

Division 17: Mid West Development Commission, \$1 336 000 -

Mr Andrews, Chairman.

Mr Logan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Midwest, Wheatbelt and Great Southern.

Mr G.J. Baesjou, Chief Executive Officer.

Mr D.J. Singe, Chief Executive Officer, Wheatbelt Development Commission.

Mr B.W. Manning, Chief Executive Officer, Great Southern Development Commission.

Mr HILL: I refer to the sixth dot point under major initiatives for 2002-03 on page 311 of the *Budget Statements*. Can the parliamentary secretary provide additional information on that initiative?

Mr LOGAN: The State Government has allocated \$592 000 to fund the establishment and operating costs of the Geraldton Universities Centre until 2005-06. The initial operations of the Geraldton Universities Centre will be significantly subsidised by collocating with the Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health in 2002-03. In addition, collocation with the Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health defers the need for capital purchases. There are 35 commonwealth fully funded student placements in 2002-03. That will increase over the next few years to 2006-07 as follows: 56 in 2003-04; 82 in 2004-05; 105 in 2005-06; and 105 in the first half of 2006-07. For further information, I ask Mr Baesjou to give an overview of the Geraldton Universities Centre project.

Mr BAESJOU: The genesis of that project started with a youth subcommittee sponsored by the Mid West Development Commission. Further studies on university access revealed that Geraldton was rated 281 out of 290 across Australia. In the metropolitan area 21 out of 100 school leavers accessed university studies; in Geraldton that figure was eight out of 100. That result provided enough impetus for the development of this project. The project started under the tutelage of a board member who headed up a working party. That working party resulted in a successful lobby to the federal Government for 20 fully funded places which, as stated earlier, has been ramped up. In addition, \$1 million was secured from the federal Government for capital works in 2004.

Mr SWEETMAN: I asked some questions on the Gascoyne Development Commission in Estimates Committee A and have come back to this committee for the Mid West Development Commission. I therefore do not have any questions prepared. I am aware that the Mid West Development Commission has a project office in the Murchison area based in Mt Magnet, I think, or located in the Murchison region.

Mr BAESJOU: A significant need was identified to service the seven shires in the Murchison area. It took some time to put that office into place. It was done in partnership with the Shire of Mt Magnet, which now hosts the level 6 officer who was appointed in February as the regional manager for the Murchison. That project is working well and a strong liaison and partnership is developing with those seven Murchison shires.

Mr SWEETMAN: The commissioner would probably be aware that the Shires of Greenough and Geraldton made substantial contributions to a concept called "Outback Coast". Has the Mid West Development Commission been involved in that concept by providing advice to the shires or by understanding the concept of "Outback Coast"? It encompasses most of the mid west area covered by the Mid West Development Commission.

Mr BAESJOU: Yes, we were aware of that proposal. We exercised some caution on that project in consultation with the Shire of Greenough and the City of Geraldton because we did not believe that a due diligence study had been completed. We are in the process of doing that. However, the commission has made no financial contribution to that outback-to-ocean project.

Mr SWEETMAN: If the commission is conducting due diligence now, is it considering being involved in the project in some capacity in the future, if not financially, by providing other resources to it?

Mr BAESJOU: That will depend on the due diligence studies that we are conducting in conjunction with the other local government authorities.

Mr SWEETMAN: I refer to the air services into the mid west, particularly into Kalbarri, and the position of the development commission. Given that there is currently a review into regional air services, with an initial emphasis on the area serviced by Skywest Airlines Pty Ltd, has the development commission been able to provide information to the Department for Planning and Infrastructure and has the commission been contacted by the consultants undertaking that intrastate review?

Mr LOGAN: Mr Baesjou, has the RDC had any input into that review?

[9.50 pm]

Mr BAESJOU: Yes, it has. It hosted a forum in Kalbarri with the consultants, and that was followed up with a forum in Geraldton. The coastal air service was a significant item in that consultation, particularly extending that service from Geraldton and looking at involving other operators in that route.

The appropriation was recommended.