

JOBS — REGIONS

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

I refer to the Cook Labor government's continuing efforts to create sustainable regional jobs in a diversified economy.

- (1) Can the minister advise how this government's efforts to diversify regional economies will provide long-term opportunities for regional Western Australians?
- (2) Can the minister advise how these efforts are accelerating new economic development opportunities in the regions?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH replied:**

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for her question. In fact, I thank all our regional members for their unwavering commitment to regional WA and for creating jobs in the regions and looking after their regions. It is a unified team right around regional Western Australia.

**Ms R. Saffioti:** And consistent.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** It is consistent. We are committed to a shared vision for regional Western Australia that is about sustainable regional jobs for the future by diversifying the economy of regional Western Australia to increase opportunities and build resilience for the future and, importantly, to create a quality of life across our regions that provides a long-term basis for strong and vibrant communities. That is what our regional members stand for.

On the back of that, the financial discipline and the teamwork that has been shown by the Cook Labor government has built the foundation for investors wanting to flock to regional WA. Everywhere I go, on the back of the infrastructure we are building, the services we are providing, I see investors coming along and saying, "We want to be part of the action; there is a lot happening."

I was delighted when the Kimberley Cotton Company ordered WA's first \$60 million cotton processing facility for the East Kimberley, heralding a long-term future in the cotton industry for the East Kimberley—a real sign of confidence. Tassal, the nation's largest aquaculture producer, has invested in Cone Bay in the West Kimberley, providing an opportunity for hundreds of jobs in the member for Kimberley's region. I know the member for Kimberley is very excited about those developments. Right around regional Western Australia, whether it is Albemarle Australia in the south west or the activity in the goldfields area, we are seeing lots of activity. I will have some exciting news for the Peel region very shortly, but the minister for Mandurah—I mean the member for Mandurah—is not here.

**Ms R. Saffioti:** He is the minister for Mandurah!

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Yes, I was thinking about the "minister for Mandurah"—he is probably a bit like that really! I digress.

Not only are we looking at the large end of industry, not only is large industry wanting to come in, but we have been able to support, through our regional economic development scheme, over 359 small and medium enterprises around regional Western Australia. I have just come back from announcing six recipients in the Peel region doing some fantastic things in medium and small enterprise, supporting those large industries, getting on the back on those large industry investments, but also looking at opportunities to provide niche services, build capacity, build capability and provide jobs in regional Western Australia. There have been some fantastic ones. I will give just a few examples. In manufacturing and innovation, there have been 72 manufacturing-related projects, building capability in local communities so that the product does not have to be referred back for manufacture in Perth or overseas—building capability locally.

One that I know members opposite—the Liberal and National Parties—will be really pleased about is that \$8.8 million has gone into food and beverage-related projects. Importantly, I was there with the member for Collie–Preston when the Kingston Rest Farm indoor sheep feeding project was awarded funding to develop a large-scale indoor sheep feedlot that will directly support the export industry through V&V Walsh, one of the largest abattoirs in Western Australia. We are seeing it in the areas of community services and childcare. I was delighted to be in one of my home towns, Moora, next to Collie, where I started my career. I was with the shire president congratulating Stegosaurus, which is developing and establishing a new childcare centre in Moora. Everywhere I go in regional Western Australia people are looking at local opportunities to establish childcare centres. We were delighted to do that.

In the member for Pilbara's area, a grant was made to Red Dog Renewables, an Indigenous-owned business that is looking at setting up a maintenance and charging facility for the introduction of electric vehicles in the Karratha and Pilbara area. These are really exciting and innovative projects. That is built on the back of the positive investment climate that this government is creating for regional Western Australia.

I looked for some alternatives from the Liberal and National Parties. The first port of call was, of course, the recent state conference. I saw a lot of weeping and wailing there about our government. I can only assume it was about the very positive things we are doing—they are upset about it. There was one gem in there. The leader was quoted as saying that their strength lies in their unity while others might attempt to throw discord. We know where that was coming from, do we not? It was the member sitting next to the Leader of the Opposition. That was a bit of a shock, I think. Could I find one decent policy in relation to job creation in regional Western Australia? I could not, so I cannot answer the second part of the member for Collie–Preston’s question because there seems to be a complete absence of policy or an alternative to the very strong policies this government is delivering.