

CORONAVIRUS — KEY REGIONAL INDUSTRIES — PROTECTION

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson) informed the Assembly that he was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Nationals WA seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA) [2.43 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the state government to act immediately to introduce practical measures to protect key regional industries from the impact of COVID-19 such as agriculture, the resources sector, tourism and small business and the communities that rely on them.

As we have discussed over the last two days, we all understand that this is a challenging time for everyone. We are, as the Premier has said, leaders in our communities and we must respond appropriately to the flurry and constantly changing nature of this crisis as it emerges. Members in this place—certainly, members on this side of the house—are not interested in adding to that real anxiety and concern in our communities. But we are in a place where it is appropriate to seek advice and clarification and confirmation of government plans to address the crisis of COVID-19 and the way that our community will be able to recover once the immediate health crisis has passed. Last week, we raised concerns about our regional health system. We raised concerns about the pressure it is experiencing, and this was without the rapidly escalating issues that COVID-19 is layering on top of that. I raised concerns again yesterday during the debate on the Supply Bill 2020 and also in person during the briefing that the Leader of the Opposition and I had from the Commissioner of Police, the director general of the Department of Health and members of the Premier's office about health, the stimulus package and how we can better assist to communicate some of the information coming from government as it responds. We will continue to push for greater clarity and certainty when it comes to that health response. Without doubt, that is concerning our community right now, but we are also seriously concerned about the impact —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: — this crisis is having on our communities, particularly from a regional Western Australia perspective. We feel that a number of sectors in that area are not being addressed or included in the public commentary or even behind the scenes, going by the discussions we have had with senior people in those sectors. We would like to use the opportunity that we have in this place to seek clarification from the government to ensure that this is made a priority and that plans are being put in place to manage some of the impacts that we already see.

I will leave it to the member for Moore to touch on the agricultural sector. We raised some of those concerns yesterday in the Supply Bill debate. I have heard commentary from the Premier about the resources sector. There is no doubt that it will need to be ready to ramp back up and take advantage of recovering global economies when this crisis passes. I think that the resources sector will be ready and, as the Premier has rightly pointed out, there is stability at the moment in that sector. But that sector will undoubtedly need to have, because of the sheer number of people it employs, ongoing discussions about how it can maintain that position, sustain its activities throughout the crisis and be ready to go when needed to ensure that we do not see massive job losses.

I take note of what the Premier said yesterday when asked whether the government would provide urgent financial assistance to small businesses that do not pay or meet that payroll tax threshold. The opposition and the Nationals are seriously concerned about this. This is a broad section of our community consisting of sole traders, microbusinesses and small businesses that do not meet that threshold that has already been addressed through the announcement of the first stimulus package. We hope that package will be added to over time and before it is too late—before many of these businesses fold up or wrap up and are lost from our communities. Yesterday, when asked about this by the member for Darling Range, the Premier said —

... one of the major things that can be done is consumers can continue to support our small businesses.

Yes, we absolutely agree with that —

The Minister for Small Business just said it. I have been saying it now for six weeks. Keep going to our cafes and our retailers. Keep going. There is no need not to. There is no need not to go and buy a coffee or buy lunch or have dinner. There is no need to desert these businesses. If people are going to buy a suit or a dress, or some products, or a gift or a birthday present, go and do it. If people are going to buy a new car or a used car, go and do it.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 18 March 2020]

p1585c-1595a

Ms Mia Davies; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Shane Love; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr David Templeman; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Paul Papalia

That is great advice, except that people are not doing it. The feedback that we are getting through the Small Business Development Corporation, in the most cursory of online searches and from our own communities is that those businesses are reaching out to us and telling us that they are seriously concerned that their customers have stopped supporting them already. I understand that the Premier of the state needs to stand and say, “Have confidence and go and spend your money. Continue to go down the main street and make purchases to support your small businesses.” We agree with that. We are saying that to our communities, but people are not doing that. We are very, very concerned that because there is no appropriate response to support these businesses, in particular those ones that do not fall into the categories the Premier raised, that they will be the first to fall out of our communities, and they will be lost and unable to recover.

We went to the Small Business Development Corporation’s website because we welcomed the announcement of the hotline for our small businesses to contact. We were trying to get a broader one-stop shop, but the Small Business Development Corporation moving in and providing this support through a hotline is a step in the right direction. However, posted on the website is comment after comment after comment from businesses that say that they do not fall into this category and have been left behind. I cannot read out some of them because they are not appropriate. People are saying, and I refer to my notes —

It would be nice to understand why businesses below the \$1M do not seem to matter

... I run a childrens play class a sole trader, my numbers have already halved....this won’t help at all.

... my picture framing shop will die from coronavirus before i even catch it!

... What about the small business that are sole traders?? Nothing!!

... On behalf of the other 95% of small businesses in Western Australia, thanks for nothing.

... I run a market stall business. All events cancelled so no income!

I am sure every member of Parliament is receiving comments like these. I have contacted and reached out to the small business sector in my electorate, and we have been doing this across regional Western Australia. *Hansard* will not be able to record this, but I have pages of business that are already under pressure. They are taking the time to make sure that I, as a member of Parliament, know exactly what it means for their business so that when I am meeting with senior members of government and advocating on their behalf, they know that their views are being heard. I do not want to put their names into *Hansard* because these businesses are still trying to survive. But I can tell members that from the conversation I raised yesterday, I have a list of at least 20 businesses that are seriously concerned about their capacity to survive for more than one month, possibly two. Some of them have seen 95 per cent of their business dry up already. People are choosing to stay away from events businesses, sole traders and anything to do with non-essential childcare or support services. Cafes in my community are stretched; it is like a ghost town. I am not saying that this is the responsibility of government. We all know that none of us can control COVID-19, but we can control the response to it. If we do not have some sort of response to support these small businesses that do not fall into the category in the stimulus package, I feel very much that some of the fabric of our community will be lost permanently, and it will be very, very hard to recover. The flow-on impact on our towns is very real, people will be unable to pay their mortgages, to keep on apprentices or to make sure that they are creating employment in our towns. It is quite simply devastating to read some of this correspondence from people that I know very well. I received this email this morning —

Just thought I would drop a line as a sole trader who is a little forgotten in this so called stimulus package

... I have had 2 markets cancelled just this last weekend ... I had to sell some of the products on my personal page to recoup some of the outlay of ingredients ... That does not include all the upcoming markets and now including —

A major festival that was to be held in the electorate —

I would have been attending ...

It has also affected my catering needs as a memorial service that was scheduled for this weekend ... has now been postponed ...

Limiting the number of people at funeral services is impacting on catering and events businesses in the small gig economy. This is being replicated across the state. If we do not act swiftly, Premier, to support these businesses, our economy and our communities may not recover. That is the message and our concerns. We are taking this opportunity to use the forum we have in this Parliament to seek guidance from government that this is being considered in the government’s forums—in the state cabinet and the national cabinet, and government departments. How can we pull every lever available to ensure that we do not see these good people going to the wall and our communities crumbling? I do not think I am over egging it. Certainly, that is the concern coming through to every single one of us.

When we talk about it from a regional perspective, obviously we add on some unique complexities. As we discussed yesterday in relation to the health response, transport opportunities and freight connections for people who live in remote areas of regional Western Australia start to pile on when people are remote from this major metropolitan centre. This is why we are bringing this matter of public interest motion to the house today. It is not to incite greater anxiety or to deliver blame; it is simply saying, “Please don’t let the pleas of the small business community fall on deaf ears as we move forward. Let’s act swiftly.”

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [2.55 pm]: How can a freeze on future fees and charges be part of a stimulus package? As the Leader of the Nationals WA said, how can that support small businesses—that is, those sole traders, mums and dads, and individuals with businesses throughout regional Western Australia? The government announced a stimulus package, but I question the use of word “stimulus”. What is the government trying to stimulate here? The economy is suffering because of the COVID-19 virus. It is not about stimulating the economy; it is about saving our economy. It is about saving our small businesses and our tourism businesses so that something is left if the virus goes away in six months’ time. Small businesses in Western Australia need action now—that is, not just those businesses that can afford to pay payroll tax, but also those small businesses, particularly in regional Western Australia that are impacted by people not going to the regions now, and that had been impacted prior to this by a tanking economy because of a lack of investment. What we have here is a stimulus package—I question the use of the words “stimulus package”—that does not deal with the current situation. Small businesses are going to go to the wall in a very short period of time.

Today, I asked the Premier a question about the #DoItinWA tourism campaign. That campaign was sending mixed messages to the people of Western Australia: do not congregate with too many people; people should make sure they protect themselves; do not travel interstate or overseas, but go on holiday in regional Western Australia. Potentially, people would be passing on the virus to areas that cannot cope if people get it. That is the issue. Our health system in regional Western Australia cannot cope with an influx of people with the COVID-19 virus. The sensible and logical thing to do was to dump that campaign, but let us put that money back into regional tourism businesses that are seeing the tourism market collapse. One of the motels in town had 20 cancellations yesterday and 15 so far today. Another motel had 45 cancellations yesterday and 18 so far today. The seven caravan parks have had 30 per cent of bookings cancelled. One caravan park had 15 cancellations yesterday. People who rent their houses out are not getting anyone coming in.

Members and Premier, small tourism businesses in regional Western Australia need our help. Looking at stimulus packages across Australia, we see WA has payroll tax exemption for businesses of \$1 million to \$4 million and a \$17 000 one-off payment, but New South Wales has a \$2.3 billion stimulus package, including \$1.6 billion to keep people in jobs and payroll tax up to \$10 million and fees and charges of \$80 million waived for small businesses. Queensland has a \$500 million stimulus package with concessional loans of up to \$250 000 for businesses. That is what we need. We need businesses to be able to have concessional loans, particularly tourism businesses in regional Western Australia, so they can survive for the next six months or longer and pay their mortgages, rents and fees and charges, and, more importantly, keep their employees. What happens to the casual employees? What happens to the strip shops in regional Western Australia? They will be closed in no time unless we have real action from the state government ensuring we can help small businesses.

Nearly every tourism event, such as the Yalgoo Races, has been cancelled in Western Australia. There is the Mandurah Crab Fest and there are other events right across regional Western Australia. The state government should allow organisers to keep the tourism marketing money that it gives to them, because that work is not just for now, whether it is the races or other tourism events. Let them keep the money so they can plan for 12 months’ time and ensure they can keep these events running. It is critical for regional WA and for the volunteers involved.

One thing that has been lacking in this debate is mention of mental health. For businesses and their owners there is bankruptcy, redundancies, losses of property and assets, homelessness, joblessness, financial strain and self-isolation. There are all these hurdles that businesses in regional WA are facing now, yet the Premier and this government are not talking about small businesses in regional Western Australia and are not being sympathetic that they are going to the wall now. They cannot survive until a budget is handed down; they cannot survive for another week or two. We need action now.

Turning to utility costs, around the world governments are waiving water, power and gas fees. There is a still toilet tax for motels, hotels and regional businesses. They are paying a tax to have a toilet—not to flush or use a toilet, but to have a toilet. If there are 16 toilets at a motel, it costs the motel \$2 000 a month before they are even flushed, before any water is used, let alone the bands forcing them to pay the highest percentage of water charges. Places like Carnarvon are band 15. Businesses in regional towns cannot afford to pay water and power bills, especially when tourists are not coming and people are not moving because of the fear of contracting the virus. Regional businesses are suffering now. They need interest-free loans. They need utility costs waived to ensure they can survive this period so we can have businesses in the main streets of regional Western Australia and tourism operators when

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things pick up, because this will pass. When things pick up, we need to be able to promote tourism, as the Premier said, when we have the ability to do it. But if there are no products or businesses to help in that promotion of tourism, what do we do? It is about saving our businesses now. That is what this motion is about.

I turn to transport and aviation. Things are critical. Qantas, Virgin and Regional Express Airlines are saying they will go to the wall. Landing fees need to be waived, perhaps at Perth Airport and regional airports—perhaps for security screening as well. Is that what the state government is looking at? Is it looking at ways to subsidise and ease the burden of costs for airlines and local governments—perhaps for security screening at Perth Airport? The government needs to ease the burden for those aviation companies flying to regional Western Australia that are critical for transport connections, whether they be for health or visiting family and friends. We still need those planes to be able to fly to regional communities. The government should not let them go to the wall but should help them out financially. We need our modes of transport like buses and trains, and we need planes still flying to regional Western Australia. I call on this government to prioritise small business, tourism operators and the people of regional Western Australia to ensure that they have businesses left. We need to ensure there are tourism operators left and there are modes of transport such as planes left.

We need visas extended for agriculture and hospitality workers. Backpackers who help our industries need to have their visas extended for at least two years to ensure we can keep workers picking the fruit and veg and working in the cafes and the tourism industry in the future to help us recover from this very tough period.

MR D.C. NALDER (Bateman) [3.04 pm]: I stand to support the Nationals WA's motion. The McGowan government has a poor track record when it comes to looking after people in the bush. I am not talking about people of the regional cities where Labor may have an incumbent member; I am talking about all those other areas out there in the bush that have been forgotten. We do not have to look much further than the manipulation of the funding for royalties for regions, the attempted raid on the community resource centres, the closure of the Moora Residential College or the attempted closure of the Schools of the Air. That gives an indication of how much this government cares about the people of the bush, and it is not very much at all. Of the businesses of Western Australia, there are 150 000 sole traders, and a lot of them are our farmers, our fishermen, our orchardists, our shop owners and our small businesses out in the bush who keep farmers operating. Plenty of little businesses exist across regional Western Australia that are really concerned at this time. The question is: what is the government doing about it? The government announced a stimulus package, but there is nothing there for the 150 000 sole traders in Western Australia and there is nothing there for the small businesses with up to roughly 12 employees and payrolls of less than \$1 million per annum—absolutely nothing. The issue is that the concern of what is happening here goes before coronavirus; it goes way before coronavirus. The Premier might grandstand and talk about responsible government and acting responsibly, but where is the responsibility for the people out there who have been working hard for Western Australia to whom the government has not delivered anything? These concerns exist. If members have not been there, I encourage them drive down Great Southern Highway and look at how many small businesses and shopfronts are closed. They should drive through Narrogin and have a look. It is a concern, and the Premier is not doing anything about it for the people out there in regional Western Australia.

Now we have the coronavirus. Let me say this: the moisture content of the soil sitting in the northern and eastern wheatbelt is looking really good, but the farmers out there tell me that they are really concerned about the supply chain. They are about to start the seeding program. If the Premier is worried about our economy, the agricultural sector delivers a lot for Western Australia, but I have not heard him saying that the government is really concerned about the supply chain. Can farmers get their fertiliser, can they get their diesel, can they get the chemicals to ensure that these things are going ahead? That is what we want to hear from the Premier; that is, he is standing up for the people of regional Western Australia, they can have some confidence that there will be no disruption and they can go about their business in the appropriate way and continue delivering for the people of Western Australia, as they have done for a long time.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA) [3.07 pm]: The member for Bateman has outlined that farming is a very vital industry in Western Australia, and at the moment we are poised to have a good season after a very poor one throughout much of the region last year. Holding farmers back this year may be shortages of labour or those vital inputs that the member spoke about, particularly herbicides needed early to control the weeds and get the crop in. I think there is a role for the Department of Agriculture and Food and for the Premier and his office to ensure that supply chains to farmers for herbicides and fertilisers are available, because without those things, they will not be able to plant the crops that we so desperately need for income and to provide jobs. They provide income for rural communities such as the ones the member for Central Wheatbelt outlined where all those microbusinesses are suffering. They need an inflow of money. The only way they are going to get that is for farmers to have a decent crop.

The farming community is also very concerned about its labour situation. Many visa holders have now come to the end of their working time, and we ask that the Premier raise this with national cabinet. I understand he will be

back sitting around the national cabinet with all of the Premiers of this country and the Prime Minister on Friday, and I would like him to raise the issue of making sure that visa holders can continue to stay. The broadacre crops throughout extensive areas of my electorate and the horticulture in the Carnarvon area right through my electorate of Moore and down to the south west are vital to ensuring that the community of Western Australia has food. That is where the lettuce and tomatoes, and all the other fresh fruit and vegies, for Western Australia are grown. If they cannot get the labour and the imports, we will have a real problem with food—more than we have seen in recent times with the depletion of dry goods and toilet paper throughout the state because of raiding and hoarding by shoppers.

I also want to talk about the impact of those raiders coming into small country towns. I understand that on Tuesday, both supermarkets in Moora were inundated by a busload of shoppers from Perth who took scarce commodities from that town and returned to Perth. That is not good enough. Something needs to be done about this, because supply lines to country towns are already short. We have the ridiculous situation in which the food from Carnarvon comes down to Perth and then has to go back up to Carnarvon. These sorts of things need to be looked at. If people are going to raid the small shops in these towns, those shops will not be able to replenish the goods that they need to provide for their community. I commend some of the IGAs in my electorate. The Bindoon IGA is trying to ration goods so that those who cannot get to Perth or somewhere else to shop can have a chance to buy goods in the store. Even so, it has been reported that its shelves have been empty on many occasions, often, again, because of metropolitan shoppers selfishly coming into country areas and raiding those shops. It is not good enough and it needs to stop.

On the matter of farmers, we know that when the drought occurred in the eastern states, farm households were given a level of support. Again, I know this is not a state responsibility, but I know that the Premier talks with the Prime Minister on a regular basis about what needs to happen nationally, so I raise these matters with him as a conduit to the federal government in this regard. Small businesses in a small town such as Guilderton, Cervantes or Dongara in my electorate have been hit with a double whammy. The early impact of the coronavirus shut down the lobster industry and then the China market caused tourism to drop, and now there has been the complete cessation of tourism. The member for North West Central highlighted the number of cancellations. I have an email from an operator in Guilderton that refers to the fact that they will not get an Easter, so to speak. He does not know how he is going to pay his bills or his staff. The member for North West Central highlighted the fact that we are going to lose the fabric of small business in this state unless we do something to protect it. We are going to lose a whole generation of small business operators. When there is a turnaround in the market, although we have high commodity prices, hopefully farmers will have a good year and hopefully the government will help them to get their supply chains right and get the labour that they need to make it happen. We need to have entrepreneurs within the towns and the regions who can make things happen locally and employ people and get them back into the workforce.

I urge the Premier to discuss with the Prime Minister the idea that perhaps that starts to happen with farming communities in times of crisis whereby farmers are eligible for what is known as the farm household allowance from the federal government, which is a fortnightly payment similar to Newstart or the youth allowance, to make sure that those small businesses can put food on the table for their families. I know small business operators with young families who have no idea how they will pay their grocery bills going forward. They have given up on their businesses; they know that they cannot keep them alive. They are trying to keep their families alive now. When farmers are in this situation, a helping hand is extended, and I think that same helping hand needs to be extended through the federal government to many of our small businesses. Eventually, they will need welfare from the government because they will not have jobs. They will eventually be entitled to Newstart, but at that point they will be penniless. I would rather that we step in now to ensure that they are eligible for some assistance so that they can put food on the table for their families, which will then help the rest of the town because there will be money to spend at the grocery shop and the kids will be able to buy the goods needed to go to school and the community can continue to thrive. It is inhumane to consider that up to one million small businesses around the country could go under and those people will have no income and no way of feeding their families. We should look at the farm household allowance and financial counselling for those small business people.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier) [3.14 pm]: What is happening to small and medium enterprises across Australia is tragic. It is very distressing for us to watch this situation. It is shocking to see images of malls and shopping centres with very few customers, except for the supermarkets, and I feel deeply for all those businesses, particularly in the retail, hospitality and tourism sectors, and their associated parts of the economy. I have expressed that concern for a considerable number of weeks and have encouraged Western Australians and Australians to continue to consume products from the cafes, restaurants, pubs, retailers, dress shops, lottery kiosks, newsagents or whatever they may be across the community because these people are suffering.

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There are 230 000 or 240 000 of these businesses across Western Australia and what is occurring is shocking and tragic.

On Monday, we released a stimulus package, with far greater payroll tax cuts than were called for by industry or anybody else in Western Australia. We did far more with payroll tax relief than the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, the opposition or anybody else in Western Australia asked for to support businesses, particularly smaller ones. We have deferred payroll tax payments, we have provided \$17 500 payments to businesses with payrolls of between \$1 million and \$4 million, and we have brought forward the lift in the threshold, which, in effect, is a cut for 11 000 businesses in Western Australia. That was only one part of the measure. The other part, of course, is that there will be no increase in fees and charges, which will impact the budget by greater than \$400 million. That is essentially \$400 million that was budgeted for but is no longer budgeted for and is being given back to the community.

Further aspects of the stimulus package include the energy assistance payment and the like, and, as I have said, we are going to do more for the community. This comes on top of the seven initiatives that we have announced recently, which other states are now copying in effect. Other states are now copying the housing package and the maintenance package in hospitals and schools that we rolled out in the last couple of months of last year and the first couple of months of this year. The best part of \$1.5 billion or thereabouts of stimulus measures have been rolled out in the last few months. Last week, the commonwealth government announced a major stimulus package. I welcomed that and I congratulate the Prime Minister and the government on what they have done to support industry across the country. I suspect that the federal government will need to do a lot more and, to be honest, I am sure it will.

Governments can do only so much. As I said during question time, there is no point in bankrupting the state of Western Australia. We have to carefully husband our resources to do the things that work best, make sure that we continue to support our health system over the next six months or so, and make sure that we have capacity for when this crisis ends to boost industries and provide support when they need it, particularly the tourism sector with advertising campaigns, airline campaigns and matters of that nature. Having said that, we need to do more, and we will.

Yesterday, I called upon the banks, landlords and local governments. I understand that local governments are looking at what they can do. I have asked them not to put up rates and fees and charges on households next year. I expect that they will do that—I am certainly hopeful that they will do that. That would be some relief to households and small businesses. But the real people who can make a bigger difference are banks and landlords. Evicting tenants will only mean that landlords have an empty shop, an empty warehouse or an empty factory unit. It will not give them any income. There will not be others to come in, so evicting tenants because they cannot pay their rent will make it only worse for landlords. I urge landlords to think about that. There has been a history of some very hard-nosed landlords in this country over many years. I urge them to think about the fact that if they evict their tenants in the current crisis, they will not necessarily get another one. They are better off having someone in their premises than nobody. It is far better to have someone in their premises who is running their business, but giving them a rental holiday, rental reduction, deferral of their rent or whatever it may be to keep them, than having no-one. How will having shopping centres full of empty shops keep the businesses that are still there going? It will not help. So, firstly, with landlords, there needs to be some understanding and some national pressure on this issue.

The second area is the banks. It will only make the situation worse if people go bankrupt because they cannot meet their mortgage payments on their house or business. The banks need to suck it up. They need to help. The banks have a responsibility to help. We have four major banks in this country. In effect, we have a regulated market in which the banks receive the benefit of being protected to a degree. A responsibility needs to come with that in times of crisis. I urge the banks to do the right thing by mortgage holders across the country, both households and small businesses. They have a massive responsibility to do the right thing in this crisis. If the banks do not do the right thing, the commonwealth government needs to be hard with them. Interest rates are historically low, which is a good thing. That helps, to a degree, with what we are confronting.

Mr D.T. Redman: What banks have you met with, Premier?

Ms R. Saffioti: We don't regulate banks.

Mr D.T. Redman: Well, it's something you should be doing.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Please, show a bit of decorum.

I have communicated to the Prime Minister that the banks need to be worked with, and that if they do not cooperate, the commonwealth government needs to deal with them very, very heavily to make sure that they do the right thing.

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Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warren–Blackwood!

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Let me speak; I did not interrupt you.

If the banks bankrupt and evict thousands of people, they will make the situation worse and make a potential recession far deeper. They are two areas in which things need to happen.

The fourth area, after local government, banks and landlords, is schools. I want members to understand this, because some people are promulgating the idea that we should close schools: if we close schools, we will make this crisis immeasurably worse. People will leave the workforce to look after their kids. What is the thing that people love most in the world? It is their children, more than anything. People will leave the workforce to look after their kids or will have the grandparents look after the kids. We know that anyone over 60 is more vulnerable. At this point in time, it is not a reasonable proposition. If we close schools, we could potentially put hundreds of thousands more Australians on the unemployment list. We would reduce our gross domestic product by tens of billions of dollars. We would send businesses to the wall. We would remove beds from our hospitals. We would take firefighters out of fire stations. It is not a sensible proposition. Those people who are promoting it need to stop. It has not happened in Singapore. That country did not do it and it arrested the curve of the coronavirus. I urge people: this is not just a health issue; this is also an important economic and social issue for the country.

All of us need to urge consumers to get out there and buy and spend. Consumers are the key here—people having the confidence to buy and spend. We have to continue to encourage people to go to restaurants, cafes and retail outlets all over the country.

We need to avoid propositions that are ill thought out and create panic. By that I mean the idea promulgated yesterday that we close the borders to the east. I heard the member for Moore’s contribution and he is right: supply chains are important. The formal opposition, the Liberal Party, said yesterday that we should close the borders to the east. If we close the borders to the east, what will happen to the markets for some of our products? What will happen to the inputs that come in from the east for many of our farmers? What will happen to our supply chains for important goods that we need?

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The Leader of the Nationals WA moved a motion that refers to regional industries, regional businesses and regional tourism. The Premier has not mentioned the word “regional” for 10 minutes now.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I will hear the point of order in silence.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: My point of order is that the Premier has not spoken about regional Western Australia once within 10 minutes of standing up. This motion is about regional Western Australia, regional small businesses, regional tourism, regional agriculture —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have a point of order. The member for North West Central is canvassing a debate that is not part of the point of order, so I ask you to rule it out of order.

The SPEAKER: It is out of order. People on this side did drift away from regional areas too, so I will allow it.

Debate Resumed

Mr M. McGOWAN: As I was just saying in relation to the point made by the member for Moore about farmers and farming communities, which as far as I am aware are predominantly in regional areas, disrupting supply chains to the east would only make matters worse for farmers. The idea put forward by the Leader of the Opposition yesterday would frankly make the situation worse. When this whole thing first really took off in early February, we ensured that our ports would continue to operate properly. That was the first round table I held on 3 February. If our agricultural, mining, energy and other products are unable to be exported, our economy will completely sink. Supply chains are not just to the east; they are also through the ports. We took action on both of those. We discussed the eastern states blockade suggested by the Liberal Party in Western Australia with senior figures nationally. It was not a sensible proposition put forward by the Liberal Party in Western Australia. We resolved the issues around the ports so that they could continue to operate and support regional communities, because most of our export products come from regional WA. Making sure that our ports continue to function is very, very important.

I will come to other measures, as spoken about by other members. I condemn people who leave the city to go and ransack supermarkets in regional towns, just as I condemn people who go into supermarkets in the city, wherever they are from, and ransack those supermarkets as well. This is a shocking, un-Australian thing to do, and I have

Ms Mia Davies; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Shane Love; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr David Templeman; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Paul Papalia

never seen it happen before in my lifetime. The police are going to police it. I urge Coles and Woolworths to urgently get in decent security. Aldi, Coles, Woolies, IGA or whoever it is should get in proper security to deal with this. The police are going in now, but I want supermarkets to take responsibility and get in decent security to deal with it.

When it comes to visa holders staying in Australia, the first thing to say is that the airlines are winding down. We now have level 4 restrictions. I suspect that visa holders in Australia will not be able to go anywhere anyway.

Mr R.S. Love: But they can't work.

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is an issue that I will need to take up with the Prime Minister. If the member gives me some correspondence, I will raise the matter with him.

I am very concerned about tourism. I want to make sure that our tourism businesses stay strong. That means that Western Australians have to continue to support our tourism industry. We are not going to have international visitors or visitors from over east, so we need Western Australians to continue to support our tourism industry. It is up to Western Australians to do this. It is up to us to do this. We will do what we can for industry, but if a business has a cashflow every year of a million dollars or whatever it might be, the state government cannot give them a million dollars. We cannot do that, but we can encourage Western Australians to at least holiday in Western Australia. We have abandoned our campaign from last week. We now know, in light of the rapidly moving events of the last week, that that is no longer the right thing to do. However, we encourage those Western Australians who are still going to holiday that they should holiday within our state.

The initiative we put forward during the earlier part of this week—the stimulus measures—will actually reach everyone in our state. Everyone is a householder, and a lot of people pay payroll tax. Of course, we are looking at what we can do to support those businesses that are under the payroll tax threshold. There is an idea that the state government, which I learnt this morning makes up seven per cent of the entire state economy, could somehow prop up the entire state business sector. That is not something that it can do. We need to work with the commonwealth and consumers to keep our export economy strong. They are the things we are doing. I urge everyone not to come up with wild and irrational ideas. If we had a loan scheme, as proposed by one member of Parliament, that was proportionate to another state depending on our population, we would be able to provide small businesses with loans of \$1 000 each that those businesses would then have to repay. That is the extent of what the member is proposing. Let us make considered and rational decisions. The cabinet and the national cabinet is doing that, and we are doing it in conjunction with Treasury to ensure that we do our best for businesses across Western Australia.

I cannot hide this. It is a dark period and it will be difficult for many people. Western Australia will shine through and will recover, but part of the recovery has to be Western Australians continuing to support our own industries and businesses—our own business sector and small businesses. If Western Australians do not support our own small businesses, we cannot rely on anyone else to.

MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park — Treasurer) [3.30 pm]: I rise to make some comments to follow on from the Premier. I want to explain to members what is happening, because I do not think the opposition understands what is happening in Australia and around the globe. As the Premier said, there is only so much that the government can do. The member for North West Central wants the government to compensate businesses for their cash flow —

Mr V.A. Catania: I didn't say that.

Mr B.S. WYATT: No. The member did say that, and he also raised —

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for North West Central!

Mr V.A. Catania: I said provide interest-free loans.

Mr B.S. WYATT: I will come to that in a minute.

The reality is that private and household consumption is collapsing, except in grocery stores. The Premier says that people should go to their local cafe or buy a car, if that is what they are looking to do, and support local businesses, and gets ridiculed by the opposition, so I will explain what he is saying. The state government cannot fill the hole that is being left by the decline in private consumption without bankrupting the state. It is impossible. We can do some things, and the Premier has gone through them—maintenance, payroll tax, TAFE fees and social housing—but there is only so much that we can do. We cannot fill that hole. I want to be clear with members opposite. I and Senator Mathias Cormann said yesterday that businesses will close and jobs will be lost. This is a very significant global and national shock. People are changing their behaviour. People going to their local stores can do way more than any of us can do. That is the reality. As the Premier said, interest-free loans on the scale that Queensland is offering are slow because it takes time to get money out the door. The scale that we are offering is

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significantly bigger. It is a grant; it is money out the door. The reaction of the state government has been targeted for that purpose. As the Premier said, we are doing more. I resent this argument that somehow we have forgotten about every organisation that does not pay payroll tax. What a ludicrous comment! Every single Western Australian will get some benefit from what has been announced thus far. But I will say again, for those who have some vague understanding of the levers that the state government has: we have clunky levers to provide support for businesses that do not pay payroll tax. I said this yesterday. The big beast that can do most of the stimulus spending is the commonwealth government, which is why the Premier is speaking to the Prime Minister daily. That is why we have a national cabinet and why we are working with the commonwealth. However, we will have something to say about those businesses, too. We understand that they are under pressure, but I want to be clear that what we do will not replace the loss of cash flow and household consumption that they are experiencing. Nothing that the government does will. That is why businesses will close and jobs will be lost.

I will conclude with one final point. The Premier stole my thunder about this. I found this to be quite a hypocritical argument made by the opposition today. Yesterday afternoon, in the debate on the Supply Bill 2020 and in question time, the opposition demanded that the Premier close our border with the eastern states. I think some members of the opposition for some reason still seem to think that we have no interaction with the rest of the nation. Members opposite should think about what that would do to supply chains. I am going to say a word that is in the motion that no-one has said yet. What do members think that would do to the agricultural sector if it could not move its produce around? The one thing we have to protect in this state so that once we are through this we will be in a position in which we have a balance sheet capacity to recover, is to protect the supply lines, protect our ports and protect our capacity to get what we produce to market, whether from the resource sector or the agricultural sector. If anyone suggests that we are not thinking or worrying about these things, they are wrong, and we have gone through this at great length.

I want to finish with one point; that is, consumers and Western Australians can have a much bigger impact going about their normal behaviour than we can in this place. I think the member for Moore made this point: a lot more people will end up being caught up in the commonwealth government social safety net. That is a tragedy, but we need to do what we can to limit that.

Amendment to Motion

Mr B.S. WYATT: I move —

To delete “calls on the state government to act immediately to introduce” and substitute —
acknowledges the action of the state government in delivering

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Mines and Petroleum) [3.36 pm]: I support this amendment and I support the government in its actions. I want to congratulate the Premier for his stable and focused leadership, which is delivering for the people of this state. I will remind people of the position of the Liberal Party and the fact that it has changed what it is saying about the coronavirus by 180 degrees. I will quote from *Hansard* of 12 February. The Premier said —

These are serious headwinds that we have to confront ...

That was about the coronavirus. What did the member for Bateman, the opposition’s economic spokesperson, say? He said “It’s your spin.” Let us not pretend that somehow or other the Liberal Party and the Nationals WA criticised the government for acting too slowly. Their members criticised us for acting too fast. The Premier organised to meet with all leaders of resource companies in Western Australia to make sure the government understood what those resource companies needed the day after the Prime Minister took action on the coronavirus. One day after that happened, the Premier provided his stable leadership, focusing on the future of Western Australia, and talked to those resource industry companies. We do not operate the resource companies in this state. That is a specific issue that we are dealing with here. These businesses are operated by their owners and operators, but we can provide the leadership that they need so that they can work through the challenges that the coronavirus is putting before us. Members should remember that without the resource sector, our state would not be able to provide employment and opportunities in the future. Let me make this clear: if we did what the Leader of the Opposition asked us to do and closed the borders of Western Australia to the rest of the country—even if it were constitutionally possible—the resource industry in Western Australia would stop. It would not be able to function. Oil and gas exports from Western Australia would cease, and the mining industry would grind to a halt. Those companies require continued liaison with the east coast to function. Let us not aim for a headline. Instead, we should aim for a solution.

I am proud of the Premier’s leadership because, together with the resource industry, we are working to make sure that we provide the necessary leadership and guidance so that the industry can continue to operate. I remind members that at the meeting at the beginning of February, the industry pointed out that the federal government had not explained how its decision would impact on vessels sailing between Western Australia and China. If we

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had implemented the closure in the way that was described at that time, our mining, oil and gas sectors would have ceased to function. It was because the Premier listened to industry from Western Australia that we were able to reach out to the commonwealth and accommodate the sailing times for the oil and gas and iron ore carriers. Previously, it took iron ore carriers 17 days to get to and from China and the federal government suggested requiring a 14-day quarantine period. It was because of the Premier's leadership that we were able to keep the industry in this state going. It is bizarre and disgraceful for the Nationals WA and the Liberal Party to come in here and criticise the government when in February they said that we were making it up; they said it was spin. This is a major crisis for Western Australia, as it is globally. Thankfully, we have strong and stable leadership from the Premier, and that should see us through.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism) [3.41 pm]: I stand to speak in support of the amendment and address two points in particular. Firstly, I will address the member for North West Central's contribution. It was very disappointing to hear what the member said. He has been a source of disappointment to me ever since July 2009, but today at this critical time when we face the consequences of something that no-one here or globally has witnessed in their lifetime, the member chose to suggest that coronavirus was a metropolitan disease that has been foisted on the regions and that the consequences on small business are somehow faced only in the regions and that people in the metropolitan area are depriving regional people of benefit and support because it is being given to people in the city. Understand this: the impact is being felt everywhere; it is global. The impact on small business is global. Of all small businesses in Western Australia, 77.5 per cent are located in the metropolitan area. They are suffering just as much as regional small businesses. Everyone is suffering.

Secondly, the member's tweets and his contribution today attacking me and the government for calling on Western Australians to support their fellow Western Australians by visiting tourism industries, hospitality outlets, hotels, motels, cafes, bars and tourism operators throughout the state were disgraceful. He started by suggesting that we were wrong because somehow we were sending mixed messages. Let me tell the member this: our message has not changed. We support small business in Western Australia. We urge our consumers to continue to support their fellow Western Australians. As the Treasurer said, that is the biggest thing we can do to help. We are also doing other things to help sole traders. I understand what they go through because I have done it.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for North West Central, you have had your go. Take whatever you get.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I know what it is like to have a mortgage and a house on the line. It is an incredibly terrible, difficult time and we are doing everything we can. Work is being done with the federal government and the national cabinet and we will tell people when we can what additional support services will be provided. Yesterday, I told the member about a service for small businesses right across the state to provide support, guidance and advice. I ask small businesses to go not to the member for North West Central but to smallbusiness.wa.gov.au or ring 133 140 during business hours during the week from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm and ask the experts—people who actually care about them—what they can do, where they can seek support and what they are eligible for. The member said that we have dumped the tourism campaign. We have not dumped it. We have suspended it, because Western Australia's tourism industry will rebound. Our campaign is supported by Tourism Council Western Australia. When we launched it, the Tourism Council and the Australian Hotels Association supported it. They said it was wonderful. This morning in my office, I met with Evan Hall, Bradley Woods, Deborah Carr, Hugh Singe, Gareth Martin, Nigel Keene, Andrew Cairns, Stephanie Juskiewicz, Brodie Carr, Michelle Reynolds and David Eaton, and they all support that campaign. They want it to get going again the moment that we rebound from this. We will keep the money and have it ready so that the moment we are able to, we will support Western Australian businesses just as we are doing now and will do into the future. We will never apologise for supporting Western Australian small businesses. It is a disgrace that the member should be trying to split the community at this time. That is appalling. We are all in this together. The member is an embarrassment and a disgrace. It is time he recognised that this is an unprecedented situation.

Division

Amendment (deletion of words) put and a division taken with the following result —

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 18 March 2020]
p1585c-1595a

Ms Mia Davies; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Shane Love; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr David Templeman; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Paul Papalia

Ayes (35)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr P. Papalia	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr S.J. Price	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr M. McGowan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke	Ms S.F. McGurk	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr P.C. Tinley
Mr R.H. Cook	Mr K.J.J. Michel	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr S.A. Millman	Ms C.M. Rowe	Ms S.E. Winton
Ms E.L. Hamilton	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Ms R. Saffioti	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr M. Hughes	Mr M.P. Murray	Ms A. Sanderson	Mr D.R. Michael (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr W.J. Johnston	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Ms J.J. Shaw	

Noes (18)

Mr I.C. Blayney	Dr D.J. Honey	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr V.A. Catania	Mr P.A. Katsambanis	Mr J.E. McGrath	Mr P.J. Rundle
Ms M.J. Davies	Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup	Dr M.D. Nahan	Mr A. Krsticevic (<i>Teller</i>)
Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr S.K. L'Estrange	Mr D.C. Nalder	
Mrs A.K. Hayden	Mr R.S. Love	Mr K.M. O'Donnell	

Pair

Ms J. Farrer

Ms L. Mettam

Amendment (insertion of words) put and passed.

Motion, as Amended

The SPEAKER: The question is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

Division

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (35)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr P. Papalia	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr S.J. Price	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr M. McGowan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke	Ms S.F. McGurk	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr P.C. Tinley
Mr R.H. Cook	Mr K.J.J. Michel	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr S.A. Millman	Ms C.M. Rowe	Ms S.E. Winton
Ms E.L. Hamilton	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Ms R. Saffioti	Mr B.S. Wyatt
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Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr S.K. L'Estrange	Mr D.C. Nalder	
Mrs A.K. Hayden	Mr R.S. Love	Mr K.M. O'Donnell	

Pair

Ms J. Farrer

Ms L. Mettam

Question thus passed.