SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATHEMATICS — SKILLS STRATEGY

Statement by Minister for Science

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Science) [9.18 am]: Under the WA Labor Plan for Jobs, Labor promised to deliver Western Australia's first science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills strategy, which would build Western Australia's STEM skills, strengthen our economy, address the needs of our future workforce and capitalise on the creation of job opportunities. "Future jobs, future skills—Driving STEM skills in Western Australia" is the realisation of that commitment. Seventy-five per cent of the fastest growing jobs in our economy require STEM skills. Technological change, automation and a diversifying economy mean that every Western Australian needs some level of STEM skills. This strategy also considers retraining for workers at risk of displacement by automation into new areas in the workforce.

Western Australia's first ever state STEM skills strategy aims to ensure everyone can develop the skills to embrace a technological future. Of particular importance is this strategy that seeks to improve those under-represented in STEM. Women, people from low socioeconomic areas and Aboriginal people are all significantly under-represented in STEM careers and education. Only 16 per cent of STEM qualified people in Australia are female, with the number even lower in the vocational education and training sector. Aboriginal people represent fewer than one per cent of higher education engineering and science students. These figures need to improve.

Through the strategy we will work together with stakeholders to break down the barriers and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate in a STEM future. We are already implementing this strategy through a suite of programs that we have committed more than $3.3 million towards. This includes $738 000 for digital and technology skills programs and $1.96 million for professional development of teachers to deliver quality STEM education. This strategy will serve as a cross-sector framework for industry, VET, university, school education and community sectors to work together to respond to these challenges, particularly with industry and the more than 120 informal STEM education service providers out there running STEM programs. I thank the 26 expert panel members ,who gave up their time to develop this strategy, for their commitment and their work.