been given.

Those of us who have spent time in government know that reallocating government resources can sometimes be one of the toughest tasks we are asked to do. Trying to reallocate funds is very, very difficult once a project has been assessed and funding given. But Hon Alannah MacTiernan took on that task and has managed to deliver for the Denmark community, grounded as it is in providing for not only its local community—its residents—but also the huge tourist population that descends on Denmark only two or three times a year and puts enormous stress on local capacities. Hon Alannah MacTiernan has made sure that the Denmark community is very well resourced to handle the expansion of tourism over the next decade or so. The money that she has put into developing the Greens Pool and Elephant Rocks areas in William Bay National Park in particular has been absolutely stunning. I know that Hon Stephen Dawson is one of the people who has helped to facilitate the improvements in William Bay National Park and I thank him for that. Having ministers in the Labor government's cabinet who are regional members, such as Hon Stephen Dawson and Hon Mick Murray, has been of inestimable value to regional members such as me. We know that the voice of regional Western Australia is heard loud and clear around the cabinet table and that is one reason why one of the longest media statements members will see from the last two budgets has been made by Hon Alannah MacTiernan talking about funding for regional Western Australia. It is a very impressive document.

I have a couple of statements here that I will draw on very briefly to conclude my comments. The reality is that the McGowan Labor government's 2019–20 state budget includes \$4.2 billion in royalties for regions funding across regional Western Australia over the next four years. An amount of \$5.6 billion will be invested in regional infrastructure over the next four years. A large part of that will go into the great southern in the South West Region. It would be extremely remiss of me not to pay tribute to the local Labor members in that area, with Don Punch as the member for Bunbury; Mick Murray continuing his work in Collie–Preston; Peter Watson continuing the great work he has done in Albany; Robyn Clarke in Murray–Wellington; and David Templeman. Having five Labor lower house members in my electorate of South West Region results in budget papers containing pages and pages of spending commitments in those regions. Those local members have fought tooth and nail to get that funding to deliver on the priorities that they understand their local community needs. I take my hat off to each and every one of them for the way in which they have been able to deliver for their local area.

In the very short time that remains, I want to acknowledge two other programs that perhaps will not be mentioned by my colleagues in this place because the lists are so long. I want to make particular comment about the regional local content initiative. It is one of my passions. It not only promotes the idea of local content, but also adds substance to the idea, so that every regional and metropolitan member of both houses understands what a significant contribution and a stupendous difference a genuine commitment to local content—getting things made and fixed by people who live near those projects—makes to a local community. Hand in hand with that regional local content initiative is the regional traineeship program in which 45 organisations have already been funded to deliver traineeship programs on the ground locally in small country communities throughout regional Western Australia. A number of them are in the south west. In the current budget year, we have \$2 million to encourage young people to stay in their communities while they retrain and skill up.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [12.38 pm]: I, too, would like to acknowledge and congratulate Hon Laurie Graham on the high-quality motion that he has brought to the house today. We want to talk about the positive impact that our government is having on regional Western Australia, which probably explains why no opposition members have spoken on this motion. It is a positive motion that talks about positive things, and all we have heard from the opposition over the last two years is whingeing, complaining and negativity about the regions. I am over it and I think regional Western Australians are as well. We are going to talk up the regions during the time allocated for this motion, and I thank the honourable member for bringing it forward. In 2017, we were elected with the most regional members of any party in the Parliament, and that has enabled us to address a lot of the issues we found in regional Western Australia. Although I acknowledge that the previous government spent a lot of money, it was predominantly on low-hanging fruit and vote-buying projects. None of the really heavy issues were addressed during those eight and a half years of the Barnett Liberal–National government. I am proud to say that our government is getting on with things. We are getting on with looking for real work and real business opportunities for Aboriginal people in the regions. That is tracking along particularly well. We have an outstanding Minister for Regional Development—one of the most revered in the Parliament, known by her first name all across the state. She has a great reputation for getting things done and getting on with it.

Hon Alanna Clohesy: It is a well-earned reputation.

Hon DARREN WEST: Absolutely—that reputation is not just given; it has to be earned. Minister MacTiernan has done a fantastic job living up to that reputation right across regional Western Australia. Again, I point out the contrast between the positivity of Minister MacTiernan and the negativity, whining and talking down of the regions by members opposite. It is plain for all to see, and I think regional Western Australia is really starting to respond to the positivity shown towards regional areas by this government. I think the worst is over in the regions. Things were dire when we came into government, but the worst is over.

There are some legacy projects that I am particularly proud of. Finally, the upgrade of the Geraldton Health Campus is happening under Labor. That \$70 million upgrade will fix all the immediate issues and address some of the issues that have been hanging around for many years in Geraldton. We are also upgrading hospitals in Northam and Merredin. Health is a very important issue for us in regional Western Australia. We know that there are challenges in delivering health services, but new infrastructure helps to address those challenges.

We are rebuilding the agricultural research capability in Western Australia. It was gutted by the previous government, with the halving of the number of staff in the then Department of Agriculture and Food, and research was the biggest casualty of that. We are rebuilding the agricultural research capacity of the department and the government.

Hon Martin Aldridge interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Robin Chapple): Order!

Hon DARREN WEST: There is a very direct and tangible link between investment by government in agricultural research and increased productivity. That has been clearly demonstrated in Germany and Brazil. It is still a mystery to me why the previous government gutted the research capacity of the former Department of Agriculture and Food. I still do not know why that happened, but we are rebuilding that agricultural research capacity with a \$45 million cash injection. I know that researchers right across the state are delighted that they can now go and do what they are passionate about, and find better ways forward for us, as we deal with the very real issue of climate change across our marginal agricultural areas. I am not using that word unfairly, but I think that, compared with the rest of the world, our climate and farming systems are marginal, and we need to find new and innovative ways to compete with places such as the Black Sea states, Europe and America. We will do that because we are rebuilding the agricultural capacity of the department.

We are delivering high-speed, enterprise-grade broadband. This is a great legacy project. Long after the McGowan government ceases to exist, this project will remain. We are delivering broadband speeds to farmers in the midwest, but soon spreading to other areas, six times what is required to run Netflix. I live in the regions —

Hon Martin Aldridge: Tell us about Twitter.

Hon DARREN WEST: Is it not interesting that, while I am talking about positive things —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order! Can the member resume his seat for a minute? The interjections are getting ferocious. I do not particularly appreciate that, and I am sure *Hansard* does not.

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Mr Acting President. I will make the point on that interjection that this demonstrates very clearly to everyone listening or reading today's *Hansard* that while this government is focused on developing the state of Western Australia for the future, the National Party is concerned about my Twitter account. That shows the very real and tangible difference between the Nationals and the McGowan government, which is working to address issues with broadband, trying to prevent wild dog attacks and rebuild our sheep flocks, building new hospitals, delivering education assistants back into schools, running a genuine local content program, promoting Aboriginal ranger projects, creating more national parks and rebuilding our road network, and what is the National Party focused on? The National Party is focused on a Twitter account that I closed a year ago. I encourage the National Party to keep focused on my Twitter account and to stay fascinated by my social media accounts because while its members are doing that, they are not engaging with the people in their electorates. We are engaging with the people in our electorates. We are working for them and rebuilding the regions after the Nationals' eight and a half years of seeing nothing in the regions but low-hanging fruit.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members, order! Hon Darren West is inviting interjections. I do not think that is beneficial to the contribution he is making.

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Mr Acting President. I shall take your sage advice and stop inviting interjections.

I talked about our Local Projects, Local Jobs program. The biggest criticism I used to get from business groups about governments was that there was a local content policy but no government actually implemented it—until the McGowan government took office. Now we are actively changing the scope of projects such as the Geraldton

hospital project so that we can extend those time lines to actively engage with local businesses and workers to help build local projects. It should not be something seen as a bit out there; it should be obvious. However, in the last eight years of the Barnett Liberal–National government, it spent 16 per cent of royalties for regions money on tenders awarded to regional companies. That is a disgrace—16 per cent. The big benefit from these projects is getting local jobs and local employment and encouraging people back to the regions. That is what we are doing. While the opposition complains and talks the regions down and discourages people from moving to the regions, this government is doing exactly the opposite. The government's local content program is working particularly well and getting people to move out of the metropolitan area and into the regions. We are one of the most urbanised jurisdictions anywhere at about 78 per cent, I believe. We want to get some of those people to move back to the regions, and to do that we need to create employment opportunities for them. That is what our government is about. The work on the Geraldton hospital will be broken down into small contracts that will enable local businesses—there are some fantastic local businesses and workers in Geraldton—to build that hospital. I am particularly proud of that.

We are rebuilding the tourism industry, which was decimated under the previous government. We are establishing direct flights from overseas destinations. We are working on reducing the cost of airfares in the regions, and that has been particularly successful for Karratha, Broome, Esperance and Albany. We are working also on a solution for Geraldton. As a government, we are working on bringing down the cost of regional airfares and attracting people to visit the regions and spend some money. Local residents also appreciate the work that we are doing to lower airfares.

We have a lot to be proud of. It is a very positive government and we are doing some very positive things in the regions. I say to the opposition: think it, but do not say it. If members opposite do not have anything positive to say about regional Western Australia, they should not say anything. The government is trying to talk up the regions and encourage people to live there. We are all getting a bit tired of the whingeing and negativity from the other side of the house. Members of the rural media are also villains in this because they are very quick to write up their press releases and articles as stories when they are not actually stories and a lot of it is not even true.

This government is having a positive effect on regional Western Australia. I thank Hon Laurie Graham for his very good motion. He is a great colleague in the agricultural regions. Let us talk up the regions and get on with it.

HON LAURIE GRAHAM (Agricultural) [12.49 pm] — in reply: I would like to acknowledge the contributions made by my colleagues Hon Kyle McGinn, Minister MacTiernan, Hon Dr Sally Talbot and Hon Darren West. They touched on a number of issues, some of which were sensitive to people because I certainly did not hear the same level of interjection during my comments. These are all real problems that are in regional WA when people talk it down. I would especially like to acknowledge Hon Kyle McGinn's contribution on the dog fence and the Aboriginal ranger program. These projects have delivered significant employment opportunities for people in the regions and for the Aboriginal community, in particular. That employment is very welcome in those regions, and, as pointed out by Minister MacTiernan, the skills that they will learn as a result of those opportunities will have an ongoing legacy. Minister MacTiernan talked about local procurement, of which there did not seem to be much in the past. Hon Darren West briefly touched on the matter of what the percentage will be in the future, and I am sure that the role of those officers in getting within the region and being very active with contracts will have a significant impact. The local procurement facilitators have helped increase the local people's understanding of the tender process. More and more people are interested in getting on the register and trying to upgrade themselves so they can tender at the next scale up from their current position on the list. Hon Dr Sally Talbot and Hon Darren West sent a very strong message: we need to talk up the regions. Hon Dr Sally Talbot stated that \$4.2 billion in royalties for regions funding and \$5.6 billion in contracts are being rolled out in regional WA over four years. This is a significant increase in regional expenditure. From time to time, we bicker about what should be inside and what should be outside the RforR cap, but on our side we have focused on servicing regional WA, and which pot of money it comes from really does not matter as long as the intent of that fund is met.

One other issue that was not touched on was the Outback Way, which is a very good initiative. I know people are trying to be involved in the contract for stage 1, which is about 40 kilometres of the low-grade bitumen road that will be initially built. Using Aboriginal and local employment is a key factor in that contract, and that will be a tremendous boost to the regions.

I ran out of time during my first contribution, so I missed acknowledging Hon Mick Murray and Hon David Templeman, who are passionate supporters of the midwest region and regional WA. They are tremendous to have within cabinet and are supportive members. Services have been rolled out in regional WA that meet the needs of regional WA.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.