

STATE ECONOMY — REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GRANTS PROGRAM

726. Ms L. DALTON to the Minister for Regional Development:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's efforts to create jobs and diversify Western Australia's economy.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house how this government is supporting the growth and development of regional small businesses throughout the regional economic development grants program?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this program is creating more jobs and career opportunities for regional Western Australians?

Mr D.T. PUNCH replied:

- (1)–(2) I certainly will. I thank the member for the question and also for her incredible advocacy for her regional community. Thank you, member. I am incredibly proud of the record levels of employment that the Cook government has created in not only regional Western Australia, but also Western Australia as a whole. We have been able to do that through responsible budget management. That has enabled us to invest in record levels of infrastructure, attract new industry into the regions, maximise opportunities in health care—as we have heard from the Minister for Health—and look at opportunities in education right across the board. We know, members, that that has created jobs, but that is not the only story. Small businesses, medium-sized businesses, local governments and community organisations contribute to the diversity of economic life in our regions. That is why we created the regional economic development grants system. In total, we have provided over \$50 million of grants over the nine years that we have been in office. We have co-invested in community and small business-driven projects that drive economic growth in the regions and employment opportunities, and create diversity that creates vibrancy. It means supporting individual projects that contribute to sustainable jobs and, importantly, build career opportunities. This is not just about a job; it is about building a career in regional Western Australia so that people stay in the regions, build businesses in the regions and have a future vision for the regions. That is what we want to see. This is about increasing business productivity and replacing the need to import skills and capability from outside the region, helping to make regions self-sufficient.

Across regional WA, we have co-invested with over 320 projects, and there will be more in the coming weeks. I was recently in Geraldton with the member, where we announced three successful projects from round 6 of the RED grants program, totalling \$606 000. Over the last five rounds, we have provided over \$4 million worth of grants into the midwest alone. I want to talk about one fantastic example—Dongara Marine. It is an absolutely superb example.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It did. It is building a few ships. Dongara Marine has received \$250 000 to increase vessel-building capability through the purchase of two cranes for enhanced lifting capability, helping to position it for Australian defence maritime assurance programs into the future. Dongara Marine has been fantastic in its employment. It currently employs 64 personnel and is projected to go to 90, but, more importantly, it will offer apprenticeships for shipwrights, fabricators and marine electricians. Jobs in all sorts of aspects of the marine industry will be offered in Dongara in regional WA, building capability and making Dongara Marine competitive not only in the locality, but right across Western Australia and Australia.

The grants program is about boosting local manufacturing, but we do not stop there. It is a diverse program. Abrolhos Island Oysters has received just over \$200 000 to create a new oyster industry for WA. That funding will assist with the completion of farming and processing facilities before the 2024–25 season. Geraldton is going to be the place for oysters as well as Albany, member. With that equipment, Abrolhos Island Oysters will be able to process up to three million oysters each harvest season as well as having excess capacity to process oysters for other producers in the area. That will create five full-time jobs and four casual jobs in aquaculture. What a fantastic outcome!

Over the five years of RED grants, we have funded 86 projects from across the state in the food and beverage area alone to the value of \$8.8 million, helping to support downstream processing of our ag and food sector, something I know that members opposite might have an interest in. They were at the Buy West Eat Best event last night in droves, so the proof is in the pudding, members. Our approach to regional development is based on genuine engagement at all levels. It is based on engagement with big industry, local government and local business people who have a vision for the future of the region and want a helping hand. We have been there to give it to them, creating genuine, sustainable futures for each of our towns in regional Western Australia.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition with the last question.