

DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT — RELOCATION

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) [3.29 pm]: I move —

That this house notes the McGowan government's chaotic and haphazard management of the primary industries portfolio and rejects the metro-centric decision to relocate the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to the Perth central business district.

It is with rather a heavy heart that we bring this motion to the Parliament, but it is timely, because we have seen decision after decision. To bring it to a head, there was an announcement yesterday that should have been a good-news moment for the industry. Instead, the announcement was that a department that is for and represents regional industries and regional people is being moved to the Perth CBD. This government's track record on agriculture in particular is appalling. As the motion states, it has been chaotic and haphazard and it has been marked by policy on the run. The management of the portfolio has been led by a minister who, quite frankly, pursues niche policy ideas to the detriment of supporting mainstream farming and agricultural industry accepted practices. It is marked by a minister who does not have a deep or genuine understanding of the sector she is supposed to champion; it is hampered by a minister who outright opposes live export, GMO and the use of glyphosate; and it is hampered by a cabinet of metropolitan MPs who do not understand and backbenchers who will not champion the cause for agricultural and primary industries within the party.

The Premier's own comments in this house reveal just how little time this government spends on working with the industry. He would rather berate and belittle it on regular occasions, just like his minister. I have seen them both do it in this chamber, in the other place and in public.

I think there is often a quick defence of and waxing lyrical for the Minister for Regional Development; Agriculture and Food in this chamber, but when it comes to the industry and the people on the ground who underpin this \$10 billion sector, she is found wanting. That is the feedback we get when we are on the ground, talking to the sector.

We understand that we are not in normal times. We understand that we are all working through the impact of a global pandemic. But I think one of the reasons that we have decided to bring this motion forward is that not only do we have a decision and an announcement like that announced yesterday, whereby an opportunity has been missed to reinvigorate and regenerate the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development in the regions, but also it comes off the back of a whole raft of things for which we have been trying to get the government's attention since this pandemic started. We wanted to compare and contrast the approach and vigour that the Premier seems to have for engaging with the mining sector about its workforce shortages with his approach to the agricultural sector. Since March, the agricultural industry, along with the Nationals' spokesperson for agriculture, has been raising concerns with the Premier and the agriculture minister that there is an impending cliff face with the harvest, the fruit picking season and shearing. The timeliness of these need to be addressed. There was time. When we started raising it back in March, there was clearly an opportunity for the minister and the government to sit down with the sector and work through it. Unfortunately, that has not happened. Now we see this policy on the run and haphazard approach. Quite frankly, I do not think that the things that have been announced in the last few weeks are going to address the real challenges that we will be facing in the next couple of months, and many people to whom we speak would confirm this.

The advocacy that we have put in has fallen on deaf ears. In a rush to prove this government's limited credentials in agriculture and primary industry, we have seen it hastily pull together a website that is trying to match jobs with industry and potential employees. It is not working, and people are quite open about that. We have seen an advertising campaign that reduces our workforce issues to a holiday plan for young people, basically trivialising the matter of the workforce required by the sector. It encourages young people to have a jolly holiday in the regions while they pick some fruit and jump on a header. It is remarkable that the government is allowed to get away with this when we are talking about a \$10 billion sector. Would it have run that campaign and engaged with the mining sector in the same way? We know that the government has challenges. I read *The West Australian* this morning and I saw Paul Everingham's comments about continuing to bring people in from over east. There are still about 1 500 fly in, fly out people from over east to service the mining sector. It is a very important sector. It needs to be supported and it needs to continue. We understand why there has been a focus on that sector. However, we want to see the same amount of consultation and engagement with the agricultural sector, because this is the sector that grows the food for our state and our nation, and also for our overseas markets. Particularly in Western Australia, we are outward

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looking. We are an export-oriented market, and that means there are some risks associated with us not being able to get to the end of harvest if we do not have anybody to do that work for us.

It comes to a point at which we have to ask why there is a complete lack of presence and decision-making when it comes to the agricultural sector and the challenges that it is facing. It is quite incredible to me that the Premier does not believe that we have the same issues with the movement of people as do New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. The Premier and the minister have clearly not been apprised of the concerns that the Kimberley Pilbara Cattlemen's Association has raised about the movement across borders between the Northern Territory and Western Australia. Members of that association are impacted by the fact that they cannot move in and out across those borders. That is an important sector to our community, yet the Premier will stand up and say that we do not have the same issues and that we are not signing up to a code of practice that will allow us to deal with that in a way that would retain the safety of our community from a health perspective and actually deliver an outcome for the agricultural sector. I cannot believe that the Minister for Agriculture and Food has failed to tell him of the serious concerns that the industry in the Kimberley and the Pilbara has about those challenges. There is a challenge with the Premier and the minister for agriculture being at odds in trying to bring in overseas workers to deal with the fruit-picking season. This is something that we raised with the minister for agriculture. We got a letter back very quickly saying that she is optimistic and positive that we can come to a solution, which might look like something that has been negotiated in the Northern Territory with people from Vanuatu. The next day in this place the Premier stood up and said, "Absolutely not; we are not having a bar of it." We have the minister for agriculture and the Premier at complete odds on something that would assist our industry in the short term to meet the requirements of their harvest. The Premier has a tin ear to this and will not listen, and the minister does not understand and did not engage with the industry early enough.

These are things that we would like to see addressed. We would like to see more engagement in this, and less chaos and confusion. We have to acknowledge that the hard border in Western Australia has always operated with exemptions. My colleagues and I have said on the record again and again that we support the hard border; we have never advocated for anything else. But we are also realists, and, beyond the hyperbole, the Premier knows that the hard border is a border that operates with exemptions. There are exemptions for the mining sector and the trucking industry so that we can keep freight and important staff in key sectors moving. We have families repatriating to WA or returning after visiting loved ones for compassionate reasons—often to say goodbye to a mother or father who is dying. People are moving across the border. We support the notion of a hard border; we support what the Premier is doing to keep our community safe. What we do not support is this lack of engagement to try to come up with a strategy that will allow our agricultural sector to get through the next few months. Why is it being denied the opportunity to come up with a workforce and, instead, having to rely on a \$3 million advertising campaign, which is literally a drop in the ocean—too little too late, I might say? It is not going to cut it.

We have asked questions of the Premier, and anybody who has been following this debate can see that we have persistently asked questions in this house and in the other place to try to understand what the strategy was. The Premier was derisive and dismissive to the point that he was completely at odds with what he said previously when we asked him about the strategy that he was rolling out. In the last session of Parliament, we asked, "What are the strategies that will accompany this advertising campaign?" We asked that specific question and the Premier's response was, "No; we have jobs and skills centres. You've got to go out there and do some things for yourself. You've got to look after yourself. I used to roll up my swag and get around the state and look after myself. Show a bit of initiative." So it was with great surprise that, three weeks later, I read a media statement from the Premier titled "Young West Aussies encouraged to Work and Wonder out Yonder". Buried in one paragraph of that media statement is the line —

The McGowan Government is also in the final stages of developing a regional worker incentive scheme, which will provide accommodation and travel support for people moving to the regions for agricultural work.

They are the two things that we raised with the Premier not four weeks earlier and were told to sit down and be quiet. The government said it would not do that because it has jobs and skills centres. Four weeks later, the government said that it has a regional worker incentive scheme, but we found out that that has funding of just \$3 million, which is a drop in the ocean for a \$10 billion industry. Frankly, it is a disgraceful outcome and the agriculture sector is not going to stand for it. It is calling on this government to sit down and engage properly. It is calling for genuine engagement. It wants more than an advertising campaign and the smoke and mirrors that it has been given to date.

I will let the Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA talk about the disgraceful decisions —

The SPEAKER: Talk into the microphone, thanks, member.

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Ms M.J. DAVIES: I will let the Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA talk about the disgraceful decision to relocate the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. How on earth we can end up with a regional development department smack bang in the middle of the city, I can only wonder.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA) [3.41 pm]: I would also like to make a contribution to this very important matter of public importance because we have seen the failure of this government and the Minister for Agriculture and Food on so many levels. We know that the live export industry considers the minister to be unhelpful and unsupportive, and there is always an undercurrent that the industry is somehow at fault, that it is not important and that it is a sunset industry that will disappear one day anyway. We have seen the slow squeeze put on a whole range of livestock industries in this term of government, from eggs, chicken, meat and pork, through to broadacre farming and the pastoral production of animals for live export. Who could forget the pictures of the minister on Fremantle Bridge with her “ban live export” mates trying to end that industry before she became minister? We have seen that permeate all the decision-making of this government ever since. We have an Attorney General, who just left the chamber, unfortunately, who brought into this house the Animal Welfare and Trespass Legislation Amendment Bill that we will debate very shortly. Instead of setting out to protect the agriculture industry, which we were desperately calling out to happen, he has introduced a mongrel bill that puts aspects that should probably be in the Animal Welfare Act in with the trespass legislation. Again, there is an undercurrent that agriculture is at fault and that somehow rural people are to blame.

In the north, there is absolutely no leadership on the development of irrigated agriculture in the Fitzroy. When we contrast that with the work done by the member for Central Wheatbelt on the Water for Food program when she was the Minister for Water, we can see that it is a disgraceful outcome indeed. That should be no surprise when we have a city-based minister with a city-based upbringing in a city-based cabinet. The government’s focus is entirely city based. That is manifestly obvious.

The Minister for Agriculture and Food released a media statement on 9 September titled “Move to back State’s vital primary industries”. That announced the change in office accommodation for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. How will the minister back the state’s vital primary industries by putting its offices in Perth? That must have come as a surprise to the people involved in primary industry. We are told that some scientific staff will be left at South Perth, in the buildings that can be maintained to an appropriate standard, although there is a push to redevelop those buildings over time. I suggest that Northam, for instance, is an excellent place to house some of those staff. We have seen that happen in the past. Further on, the press release goes on to say —

About 500 office-based staff will move to a modern, fit for purpose building in the CBD. Negotiations are underway to secure a suitable lease to enable these staff to move ...

They do not have a building. The government has not given a firm commitment to anyone. It is not an empty space that needs to be filled. The government is going to hire a building especially to shift staff in the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to a city-based office block. That is absolutely bizarre. The member for Roe asked the Premier an excellent question about this matter in this place yesterday. We know that he got a non-answer from the Premier. The Premier talked about history going back to the McLarty and Mitchell governments. What is the relevance of that? We asked him a question about what his government is doing, not about governments from bygone eras. My colleague Hon Colin de Grussa, the agriculture spokesperson for the Nationals, came out after that media release and said that basically the Labor government had been mounting a sustained attack on the agency and its ability to operate regionally.

Mr B.S. Wyatt interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Since coming to government, Labor has removed staff from regional development commissions and closed numerous —

Mr B.S. Wyatt interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I expect to be heard in silence, thank you.

Since coming to government, Labor has removed staff from regional development commissions and closed numerous regional fisheries’ shopfronts and shed jobs as part of the machinery-of-government amalgamations. Last year, a Community and Public Sector Union–Civil Service Association of WA survey of DPIRD staff found that mental health concerns were rife and morale was at an all-time low as a result of job cuts to key service areas and ongoing uncertainty from machinery-of-government changes. Labor’s treatment of DPIRD is an indictment of its already poor record of ignoring the needs of regional WA and a sector worth \$10 billion to Western Australia’s economy—a sector that is treated very much as a poor cousin to the mining sector in the ways that the member for Central Wheatbelt outlined earlier today.

I refer to an article in the July 2016 edition of *Parks and Wildlife News* titled “New headquarters underway in Bunbury”. If we are going to talk about previous governments, the previous government made a decision to base a government

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department that has substantial assets throughout regional Western Australia in a major regional centre. What happened with that? As soon as September in the year that this government was elected, the Premier said that it was in the wrong location.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: It was 2016? Okay.

Mr R.S. LOVE: This is a news release from the department in 2016 with the Premier's face on it saying "Bunbury, wrong location". It did not take long. These things are not easy. They take a lot of guts and a lot of skill and dedication to regional development. Federally, we have seen the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority moved to Armidale. Its official opening took place in August last year. I know that a lot of people lost a lot of skin over that. It is not an easy thing to do, but the end result is that we now have 130 staff working from new offices and 96 regulatory scientists calling Armidale, in regional New South Wales, home. The same things can be achieved in Western Australia if we actually try hard.

I have a close connection with the town of Geraldton in that my electorate is serviced by Geraldton in a big way. The NBN was placed in Geraldton by one of the Treasurer's former federal colleagues Julia Gillard. She made NBN expenditure in Geraldton a focal point and made Geraldton the place where an NBN data centre was rolled out. That town is the point of connection through the NBN for the north west of Western Australia to the rest of the world. The NBN is an indication of how important Geraldton could be in the future. Why on earth would we not place some of these facilities in a town like Geraldton? It is a brilliant community that has all the necessary infrastructure. A decision, like the decision of the previous government to relocate the Department of Parks and Wildlife to Bunbury, would be an excellent fillip for Geraldton and a great shot in the arm for the community, but we need a committed minister to achieve those things and a government that is committed and prepared to lose a bit of skin along the way to achieve great outcomes for regional Western Australia. Sadly, we do not have that.

MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren-Blackwood) [3.48 pm]: I want to make my contribution to this debate as well and make the point that the Labor Party, the McGowan government, has no plan when it comes to agriculture. It is random at best. We saw the spray from the Premier yesterday in response to one of our questions saying what we did not do, but he is clearly very selective in choosing the topics he talks about, because he did not remember Seizing the Opportunity, the \$300 million investment of royalties for regions funds into an agenda. It was a plan for agriculture in Western Australia and how we were going to move forward. It was a plan that had investments in understanding our land and water assets, research and development, efficient supply chains to market, trade and investment as a pillar, workforce development, and building the profile of the agriculture sector. That is what Seizing the Opportunity was about. It also followed on from a lot of the contemporary research work that was being done in investments that would make a difference in what is a significant sector to Western Australia.

Let us look at some of the investments that happened. There was the Australian Export Grain Innovation Centre. There was commentary about that only this morning. That was done under our government. There were the New Genes for New Environments facilities at both Merredin and Katanning, setting up for some future research into genetically modified organisms and the support that might play in building productivity in agriculture. The member for Roe highlighted the wonderful facility in Katanning, which could do with a few more people in it; so there is an opportunity. We know what the Labor Party's view on GM is. Its members are the Luddites who sit across there who do not understand that there is technology that can improve productivity. I remember the Minister for Sport and Recreation saying that the genie had been let out of the bottle. There are not too many genies floating around at the moment, but farmers have a choice in growing crops that can make a difference to their productivity. There was the drought pilot program work that we did. It was a pilot program done in Western Australia under our watch that is now being used as a model for the federal government to respond to drought issues right across our nation. There was the pathway to investment and unlocking land potential in the pastoral areas. As the member for Moore highlighted, that is another thing that has been knocked on the head by this government. There are the Doppler radars and weather stations out there, and significant investments in research, development and biosecurity. There is the premium ag centre in Manjimup. There is the growers' group support—those wonderful groups that do a lot of work in the productivity space. Of course, there is the Muresk Institute. Muresk would not be there if it were not for us when we were in government. There were significant investments in Muresk. I might add that there were calls from the opposition at the time, and we did it. We supported it. We put those investments in place.

We had a plan for the ag sector in Western Australia. We have not seen and do not understand what the plan of government of the day, the Labor Party, is for agriculture. The best we can come up with is that its textbook for agriculture in Western Australia is the *Call of the Reed Warbler*. That is the closest we get to any sort of plan.

One of the sharpest issues coming to the agriculture sector in Western Australia, and I might add to other sectors such as the hospitality sector, is the workforce challenges. As we move forward, the broadacre sector, the horticulture sector and the hospitality sector are collectively worth \$20 billion to the Western Australian economy, and we have a substantial workforce issue to support that sector. I called for a task force. I reckon it is time to have a task force to look at this issue, to have industry around the table to ask what we can do to deal with the issues. Before we get

to that, what are the issues? A whole range of challenges will emerge for this government, and it has been found wanting on this front. It needs direct feedback from the sector. A sum of \$3 million simply will not cut it; \$3 million will not attract the necessary workforce to get down into those areas, particularly the horticulture sector in my electorate, to respond to the crops that need to be harvested down there. Before we came down for question time, I got a call from a transport operator who said he has lost four truck drivers to the resource sector. People do not do just a TAFE course and jump into the front seat of B-train and drive it. He has lost four drivers because of what the resource sector is able to pay.

It seems that some sort of favouritism applies to the resource sector because the first 25 words on the front page of *The West Australian* today say —

The influential mining sector is negotiating a plan with the State Government to potentially reduce the length of hotel quarantine stays for interstate FIFO workers.

They are the workers coming into Western Australia. The mining sector seems to have the ear of the government, but this government is not considering a \$10 billion sector in the agricultural sector and the hospitality sector, which is equally worth \$10 billion to Western Australians.

What is the plan for the Labor Party? What is the plan for this government towards a sector that is now going to have some massive challenges as we move through the next three to four months in particular as crops need to be harvested? There is not the workforce needed to deal with that. The Nationals WA have put an idea together about what might be considered, including bringing in teams of people from other countries that have low levels of COVID-19 risk under strict quarantine conditions to deal with the challenges we face here in Western Australia. The Minister for Agriculture and Food considered that but then she was drawn back by the Premier and told to pull it off the table, because the government wants to maintain our hard borders. As the Leader of the Nationals WA said, we support hard borders, but there needs to be consideration of options to manage issues as they emerge. The resource sector is able to put these issues on the table, because I am pretty certain the heads of some of these companies rang up the Premier and said, “Mark, we think we have got some challenges. We think if you continue with a hard line —

The SPEAKER: Call the Premier by his correct name, please.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I was quoting what they might say if they were on the phone, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Just say “Premier”, not “Mark”. You know better than that.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: They rang up the Premier and said, “Premier, we think that if you continue to take the hard line on this, you are going to have some challenges with the economy in Western Australia.” From what I read and saw, the Premier backed up a bit. Now, we see the line that has been taken. The resource sector seems to be getting the ear of the government, but the ag sector is missing out—the ag sector that is worth \$10 billion a year to the Western Australia economy. The ag sector is facing down its harvest, which will start to emerge in the next month or two, and the plan for the challenge of getting the workforce to be able to manage it is not there. This government is going to have to face up to that challenge soon. It has been given plenty of warning from this side of the house; plenty of warning from the National Party. This is another one of those warnings. The government does not have a plan for agriculture and it is going to face a challenge over the next couple of months.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse) [3.55 pm]: I would also like to contribute to this debate. It is a very important motion that has been moved. This government continues to turn its back on regional Western Australia with the mismanagement of the primary industries portfolio, but we see it with many other portfolios under this government’s watch. Just last week, we saw a plan to skimp on stage 3 of the South Coast Highway upgrade in Albany. I was there with Scott Leary, the Liberal candidate for Albany. It was a project for passing lanes and the upgrade of Bluff Creek Road and Kojaneerup West Road. The community was asking the question: why is it that when a city project such as Metronet is mismanaged, the government increases the budget, but when it is a regional project it cuts the project short? That theme, that issue, that attitude towards regional WA is what we are seeing with the management of the agriculture portfolio. It is a portfolio that, together with hospitality, is worth about \$20 billion to regional Western Australia. The government has effectively dismantled royalties for regions. Over half of royalties for regions money has gone into consolidated revenue over the last four years. The government has completely ignored regional centres such as Busselton in its economic response and has missed the boat on the significant skills crisis facing our \$10 billion agriculture sector, as well as our hospitality industry.

Another metro-centric decision was made to relocate the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to the Perth CBD. That is an opportunity lost, when we consider all of the office space available across regional WA—in Bunbury, Albany and many other centres. The fact that this government makes the decision to rent city space is another example of what regional WA already knows; that is, this government does not understand regional Western Australia. This government has very little sympathy for the agriculture industry, which is calling out for a skilled response, a response that appreciates and understands the challenges that the farming industry requires. The regions of WA are experiencing the most anti-agriculture Minister for Agriculture and Food this state has ever

seen, when we see the minister's attitude to genetically modified crops, live export and the skills crisis that the state is currently facing.

Agriculture is one of two great pillars of our economy. Why is the government engaging with only one of those sectors, and ignoring the significant needs of the agricultural industry? This represents a missed opportunity to shift hundreds of jobs to regional Western Australia. It is a missed opportunity to seriously look at and address the problems that our agricultural industry faces, as well as our hospitality sector. Those sectors are crying out for real support from this government. Other members have talked about the engagement that this government has had with the mining industry. It is disappointing that we are not seeing that same level of understanding and engagement with the agricultural sector.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Local Government) [3.59 pm]: I am very, very happy and very proud to respond to this pathetic motion that is before us. I can tell members that the National Party has reached the depths of hypocrisy with this motion. The National Party loves having a go at the Labor Minister for Agriculture and Food. Our side of the house has had some magnificent ministers for agriculture. One of those ministers was the late Hon Kim Chance. He was universally respected as a major and very effective agriculture minister. He was Minister for Agriculture in the Labor government for a long time. We now have, in the McGowan government, the Minister for Agriculture and Food; Regional Development, in Hon Alannah MacTiernan. You people hate her! You hate her! The National Party brings motions before the house consistently, with all the venom of the National Party, about that minister. The National Party cannot stand the fact that she is one of the most effective ministers of any government, particularly in agriculture, that we have ever seen. Minister MacTiernan is absolutely committed to making sure that the Western Australian government has a strong focus on the importance of the agricultural industry, not only to Western Australia, but to the nation, and that we continue to support the production of high quality agricultural and horticultural product to the rest of the world. Australia and Western Australia has a tremendous history and record of being able to do that, through passionate ministers. The previous government had several ministers for agriculture.

Mr P.J. Rundle: Of high quality.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I do not know about that, sunshine, considering what I am about to go through. The member for Roe should be cowering in his seat because of what occurred under his watch. It is important to refer to what occurred during the eight and a half years of the Barnett Liberal–National coalition government. National Party members sat in cabinet as ministers in that government, and they did diddly squat in exercising the authority that they should have asserted on the Barnett-led Liberal Party, which in the end was out of control with the state's finances. The National Party did not do anything to stand up against the Liberal Party. It is very interesting to watch what is happening in New South Wales as we speak. That argument, of course, is about koalas and a policy area that is very important. It will be interesting to see how that pans out.

We all remember that the last minister for agriculture in the Barnett government was Hon Ken Baston. Was he a member of the Nationals? No. Where was the authority that should have been asserted by the National Party? We on this side have always seen, and history shows, the argument between the Liberal Party and the National Party when they are in government about who holds and covets the agriculture portfolio. We know that a big blue goes on all the time. They wrangle about it, they fight about it and they snarl at each other about it, but they do nothing to enhance the interests of the agriculture sector.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The Leader of the National Party has had her go. Let us look at what the National Party presided over during the eight and a half years of the Barnett government, and at what it was ultimately left to the Labor Party to fix when we came to power in 2017. Let us go through some facts. It is important to remind people, including those who might be watching this debate, what this government was left with when it came to power in March 2017. First, when the Nationals and Liberals came to government in 2008, 45 per cent of the then Department of Agriculture and Food was based in the regions. Under the supervision of the National Party members, including those who sat in the cabinet room, almost 300 agriculture jobs were cut from regional Western Australia. They oversaw that. National Party members come into this place and attack Hon Alannah MacTiernan and say that she has decimated the sector. But they were right in the middle of it. Their hands were all over it.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member for Warren–Blackwood was a senior minister in the Barnett government, and he did diddly squat. People know that he did not do a thing. During his time as a minister, 300 agriculture jobs were lost from regional Western Australia.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

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Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I am not taking interjections, because I have a lot to say. Some of the regions lost almost half their staff. In 2008, Esperance—which is down the member for Roe's way—had 44 full-time equivalents. In 2017, only 23 were left. The former government halved the number. It smashed them and cut them out. That is what we saw during their eight and a half years in government. When the machinery-of-government changes came into effect in 2017, 36 per cent of the new Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development was based in regional Western Australia. That is what we inherited from the former government. We have continued to work to increase that. The former government presided over a whole range of failures. It is a disgrace that members opposite would come into this place and say that this government does not care about people in the regions or people in the agricultural sector. They use the perpetual argument that if we are not born in or live in the country, we somehow do not have empathy for or understand people who live in regional Western Australia or the importance of regional Western Australia to the economy of this state. That is absolutely wrong. Many members on this side of the house understand intimately the importance of our agricultural sector—our food growing and producing sector—to the economy of Western Australia, to our export markets, and to the people of Western Australia more generally. We have a very clear understanding of that. Therefore, when National Party members say, as did the member for Moore, that no-one in this government cares, because we have no ministers from the regions—they are wrong there, anyway—it is false.

Let us look at the agriculture budget. In 2007–08, the Carpenter government provided \$126 million for the development of new facilities for the agriculture department. This budget allocation was increased in 2008–09 when the Liberal–National government came to power. However, no works commenced. The money sat there for two years, before another allocation was made, of \$134 million apparently, over a further three budgets. The National Party oversaw that. The National Party had members sitting in cabinet. However, nothing happened. That money disappeared. Twelve months later, in the 2015–16 budget, the Barnett government replaced that \$234 million with \$250 000 for business case development to assess options. It was then left to Hon Ken Baston to say in March 2016, in a very optimistic way, that he was confident that concrete would be poured by the end of the year. We know that did not happen. We know that nothing happened under the former government.

Yesterday, the minister announced that a range of steps will be taken on the facilities; some of the department's 60-year-old South Perth buildings, which face ongoing safety and maintenance issues, will be retired; and about 500 office-based staff will move to a modern fit-for-purpose building near the CBD—I think it is one or two postcodes away. The assumption that suddenly the department will be located miles away is not true. Kensington is not in rural Western Australia. Of course, if the former government was going to shift the department from Kensington to the regions, why did it not do it? It did not. In fact, as I have highlighted, the former government decimated the number of staff in the agricultural sector in regional Western Australia.

The government will invest more than \$20 million over the next 12 months to ensure that there are functional laboratories and offices in place while planning is underway to replace the aged facilities in South Perth. The funding will support critical functions that will underpin the state's quarantine and biosecurity system, and we know how important that is for the protection of WA from pests and diseases.

Mr P.J. Rundle interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk): Member for Roe, he is not taking interjections.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The government will continue to support market access for Western Australian agriculture, fisheries and food exports. I am advised that the new laboratories will also support scientific research that underpins the sustainability and productivity of agricultural industries. A full business case for the construction of new permanent fit-for-purpose laboratory and research facilities is being developed as part of the broader redevelopment of the South Perth site.

What is the government doing? I will run through a range of projects and initiatives and spending that this government is, and has been, focusing on the state's agricultural sector. There was \$131.5 million for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development in the 2019–20 budget to deal with the fiscal cliff left by the previous government and put DPIRD back on a sustainable footing. The former government undermined the foundations of DPIRD and made it unsustainable. We have it back on track. There was \$48 million for a grains research partnership signed with the Grains Research and Development Corporation in 2019; \$1.4 million to upgrade the Carnarvon research facility; \$2.8 million to establish a world-class sheep research facility in Katanning, in the member for Roe's electorate; \$1.8 million to upgrade the Merredin Dryland Research Institute; the revitalisation of the Frank Wise Research Institute in Kununurra; and the revamping of the Northern Beef program to meet industry need, with an \$8.3 million funding boost in 2020.

The minister is particularly focused on ensuring that we continue to develop twenty-first century farming practices so that we keep up with the scientific aspects of farming and, indeed, keep the lead in that respect.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

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The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Warren–Blackwood!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: In terms of twenty-first century farming, the government has focused \$7.1 million on the Digital Farm program to bring enterprise-grade broadband to more than 1 400 farm businesses from Kununurra in the north to Mt Barker in the south; an \$8.1 million boost to the eConnected digital data service to support agricultural business competitiveness; and \$4.6 million to upgrade Albany and Geraldton Bureau of Meteorology radars to Doppler standard and complete WA's Doppler network.

There is a focus on restoring soil —

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Moore!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: What is wrong with the member? Why is he yapping away? The member dropped a real clanger in question time today. It is one of the most important fun facts: that koalas have fingerprints. I found that remarkable. I did not know they have fingers; I know they have claws. I found that very interesting and I am sure that if that is what the member is going to do, that is what he is going to do.

We are boosting funding for natural resource management projects to \$8.5 million per annum, from just \$4 million under the previous government. We are supporting industry growth. The state government has committed \$5.8 million to the State Barrier Fence, another \$6.9 million for the State Barrier Fence Esperance extension, and over \$4.5 million for cell fences in Kalgoorlie, Carnarvon and the Murchison. Of course, pastoral lands reform continues. We are driving new industries, including \$24 million to drive value adding in Western Australia, with \$7.3 million delivered in grant funding for regional value-adding projects.

I could outline more, but I know the Treasurer is very eager, as always, to speak. The member also talked about there being no support in the sector for the minister for agriculture. Let us look at some comments about when we came to government and the last three and a half years we have been in power making a genuine effort to rebuild the agricultural sector, particularly the department. David Stoate, chair of the Kimberley Pilbara Cattlemen's Association, said that the minister has "stopped the bleeding". She stemmed the bleeding from the wound opened up by the previous government.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals WA!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The CEO of WAFarmers, Trevor Whittington, said —

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The member does not like Trevor.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Dawesville, when you were absent from the chamber, the minister said that he was not taking interjections.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: He said that for the first time in over a decade—who was in power in the last decade? It would have been members opposite.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, just sit down for a minute. Members, you have heard that the minister is not taking interjections, so I call to order the Leader of the Nationals WA, the member for Dawesville, the member for Moore, the member for Roe and the member for Warren–Blackwood.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: They do not like hearing all the things that the Labor Party has been able to achieve in three and a half years of government to try to fix some of the mess we were left with by them, when they had been sitting around the cabinet table and should have been strongly advocating for the sector that they purport to represent, and failed dismally. That is why they do not like it. I will finish with comments from the CEO of WAFarmers, Trevor Whittington, about the effort by this minister and this government. I refer to my notes. He said that it is the first time in well over a decade he had seen some serious new money go directly into the department. According to my notes, he also said —

It's gone into directly funding the department, and we welcome that, because we've seen the department's numbers halve over the last decade from around 1,600 to 8 or 900.

That was under the previous government and the effort of members opposite. He then said —

So, they've reversed them —

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Mr R.S. Love interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: That is number two, member for Moore.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: These are his words —

So, they've reversed them and they've put additional money in over and above so, it's a credit to the Minister, Alannah MacTiernan, and the Treasurer

I will tell members who I believe: I believe Mr Whittington more than I would believe anything from members opposite. They come into the chamber with all this stuff they go on about and fail dismally. As was highlighted here, good credit to Minister Alannah MacTiernan. We will always defend her. She is a fighter, and that is what members opposite do not like about her. She is out every weekend—I know she is out every weekend because we cannot get the plane to go anywhere, because she is always on it, criss-crossing the state. She is in Kununurra, she is in Broome, and she is in the wheatbelt, the midwest, the south west and my area. She is everywhere because she is passionate about her job and the agricultural sector in Western Australia, and we will back her 100 per cent.

MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park — Treasurer) [4.18 pm]: I rise to make some comments after that strong defence by the Leader of the House on this interesting motion. Ultimately, the motion is about moving the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to the Perth central business district, but it became a broad spleen vent about Hon Alannah MacTiernan. There is something going on. Alannah MacTiernan is like the Lex Luthor of the Nationals WA for some reason. There is something about Hon Alannah MacTiernan that just gets under the skin of the Nationals. There is something about her. For some reason they cannot have a rational thought about agriculture when Alannah MacTiernan is the minister. It has been a slightly bizarre thing to watch over the years and I am going to say something that will cause some pain. The reality is that, for whatever reason, under a Labor government—the Minister for Local Government made this point—agriculture is always treated much more seriously than it is under the coalition. That is what the last 20 years has shown.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Carine!

Mr B.S. WYATT: Reference was made to the late Hon Kim Chance, who was broadly considered a very good Minister for Agriculture; he had the role for two terms. A senior minister and leader of government business in the upper house, he had agriculture and was broadly considered by any fair-minded person as a good minister. Then, under the former Liberal–National government, it was like pass the parcel at a 12-year old's birthday party. Everyone got to have a go at agriculture. When I had a chat to a former minister in the Liberal–National government who sat on the Economic and Expenditure Reform Committee of that government, I asked, "How did you end up with that huge fiscal cliff in the agriculture budget?", which I will come to in a minute. He said, "It was odd. We cut it once and no-one complained and we kept cutting it again." That was the answer given. That is because the agricultural sector is always taken for granted. To a certain extent, that is what Brendon Grylls did. When he moved to the Pilbara seat, he was much more focused on mining and pastoral and the Nationals completely forgot about the agricultural sector, because it took it for granted. With Alannah MacTiernan, another senior Labor minister with incredible experience in every tier of government in Australia, appointed Minister for Agriculture and Food, it drives the National Party insane, to the point at which I think it impacts on the arguments its members make around agriculture. The Minister for Local Government made this point and I agree entirely: she is very well regarded in the agricultural sector, and more broadly, I think, because she works incredibly hard. She is forever promoting the agricultural sector to the point at which when we first came to government she came to me as Treasurer with this enormous fiscal cliff that had been embedded into the agricultural budget. She irritated me as well, but to the point at which we resolved that issue.

The Minister for Local Government also made this point briefly in his contribution, but I want to remind the house of this. When we came to government, the agricultural sector in Western Australia had gone through huge cuts. A total of 600 FTE had been stripped out of the agricultural department, 300 of which were in regional WA—reference was made to the Esperance office—which saw its numbers halved during the term of the Liberal–National government. A total of 600 positions had gone out of the agricultural sector. But what infuriated me as Treasurer is what had been embedded into the forward estimates: the fiscal cliff that the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia was facing in the forward estimates. When we came into government in 2017—I remind members that this is on the back of the loss of 600 jobs in DAFWA—the previous government had built in a further 37 per cent cut in the budget. When members come into this place and ask where our plan is for the agricultural sector, I want to remind the house what the plan was under the former government, a further 37 per cent cut to the agricultural budget. It happened almost silently. I never saw any of the koala drama that we have seen in New South Wales. The National Party was silent in the face of that loss of people, FTEs in regional WA and in a budget that had been not just slashed during its time in government, but also embedded with a massive drop across the forwards. This was the former government's plan for agriculture. Had it been re-elected in 2017 there would have been

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a further reduction in FTEs, from 1 640 to 1 300. That is what that meant with that 37 per cent assumed cut to the agricultural budget across the forward estimates. Again, the Minister for Local Government has already referenced this, but I suspect that is why David Stroat and Trevor Whittington had been in the media quoting that and thanking the minister and me for restoring the financial sustainability of the agricultural department. That is what we had to do. I make that point. Alannah MacTiernan can be very vocal. She can be persistent and irritating, but my God, she is a good minister. The reality is that the Nationals seem to despise Alannah for who she is, as opposed to the minister she is, and it drives their irrational debate sometimes without focusing on what is being delivered and the policy agenda of the minister. She is very well regarded and she is doing an incredibly good job. If they can be rational and look beyond the Lex Luthor impact she seems to have on them, they may understand that she is doing a very good job.

I want to make some comments specifically to the motion because despite the broad ranging conversation from various opposition members, the motion was about the relocation of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to the Perth central business district. I want to make some comments on this because its facilities are currently located in my electorate. I want to remind members that I am the member for Victoria Park. Victoria Park is not in regional WA. It is in my electorate. It is on the edge so it sometimes changes between my electorate and the electorate of my good friend the member for South Perth. We have not moved people from Dalwallinu, we will move people from Kensington into the CBD. Why is that? It is because its facilities have been diabolical for years. When I was first elected I remember going there—it must have been around 2007, maybe 2006—and they were terrible then, but the issue was utterly ignored by the former government over its entire term of eight years in power. The member for Moore talked about how the former government announced a move to Bunbury in 2016. Eight years into government it got around to announcing a move to Bunbury that never happened. At the same time that it announced the move to Bunbury, it took out of the budget the \$234 million that had been in the budget for years to fix up those Kensington facilities, but they were never done. There are WorkSafe hazards there now. When we had a big downpour not that long ago, the place was flooded. We have to get them out of there and they are getting out of there. Significant amounts of money will go into the new labs, because the labs are old. Indeed, they are so old they are threatening our capacity to do R&D, another area that we had to top up in our second budget, I think, to the tune of \$40 million in grains research. Minister Alannah MacTiernan made the point that if the labs are not up to standard, we are in great danger of losing getting them endorsed by the commonwealth. That is what we are funding. I know the Nationals are great believers in devolution, but while the Liberal–National government was in power during those eight and a half years, it made the two devolutions to those great regional centres Joondalup and Fremantle. They were great devolutions it made. Not one went out to regional WA, because during that time it was cutting the guts out of regional FTEs in the agriculture department in regional Western Australia.

Three hundred were lost. As I said a little while ago, what surprised me is how it all happened in great silence. Not a word seemed to have been uttered.

This is one of the things that I have had to do as Treasurer, and I am pleased that we have done it. As I have said, Hon Alannah MacTiernan can be incredibly persistent, and she has managed to encourage out of the budget hundreds of millions of dollars into the agricultural space over the first three budgets of the McGowan government to deal with new spend, but also to deal with the fiscal cliff that the Nationals WA and the Liberal Party had embedded in the forward estimates for the then Department of Agriculture and Food. Agriculture bore the brunt of budget cuts under the former government. We have reversed that and added to it. That is the reality.

I say to National Party members that their contributions to this motion, which I think is an important one, became all about Hon Alannah MacTiernan because of the irrational—I am not sure that it is hatred; I think that is unfair—dislike they have for her. They did not focus on what she is doing as minister—perhaps I can understand this—and conveniently ignored their record in the agricultural space in government and what they left to me as Treasurer when we came to government in 2017.

We will, of course, oppose this motion. For whatever reason, it is always the Labor Party that takes agriculture seriously.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Ms M.M. Quirk) casting her vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (13)

Ms M.J. Davies
Mrs L.M. Harvey
Mr P.A. Katsambanis
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup

Mr S.K. L'Estrange
Mr R.S. Love
Ms L. Mettam
Dr M.D. Nahan

Mr D.C. Nalder
Mr K.M. O'Donnell
Mr D.T. Redman
Mr P.J. Rundle

Mr A. Krsticevic (*Teller*)

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY — Thursday, 10 September 2020]
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Ms Mia Davies; Mr Shane Love; Mr Terry Redman; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr David Templeman; Mr Ben Wyatt

Noes (31)

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

Pairs

Mrs A.K. Hayden	Mr M.P. Murray
Dr D.J. Honey	Ms L.L. Baker
Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr D.T. Punch
Mr J.E. McGrath	Mrs R.M.J. Clarke
Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr S.J. Price
Mr V.A. Catania	Ms S.F. McGurk

Question thus negatived.