

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

Resumed from 14 October on the following motion moved by Hon Stephen Dawson (Minister for Environment) —

That pursuant to standing order 69(1), the Legislative Council take note of tabled papers 4389A–D (budget papers 2020–21) laid upon the table of the house on Thursday, 8 October 2020.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [11.33 am]: Yesterday, in noting the budget papers, we were all able to observe that this government has now been exposed for what it really is. It used to be all froth and no substance, but it has moved on from there to be a one-trick pony, together with a lot of froth and no other substance. We have observed that government debt has grown under this government from \$32.5 billion to a figure shown in the near out years in this budget of \$42.5 billion. That is a \$10 billion increase, and that is the response from those in government who presumed to lecture the opposition about what great financial saviours they were going to be, despite the fact that they have record revenues coming in, in contrast to the fate of the previous government, which suffered just the reverse.

I mentioned, and gave some examples of, how this government has sought not to provide transparency, but to avoid every form of scrutiny. It has done that through a number of mechanisms, including machinery-of-government changes, that are already resulting in gross inefficiencies, dissatisfaction amongst our hardworking public servants and dissatisfaction with the standard of services being delivered in many cases to the people of Western Australia. That is the answer to the question: what has the government done? Apart from bringing in a hard border in March, what has it done? Not a heck of a lot, and what it has done has overwhelmingly been counterproductive and wasteful and represents tremendous lost opportunities.

The budget itself of course is, as I said yesterday, a tremendous lost opportunity, because what we see is a government now exposed for what it has always been—that is, one that is reliant on government by media spin, without regard for policy and the hard work behind developing programs to advance the various causes of the people and the sectors of industry in Western Australia. It is certainly not something that it can be congratulated on, so it will have to rely on its own self-congratulation, because that is all it is going to get.

However, the opposition has a different view. We think this is a time for leadership in Western Australia. It is a time for advancing programs to make progress in developing from the difficult economic circumstances that COVID-19 has presented and taking advantage of the very real opportunities that we enjoy in Western Australia. But those prospects have to be turned into reality, and to do that, direction and leadership are needed. Having observed over the last few years, and most recently with this current budget, that this government is inclined to produce none of that, and is incapable of producing it, it is fair enough for people to then ask, “What do you have?” We are going to hear from a range of opposition spokespeople, from our leader down, about some further positive initiatives to advance the causes of Western Australians, and they will make their judgement about that in due course.

What I want to touch on now in the brief time available to me is just one discrete sector in which we can make a contribution. I want members of this house to engage closely with me in what I am about to say, because, happily, it has turned into a positive matter. It is not criticism of the past, and that is all we seem to have heard of late. No; it is about brighter prospects for the future and how we can make things better.

Some little while ago—it seems like a very long time ago now, but it was last year—the house honoured me by making me chairman of a select committee to inquire into local government in Western Australia. I thank the house for that privilege, because it was a way to make a contribution. I will not recap all the reasons that I advanced in setting up that select committee, but I now want to look at some of the fruits of that initiative and how members here, and the house as a whole, can join in to address some of the issues that have been raised in a very proactive, positive and substantial way. In doing so, I wish to acknowledge my colleagues on the select committee. Hon Laurie Graham brought great insight and experience to the role that we were given, and I thank him very much for his substantial contribution. He was joined by Hon Diane Evers, who made a different but very complementary contribution, given her experience, not least of which being her professional experience in accountancy matters. Indeed, I have to confess that the chair relied rather heavily on his colleagues in some of these matters as we worked through some very complex issues. We were joined by Hon Martin Aldridge, who, as we all know, is a very competent member. Of course, as a member for the Agricultural Region, Hon Martin Aldridge has a vast number of regional local governments in his electorate, and he was able to bring some very important perspectives to the select committee table. Hon Charles Smith, who has a great way of cutting to the chase in issues of the day, made a strong contribution. Together, we were a good team and produced a report that is nonpartisan and balanced and I think it addresses some of the issues that have been raised by all members from time to time.

We acknowledge our legal advisory officer, David Carroll. I think we were all impressed with David. It was a very complex exercise to put this report together and make it readable, bearing in mind the readership that it is intended for. David, together with Mark Warner, now have their body of work on the record, and it is a credit to them.

In examining the many findings and recommendations of our committee, there are some things I would like members to take away, firstly generally, and then I will get to the specifics. Generally, I do not think that the role of a select committee engaged in this sort of an inquiry, and what we can and cannot achieve, is universally understood. It is interesting that I have had one or two people provide some feedback from the sector giving us marks out of 10, or saying that it is a very nice report but we should have recommended this or that. That is not how the world works. A genuine inquiry is a search for the truth. That is why we identified and then set out to examine a whole range of issues that are abroad in the public debate and search for the truth in those. We do that by taking evidence and making inquiry in a whole range of corners in order to sift through the totality of information; working out what the situation actually is, without embroidering it with the rhetoric and emotion that sometimes goes with public debate; and then providing a report accordingly for the benefit of others, so that they have some more information to work with. That is one of the first roles of a select committee in making such a report—to inform the debate.

Of course, a select committee does not have executive power beyond its own power. We do not have the capacity to make policy for governments or oppositions and say, “Here’s what should happen; here’s what will change.” But we can shine a light on the issues of the day and inform, and, indeed, on the basis of that consideration, make recommendations.

We are looking forward in due course to the response of the government when it comes through because a whole range of matters are canvassed in the report. There is simply not the time to go through them all now, and I do not intend to do so, but there are some ongoing themes. One thing we did was identify some areas in the local government sphere that would benefit from further consideration by the Parliament. I am going to conclude in a moment by making a plea to members and the house as a whole to take notice of one important element of that.

In my opening speech in favour of setting up a Select Committee into Local Government, I reminded the house that local government is a product of this Parliament. It is in state legislation that Parliament has ordained and supported over the years the principle that there shall be a system of local government in Western Australia. We have set up the legislative machinery to go with it and other state governments have set up the administrative machinery to go with it. But then, I fear, to a large extent, Parliament has washed its hands of the matter, until and unless some hot issue of the day erupts in controversy, and then political matters get brought into the fray.

Some of the recommendations we have made to the house require further examination or ongoing scrutiny of certain parts of local government operations. For example, recommendation 3 states —

The regulatory impact assessment process for any regulatory proposal giving new responsibilities to local governments should explicitly address:

- why local government is the appropriate level of government to assume those responsibilities
- the estimated cost to the local government sector of discharging those responsibilities
- the resources the State Government will provide to local governments to meet that estimated cost.

That is something that has been largely absent. Over many years, I have seen Parliament enact various laws that impact on local governments, and I do not think and the committee does not think that enough attention has been given to that. Recommendation 4 states —

Explanatory memoranda accompanying a Bill should ... address the potential impact of the Bill on local governments, including any costs of complying with and administering the proposed legislation.

I will come back to recommendation 5 when I conclude in a moment. I draw particular attention to these recommendations because they are on the theme that I am referring to this morning. Recommendation 19 states —

The Government ensure that the Department of Local Government ... is sufficiently resourced to be a strong source of advice and support for the local government sector.

That would seem to be an obvious requirement, but we found that that is not what is being delivered. If that is the case, who is going to take responsibility for measuring that and correcting it? Again, I would suggest it needs to come back to Parliament, as well as to the government of the day.

Recommendation 20 states —

The Government ensure that the Department ... is sufficiently resourced to be a source of independent advice and support for individual council members.

At the moment, it is not, but who is doing anything about it? Recommendation 21 states —

The Department ... coordinate the preparation of a publicly available single source of information clearly setting out the avenues of complaint available regarding local government decisions, and conduct issues within local governments.

We recommended that because it is necessary and it does not exist, but, again, who is going to give oversight and ensure that that is corrected? Recommendation 23 states —

The Government ensure that the Department ... is appropriately resourced to conduct authorised inquiries in a timely manner.

I think we are all aware that that is not occurring in current affairs. Inquiries are dragging on for years, hanging over councillors and councils. It is not good enough, but who is going to do something about it? Recommendation 25 states —

The Government give active consideration, as part of the review of the *Local Government Act 1995*, to establishing a new independent statutory body to regulate and support the local government sector.

There is substantial discussion about that fairly complex recommendation in the report, but again, who is going to oversee such an initiative if it is brought forward?

There are sundry other issues that will be ongoing with regard to the Local Government Standards Panel and other processes. A number of areas require further examination before we charge down a route, I would suggest, that has been outlined in the minister's review panel, which reported on 5 August this year. After an incomplete and inadequate process, in my view, it stated that it is clear that some far-reaching changes are needed in how councils are elected, their term of office and a whole range of other matters, which should not be made on the run just because some boffins in a backroom think it sounds like a good idea. No—if the Parliament is going to take care of its own entity, the local government sector, it needs to overview that properly. These are the sorts of processes that should be looked at by a joint select committee in due course before it goes charging off, making changes willy-nilly to the local government sector and all those thousands of people involved in it simply because someone thinks it is a good idea. Have we not seen in recent governments—probably governments going back a very long way—the problems and angst that are caused by some bright spark having an idea and deciding that we are all going to charge off in a particular direction? It all ends up in tears before bedtime. The local government sector is not the beneficiary of that sort of treatment and I do not think it stands to the credit of the Parliament if we allow that sort of thing to continue. I urge members, whatever their political stripe, to have regard for that fundamental respect for local government that, regrettably, seems to get swept to the wayside all too often in the interest of expediency, blinkered thinking or other prejudice.

That brings me back to recommendation 5 of the Select Committee into Local Government report, which reads —

The Legislative Council amend the Standing Orders of the Legislative Council to expand the terms of reference of an existing parliamentary committee, or establish a new parliamentary committee, to address issues relating to the system of local government.

That is a simple device that we can do something about as a house. That would go a very long way towards addressing the many matters that are raised in this report, and those that will arise in the future. It will also give a greater degree of comfort to Parliament that it is discharging its responsibilities to the child it created in local government. It would give great comfort to those who observe the processes and would sometimes wonder whether it is going off the rails. If it is, who do we go to who has some clout and can do something about it? The committee did not recommend that the government have a new standing committee. That might not be the right way to do it, but I tend to think, personally, that the better option is to simply expand the terms of reference of an existing parliamentary committee to include an explicit capacity to address issues relating to the system of local government. That way we can have a standing committee that we can rely on to give us advice in a timely and non-partisan manner that will help inform the decisions we make as a Parliament.

I will conclude on that positive note, with the strongest possible commendation of recommendation 5 to the house's attention. I hope that in due course we will be able to make progress along those lines.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas): Hon Diane Evers.

HON DIANE EVERS (South West) [11.55 am]: Thank you.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Before you begin, can I just determine whether you are the lead speaker, as usual, for the Greens.

Hon DIANE EVERS: I am indeed. Thank you, Acting President; I appreciate having the call.

This is one of my favourite days in Parliament. It is not too often I get to speak about the budget for as long as I like and people have to listen, so, here I go! I hope members find it entertaining and interesting and that we all learn a little, but we will see how that goes. Firstly, at this time, I would like to mention the federal budget. I know this is not out of line, as the previous member, Hon Dr Steve Thomas, spoke about it as well. It is very relevant to what we are doing, and it is timely, as the federal budget came out only two days before our budget. I can understand that the federal government has a lack of forward thinking, and I do not mean this unkindly, but it is a bunch of old white men. Even if they are not old, white and male, it is a way of thinking that worries me. It is that old, white male way of thinking. It does not have anything to do with age, skin colour or even gender, because it is a mindset—

a way of thinking. I cannot even say that all old males of European descent think that way; I have met young people, women and people of colour who do. I cannot even use the word “conservative”, because it is just old; it is not like they are trying to conserve anything other than the way things are. It is a way of thinking that stems pretty much from privilege, because the way things are got them into this position, so why would they want to change them? They want to keep it like this because they are doing quite well and the people in Parliament are doing quite well, so why would they change it? It is a way of thinking that, say, if the state were to become more equitable, they believe that somehow they would miss out, and it just does not go that way.

It is also a way of thinking that believes just maybe all the scientists are wrong, the earth will fight back and it will be able to handle the anthropogenic impact and heal itself so that we can continue spewing carbon into the atmosphere, but that is not the case. The thin layer of atmosphere that is making the planet inhabitable is being damaged by humans. It is changing and we know that it is changing. It will not be able to fight back unless we stop trying to damage it. This old thinking is probably from the nineteenth century. We have been talking a bit about centuries in here. This stems from the nineteenth century when people could do whatever they liked and it would not make a difference to the planet as a whole. I understand that that made some sense to people in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because they just did not realise the size, magnitude and population we would have. I think we had a quarter of the population then. They just did not realise that we would ever get to this point. That thinking that things are going to be like that and will fix itself, or whatever, is outdated. It does not work in our modern, technologically driven, well-populated, consumption-based economy. Alongside that old thinking “keep things as they are because the people in power like that because they got there using that sort of system”, it does not work anymore. We are not only killing the planet, but also making our people, our populations, much more inequitable. We are making the potential for damage to the climate and the potential for conflict that much more likely.

We have been talking about this budget and this old way of thinking and we have to get away from the idea that it is all about money. Money is one thing. If each individual had a key performance indicator, I bet one of them would be how much money they have earned or maybe how much money they have, which is a different thing, or maybe how much money they have spent—but why? I think a lot of people in other countries do not think that way, especially those people without money or access to money, or the excess that we have. I am really concerned. I was playing poker when I was five. I was studying accounting by the time I was 12. I understand—the dollar signs are fun. But it is not what you have, but who you are, what that money makes you, what it makes you able to do and how you can contribute to your society, not just how much you can consume. It is about equity. It is not just about money. It is about the opportunities that a budget can give somebody. It is about opportunities for people for their health, education, travel and leisure. It is about the opportunity to be who they want to be and who they will become, and not about sticking somebody in a box. Any member who has children probably knows that. They look at their child and see a lump of clay and they want to mould it into something, but that lump of clay wants to become something itself, and so there is that tension in families, probably at all times, trying to decide who that child is going to become. Just like every other parent, we want opportunities for our children. That is what we need to be thinking about. We need to have that in our minds while we are doing this.

The next thing we need is equitable access to services. I am not saying “equal” access to services because we cannot all have the same thing. I choose to live in Albany, so I am not going to have the same medical support that I might have if I lived in the city of Perth. I understand that; that is granted. I might have access to transportation to get me to Perth if I need it, but it would not be instant. I still know that I live far away. If a person chooses to live in Halls Creek, they will know that the time difference in travel makes things a little bit harder and the size and scale of support will be different, but we still want equity amongst our services. We still want children to have the education that everyone should be entitled to—we are a wealthy enough state to be able to provide that—whether that education is face to face in a classroom of 10 children in a remote area, in a city-based classroom of 30 children, in a private school classroom of 15 children or online. This technology-driven society that we live in allows us to do that. We can have that equity of education, but we need to support it. We need to make sure that we get good teachers who want to be there, impart their knowledge and help those kids be who they want to be and become the best that they can be with what they have been given in life. We do not all start equal, but we should still have equitable access to services.

Access to leisure is another thing we should all have. Thousands of years ago access to leisure was something for the wealthy, which is probably even now, except our wealthy are so driven by making more money maybe they are not taking that time for leisure. Leisure is becoming an inequitable thing because of what people have to give up to have it and, once they have that leisure time, what they do with it. I think a lot of people work because they would not know what to do with that time if they had it or, if they do have the time, maybe they are not making the best use of it that they would like to. Maybe they are out there in their own homes going through Facebook or Instagram on their phones, whiling away the hours with no impact on anyone other than a few electrons going around, a little bit of energy use. But if that is what they choose to do with their leisure time, that is fine. But given the opportunity to have access to leisure, I think humans might be encouraged to do something else.

We know that a lot of mental health issues stem from a loss of connection to community, to people and to society. Although phones can allow connection, they can also isolate people. Therefore, leisure is really important because as a society we need to encourage positive leisure activities. I am not saying that we should tell people what to do, but we should give them access so they can have positive opportunities to interact and be connected to their community.

Another thing that this should be about is working—not working as part of our economy, which we always talk about, but working as part of our social system. We talk about money. We talk about jobs. We talk about the economy. But I want to talk about meaningful employment. It does not necessarily need to be paid employment but use of a person's time that maybe makes a contribution in some way to their community or society. The majority of people have the capability to provide something or contribute in some way, and that contribution makes people feel good. They benefit the people or the event or the asset that they are contributing to and they feel good and they are making something good. That is what we want to develop, I believe, as a state. Those are the things that we want to try to help.

I separate it from the economy. I know I have said it before in here, but I am going to say it again because I think it is vital that we start taking this concept down. I will do it without waving my hands around because I know that cannot go into *Hansard* very well, so I will see how I go. We have all seen the triple bottom line and the idea of the three overlapping social, economic and environmental circles of the Venn diagram. I used to see that and think that it was great that people were thinking about the environment. I first saw it in an accounting magazine. Our businesses are now not all about money; they recognise this concept. Then the penny dropped for me and it dawned on me, probably only in the last year or two, that the diagram was showing the environment and society to be equal with the economy; it was trying to show that the economy was so important that it was equal to the environment and our social structures. But it is not. That is a lie. I am sorry that everyone has been misinformed on that, but that is absolute rubbish.

Looking at our history and where we are on planet Earth, this is our environment. The environment is one big circle. It will go on regardless of whether we are here or not. As Hon Dr Steve Thomas said one day, a while ago, humans are a sort of boom and bust race. He said we are doing well now, but we cannot expect to be around for long. I am paraphrasing, but it concerned me that he was willing to let us just drive ourselves into oblivion, maybe to come back in a thousand years or a few million years a little bit different—I do not know. But I am not prepared to do that.

If we picture that Venn diagram again, the big circle is the environment. Inside that circle, humans began to develop and create societies and interact and start working within their environment, managing it and manipulating it, so we have the society within that. Within the big circle of the environment is this other circle of the social structures, communities and people. That is how we are part of the environment. We are just one part of it. Then, once humans started doing all of this interacting, we wanted to start trading things. One clan or group or tribe moved across large landscapes. They had access to materials that others needed and wanted to start trading. That trade was when our economy started developing. Our economy developed as a tool to assist humans who lived on the planet—that is it; that is where it was.

Sometime in the last couple of thousand, years that economy became more and more entrenched as a system. It developed into economics and philosophy studies about how this works, which continued to develop and build up to what it is now. Somebody can do the research, but I would love to watch the news stories to see how many of them are talking about the economy, the money, the numbers, the dollars, the big corporations that are taking it from here to there and then moving it somewhere else, and the wealthy people who are spending it on whatever toys they need. But, really, that is just a part of what we do. That is not where we live. That is not the planet. That is not our health. That is not our society. That is not our children or our future or anything like that. I think we need to move away from that, but, I take it back. This is the budget. This is all about numbers, but it is also a very strong representation of our values and policies, and of where we expect to be and how we expect to get there. The budget is the prime document; this is it. This document shows where that money and those tools are going to be used to create the society that we want to have within the environment that we live in.

I mentioned the federal government and the federal budget at the same time as the state budget. They are not the same, but we have seen from the federal Liberal government—I hate to say it—the same appalling financial management of the last Liberal government in Western Australia. I do not get it. I have been in this country for only 36 years, 25 years of which have been in this state, so I am an outsider. But I look at this and I just think—I will put aside that I am from the United States, but I no longer have citizenship there and that country is not my responsibility. I will not vouch for anything that is done in that country. It is a mess and I will just leave it at that. I go back to Western Australia, my adopted home country. I am very pleased to be here and very pleased that I was allowed in. It is magnificent, but for the appalling financial management of the Liberal Party! First, it has the misnomer of being called the Liberal Party. It is liberal with money—I get it—but conservative in every other way except for the environment. It is a misnomer. Where did anybody get the idea that the Liberal Party is a financial manager? I do not remember any Liberal government being a good financial manager in the last 36 years. I just

do not understand it. It is kind of like doublespeak from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where a person keeps saying what they want people to believe. If it is said often enough, people will start believing it. A person can even start saying something else tomorrow and people will start believing that. If a person is called out on it, people will eventually forget that and believe the next thing that they are told. We need to put it up in big neon lights somewhere that the Liberal Party is not a good financial manager—no; that is not how it works. I will get into more of that as we discuss this budget because it shows a —

Hon Simon O'Brien: Hang on! Why would you seek to generalise in that way?

Hon DIANE EVERS: It is only because of my last 36 years of experience in this country. I believe that there were some very good politicians prior to that, but I am not aware of them. I will have to look back through the history books.

Hon Simon O'Brien: You could look at recent history and at Richard Court, for example.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Yes, I did. That was when I got here.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Robin Chapple): Members!

Hon DIANE EVERS: Does the member remember what he did to the rail industry? He put everything onto trucks and damaged our roads and towns, but that is a story for another day. When we have poor financial management —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Can I just comment on Richard Court? Five out of his eight budgets were deficits.

Hon DIANE EVERS: That was back in the day when deficits were bad. What we are hearing from the Liberal Party now is that deficits are good. Let us get this straight.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members! This is not a conversation. I give the call to Hon Diane Evers, and if Hon Diane Evers would like to address her remarks to me, that would be really useful.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Thank you, Mr Acting President, I appreciate it. With that poor economic management at a federal level, we were left in a pretty bad situation when the COVID-19 pandemic came along. We had no plan and no resources or savings for a rainy day to manage it. I am pleased that somehow somebody got some good ideas to the federal government and it did the right thing at the beginning. If the federal government had thought about things for even a half hour longer, the whole idea of handing out JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments may not have eventuated. I cannot imagine how that got passed but I am so delighted it did because it kept us going and it kept a lot of people afar from suffering. The payments were not available for everyone, but it kept things going. Somehow that good decision was made and a few other good decisions have since been made.

Hon Simon O'Brien: By a Liberal government.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Yes. Like I said, I do not know who was advising it.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Probably that nice Adam Bandt or some genius like that.

Hon DIANE EVERS: It could just be. At the risk of jumping ahead, I want to comment more on the federal budget and the \$50 billion in tax breaks. We are going into debt and the federal government is trying to tell us now that debt is a good thing, but one of the things contributing to that debt is the \$50 billion in tax breaks, most of which is going to go to people who do not need it. The vast majority of people do not need it. I do not need it and I do not think anyone else here needs it. If they do, they might be poor financial managers as well and maybe they need some help. Liberal Party members are now saying that debt is good and we should be spending to keep things going. That is okay as long as people are spending on the things that develop the economy and do not cause other problems in doing so. Economists are seriously leaning towards saying that we should print some more money to keep the economy going at a federal level. The mantra of our day is: we have to keep the economy going. Hon Dr Steve Thomas was practically bragging about the debt levels of the federal government proving that it can spend too, but spending \$50 billion on their rich mates so that they can give the Liberal Party more donations! Maybe in some circles that is considered smart, but I do not consider that to be smart. I consider that to be appalling. It is outrageous, inept negligence—whatever. To give more money to wealthy people who are going to hold onto it, give it back in donations or send it overseas —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Are you still talking about the federal budget?

Hon DIANE EVERS: I am still talking about the federal budget. It was such a mess that I thought I needed to give it the time. We are going down the wrong track there. It could be done better, but unfortunately I do not see it happening. It is a shame. If we get back to this state and this government, I expect considerably better than that. I have been pleased to see actions to that effect. When the COVID-19 pandemic came along, this government took scientific, factual advice and followed it, and it worked. This Parliament came together to quickly put in place legislation that addressed COVID. There was collaboration and this mindset that we had to make this legislation the best it could be because it needed to be passed. The thing that I will remember most from this term of Parliament will not be the COVID pandemic but the collaboration across the floor, so I know that it can be done. We do not

have to continually sit in an adversarial system with a government and an opposition. We need to ban the name “opposition”. What use is that? I know that the opposition wants to make the government look bad so that one day it can get back into government.

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Members!

Hon DIANE EVERS: I understand that when the situation is reversed and the other side is in opposition, it can be just as bad. I have heard it from them and I have heard it from everywhere; I get it, but it is not a great system. I will not be the one to change it. It has to be changed through collaboration across the floor. I do not see it happening any time soon, but one never knows.

I see some possibilities with this government's budget. I expect it to do better than the federal Liberal government. I see that happening and I am really pleased. It is dead slow but I think that we can get there, I just do not know whether I will be alive long enough to see it. We need to work a little bit faster.

I will now look at this budget's big-picture projection. We heard that spending has increased by \$4.8 billion since the *Government Mid-year Financial Projections Statement*. In that time, the COVID pandemic happened and royalties stayed high. Great! We are investing that \$4.8 billion back into the economy, just as the Liberals said we should be doing. Some of that money went directly to minimising the effect of COVID on individuals—wonderful. Many of the increases in household fees and charges were frozen—that was great, it needed to happen. We were living through a time that was completely unknown. We had no idea what would come next; we had no idea what the response would be and what would happen. I would be interested in reading what people wrote about their feelings and expectations at that time to see the variety of possible scenarios that that could have led to. Some of that funding is going to minimise the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals and some of it is going to keep construction workers employed. I know that we are trying to keep a lot of people in different industries employed, but, wow, what a focus there has been on construction. It is almost along the same lines as the New Deal, which was about making sure that we got unemployed people working. But why is the focus just on construction? What is the fascination with making sure we have construction workers out there? For one thing, construction is a very gendered industry, yet that is what we are focusing on and that is what we are going to need, but I will talk about that later. We may find that some more young women will go into more gendered employment such as nursing and will find themselves making twice as much as construction workers. I do not know whether that is an either/or type of situation, but sometimes I wonder how young people make that choice when they are 18, 20 or 22 years of age. Maybe they will make that choice, but, to me, it would be a loss. What about all those men who could become nurses? We are going to need a lot of health care, guys. We are all getting older—diseases are happening, and there are injuries, illnesses and all sorts of things. We are going to need a lot of medical care for the baby boomer generation as it heads into hospital care and home care. Maybe we need to train up and get more people to work there. Maybe we could even work on preventive health issues to try to make sure that we do not end up infirm. That comes back to that leisure thing, possibly. I do not have all the answers, but I have some good ideas and I hope that I can express them today. I think we need to broaden that idea to keep people employed. Maybe we have focused a bit too much on construction workers, but I will get to that.

Maybe the other part of that funding is seeking to improve the Labor Party's standing in the coming election. That is to be expected. It is part of the game; it is part of the winner getting to make the rules. But another issue in particular that I want to get to relates to the \$644 million that will go out to everybody via their Synergy and Horizon bills. It is not targeted. I am going to get it. All members here are going to get it. We are all going to get it—\$600. Great! Thanks! Vote Labor. I will come to that later; I do not want to get ahead of myself.

Let me go back to spending. The government is spending another \$4.8 billion. The government has a lot of money so what is it doing with it? The idea should not be just to spend everything that we can or to get that money into society as quickly as we can. There has been a lot of talk—a lot coming from the Greens as well—that if we put that money back into society, it will get the economy going. If we give money to people, they will spend it in the society in which they live. We need to give it to the people who need it most, because they will not spend it to pay off their debt so much; they will buy food, pay for their housing, maybe buy a new set of clothes and put fuel in the car. They will spend it and it will go right back into the economy. That money will buy a coffee so a barista can be employed, so they can spend it on a new hat or a new set of clothes—I do not want to be gender specific—and then that person will be employed and they can spend that money too. If we make it go around and around, it will make our communities healthier. The people who do not have those nice secure six-figure incomes will have enough money to do a bit of spending and that money will be out there to employ others. That is my dream for regional areas—to get more people out there. If we get more people shopping locally, more businesses will open, and if more businesses open, there will be more jobs, which will mean we will have a greater pool of people to draw on should an industry need a variety of occupations. It could work, but we just have to think forward. We just have to think about the big picture: where do we want to go?

The last point I want to make about the federal budget is that only three or four years ago, or five or six years ago—I do not know—we were talking about a budget blowout and debt crisis and how terrible that was. Then the Liberals got in and they have just kept on spending. Now we have a crisis and the federal government has no more money, so it is going to borrow more. Instead of thinking about that debt crisis now, it is saying, “No, debt is good. We’re coming up to a trillion dollars. How about that? Aren’t we great?” The federal government has changed the spin and is making us think that that is good. But who will pay for that debt?

Again, Hon Dr Steve Thomas said that we just put it out there for future generations and maybe by that time, it will not matter so much and that maybe with inflation it will be easier to pay it off, especially as we now have low interest rates. Even if we never intend to pay off that debt, it still limits what could be borrowed in the future. There is a limit. There must be a point at which we say that that is probably as much as we need because that is how much we can cover. I realise that low interest rates mean that people do not think about having to pay back so much interest. With the budget, it is not a case of how much money is spent, but where we are spending it. It is incomprehensible to me that I am the one saying, “Beware! Be careful! Don’t put it all out today if we don’t need to spend it all today”, yet a Liberal member is saying that we should be spending more and that this budget is not good enough because there is a surplus and we should not have a surplus in a COVID-19 world. I would not say that COVID-19 is the least of our worries but many things are coming in the future and we have to be prepared for all of them. This Greens spokesperson here is saying that we need to use caution: do not just spend because we have it. We are in a very lucky situation. We are in a boom and bust state and just spending it does not make any sense whatsoever.

I want to talk about investments. How do we invest these funds? I went to Wikipedia—the font of all knowledge, but at least it is representative of a wide variety of people—for the definition of “investment”. It states —

... allocate money in the expectation of some benefit in the future.

That makes sense. So why do we build a bigger road if we are expecting some benefit in the future? That bigger road might allow more people to travel more quickly, more smoothly, for a period of time, but we also know from past research that when we build a bigger road, it fills. I learnt that when I was seven or eight years old when the freeways to end the need for all freeways were built in Los Angeles. They said that those freeways would be there for 40 years and there would be no problems. I think it took about three years before they were packed and people were in traffic jams again. That was back in 1969 or 1970, or something like that. It cannot be done. There is a great quote that I will remember forever: the idea of building bigger roads to deal with a traffic congestion problem is like loosening your belt buckle to deal with obesity. It just does not work. We know that, but we still do it.

We must invest in sustainable construction. It will make us more resilient in the future as we head towards the expected impacts of climate change and other risks, which I will be detailing. The risks of climate change are happening. We cannot deny it. We cannot say that it is not happening or that we do not trust the science. That is wrong. It is happening. More frequent violent storms are occurring and those frequent violent storms are causing more damage. People die in them. Land is washed away forever. Sea levels are rising. We can see that in this budget—I will detail that when I get to it. So many places are dealing with coastal erosion. We have it. It is happening. There are heatwaves. Heatwaves put people in hospital and some people die. Heatwaves are brought on by climate change from anthropogenic influences on our planet. Increased bushfires are a whole topic. There are bad times ahead. I am not being a doomsayer here; I am just saying that we should be planning ahead. There is a decreasing water supply. There are going to be water wars. This is not going to get better just by hoping that it will or by ignoring it. There will be increased health impacts. We have that already from heatstroke, from smoke from bushfires and other health impacts from other pandemics. COVID-19 will come back and there will be health impacts from mosquito-borne disease. Malaria and dengue fever are becoming bigger problems in Australia because as the climate warms, mosquitoes carry those diseases further south. There is a lot happening, so we have to think ahead.

If we are investing, what are we investing in that will make us more resilient in the future so that we do not have so many costs hitting us every time there is a climate impact or something? We have to look at what we want to invest in. We are planning for the future. We need to invest. Where are we going with it? At the top of the list are the impacts of climate change. Why not invest in reducing the causes of climate change? That is what the Greens have been on about for I do not know how long—probably since they started. We know that climate change is caused by CO₂ or equivalent emissions. We know how those emissions get into the atmosphere—we are part of putting them there—so why are we not investing in reducing those causes? Would that not make sense? We could start by reducing our emissions. We are investing in gas at a time when we do not need to be. We do not need it as a transitional fuel. It is outdated, expensive and dirty. Leave it in the ground. We can do this with renewables. We should first reduce emissions, including from our vehicles. It is possible to run electric vehicles on renewable energy. Other countries are doing this. We are the laggards. We have so much wealth from and access to resources. We could reduce our emissions. We have to increase carbon drawdown—we have talked about that a number of times. Carbon sequestration is mentioned once in the budget—yay! Regeneration is mentioned once in the budget and it is a carryover sentence from last year. We are getting there, but not quickly enough. We really have to change what we draw down.

It is just not going to work if we continue to spew CO₂ or equivalents into the atmosphere and hope that it is going to make a difference. I am not prepared to just say, “Well, sorry, the human race had a good run at it. If we only last another 50 or 100 years, oh well, it won’t be in my lifetime; it should be okay.” I am not prepared to do that. The idea that the most intelligent species on Earth, supposedly, will destroy its own home is offensive to me. It is outrageous. We have to invest in our future and the future of our children. We need to plan ahead. Some things in this budget do just that. I am really pleased to see that, but I still think there is much more we could do. We could go 100 per cent renewable energy for not only stationary energy but also transport. I understand that we would probably still need a liquid fuel for airplanes, but there could be other methods. I do not know about hydrogen; I have not looked into that. There are other opportunities. We have the resources for renewable energy from myriad sources, so we can find the right one to suit each circumstance. We are in such a lucky position in this state because we have the minerals available for batteries. I think we have in this state 10 of the 11 minerals needed to make batteries. We have energy from the sun and the wind to be able to power our factories. We have the ingenuity coming through our universities to be able to develop and make the technology here in a clean way and at a reasonable price so that we can get it out there and use it.

We are holding ourselves back. This is more at a federal level, but the state is at it as well with the investment in gas and some things. At a federal level, we are holding ourselves back because the government does not believe—it is not even “believe”; the government is not willing to embrace—in embracing new technology, and that is what we have to see. It could be because of the donations that parties receive and corporate influence to keep things as they are. That old-white-male thinking drives most of our large corporations—mining corporations, banks, insurance companies. They are starting to look a little towards the future. They are probably starting to get there a little faster than the federal government, but they feel that they have nothing to lose—if they keep doing what they are doing, they will stay where they are. I find that offensive.

Public transport is another place to invest. I am really pleased to see the investment in that. It should continue. From talking to youth down south, I know they are really interested in public transport. They are interested because they do not see the need to own their own car or they cannot afford to own their own car, and they would like to get around. We should be thinking about how we can plan for a future in our regional areas in which public transport of some sort is available and people are not reliant on their own vehicle all the time. I am sure there are solutions. That is what we need to be looking at. Public transport in the city is a great idea. During the COVID period, a lot of people shifted away from public transport because of the concerns associated with it, but I think we need to shift them back. I think we need to show that it is safe, it can be done and it is efficient. I think we should aim to provide free public transport. If we get people off the roads, we will not have to build roads. With free public transport, there would be fewer emissions per person per kilometre. There would be no need to collect money for tickets or to police that; it would just be there for people to get on and go when and where they want to. Energy costs will reduce over time. Renewable energy does not have any input costs. Once it is built, it just continues. Our public transport should be free. Members should think about how much we would save. I will get to the part about the construction workers, because if we are not building roads, those people will not be employed. But to me, spending money to shift sand from one hole to another hole is not a good use of it. For example, \$175 million is being spent on an Albany ring-road that is not necessary and will never have much traffic on it, and even that traffic could be on a rail lane from the Down Road industrial site. The town wants that \$175 million because it will bring people to the town who will spend money. Each business will make money and the economy will go around, but this \$175 million is being invested in concrete and earthmoving. Again, think to the future: is there a better way to do this? That is what I think could happen.

I also want to talk about walkable communities, which happens in Europe. If any place is going to have difficulty with this, it is WA, because of its regional landscape. We are a very big state. In our metropolitan area, we know about town planning and about the idea of infill development. Individuals get that as well. But it is going to take a bit of a mind shift to provide walkable communities. There will need to be a little encouragement, I suppose. Our budget can do that by encouraging people in terms of where they build, how they build and when they build. That is what we were doing, but it is now pretty much open slather. The government has said, “Here’s some money; go build.” A lot of those people are going to buy greenfield sites at some distance from the main centre of a town, some distance from Perth and possibly some distance from their employment. They are going to take up a lot of space that might once have grown vegetables or have been urban bushland. We are spreading out our communities. They are not walkable. People are dependent on vehicles or public transport, but of course public transport has to work in hubs. There has to be a plan for how it works. People need to build near those hubs; that is where we should really be focusing. I know that work is being done in that area, but in our rush to get the money out, I think we are allowing more to go through than we would if we had a considered plan. If people live in a community in which they can get their food supplies or meet up with friends—to get the basic needs of a day—without having to get in a car, that will cut emissions and improve their quality of life and leisure time. It would make things a lot easier and improve people’s health. The results would show up in our hospitals in the long run. I think we can get there. I think planning is going to have to be the way to do it.

Hon Jim Chown: How often do you use public transport?

Hon DIANE EVERS: Not too often. I have walked and ridden my bike in here a couple of times, but I live only about five or six kilometres out when I am staying in Perth. Of course, if the member has ever been to Albany, he would have seen that we do have a few buses. They run at odd times now and then, but, again, I live too far out of town. There is not going to be a bus going past my place, other than a school bus.

Hon Jim Chown: So most of the time you're driving a motor car on the roads?

Hon DIANE EVERS: Correct. Have you caught me out? There; done!

Hon Jim Chown: No, I am just looking at the hypocrisy of what you're saying.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Yes, there is a lot of hypocrisy here—I get it—because that is how our state has developed. The system does not allow me to use public transport at a time when I need to do it. That is the result of poor planning. We are living in an older world in which everybody has their own vehicle and that is how they get around. If members talked to young people in the regions, they would learn that some of them do not have cars. They get lifts from friends and family, use Uber now and then if there is an Uber driver in their community, wait an hour and a half until the bus comes or use the rail system to get to Bunbury. Kudos to the government for allocating \$57 million for new railcars. That is very good. People will love that. I understand that the federal government will push for high-speed rail. I would love to see where that goes. People want those opportunities. They want to get on a train that takes them from Bunbury to Perth and back later that day so that they do not have to sit in traffic for four hours. They can do something while they are on the train, such as accessing the internet on their laptop, working or having leisure time to socialise by chatting with friends or whatever. There are so many benefits from using public transport and that is why the government needs to improve public transport opportunities.

Urban green space is another issue. Urban green spaces are very important and we need to protect, grow and expand them. We need to make sure that we do not let them go. All people have to do is look at a Google map of anywhere in the world to see what green spaces are left. New developments have been built and the buildings are rooftop to rooftop with barely a metre separating them. There is no room for trees or vegetation and those communities become super-heated. I have heard that there is a seven to 11-degree difference between a tree-covered community and one without trees. That heat is important. It is dangerous and expensive. All people have to do is plant some trees to cool it down. We really need to work on green spaces. The more green space there is in urban areas, the cooler we can keep those areas in the coming hot summers.

A circular economy is another area in which the government should invest. In a circular economy resources are used, made into something, recovered and made into something else, recovered again and so it goes. We can aim for zero waste. The container deposit scheme has been introduced in this term of government. Yay! Wow! I am hoping for more. It is a nice step. Coca-Cola Amatil and Lion Nathan will make something good out of it. Some community groups will be adding to the social fabric of our smaller communities because the container deposit place will be an interesting place to go to and have a chat with somebody while people get a few dollars or donate a few dollars. But 10¢ is a joke—right? If you saw a 10¢ coin on the ground, would you pick it up? But we are thinking that people will pick up rubbish off the ground because they can pick up a can and hold onto it until they can take it to the container deposit recycling shed, whatever, and get their 10¢ for it. No; that is not going to happen. Does the government think that somebody who normally drives on our roads and who stops to get a can of drink at a roadside service station will not, in their normal course of life, drive away and roll down the window and toss out that can? Will their behaviour change and they will leave the can in their car because they can now get 10¢ for that can? People do not even have the wherewithal to leave a can in their car long enough to put it in the bin when they stop their car, but 10¢ will change their behaviour and they will not throw the can out the window. Does the government expect that kids and community groups will walk along the roadside to pick up cans? Really? I do not know. I would not consider that safe these days. Great—10¢! If I had my way, I would have made it \$1 or banned them altogether. I think South Australia is talking about no single-use containers. We will wait and see. I have been talking about cans and bottles. We recycle bottles into road base. Wow! People take sand, use lots of energy and make a glass bottle and then turn it back into sand. That is technologically amazing for the human race! Yes, there is sarcasm in there. I should mention that was sarcastic, just so we know.

So much can be done. We have to look at what the government is spending money on. Most of what I have been talking about has been more to do with the physical side of things but, as members know, the Greens are very focused on spending money on our most vulnerable people, such as children in homes where domestic violence occurs. Domestic violence does not just affect their mental and physical health at the early stage of their life; that damage carries through their life. They are not privileged like other people who have a loving parent and live in a safe house. They have to deal with other issues throughout their life. Let us invest in those children who live in homes in which domestic violence occurs while they still live there and while they are still young so that they can work through their issues and not carry that damage throughout their lives.

Some people have not had the privilege of a good education, good health and a loving parent. We have talked about privilege in the chamber. Somebody tried to deny that they had privilege and I thought: really? My guess is that they had a loving parent when they were growing up. Some kids do not have that. My guess is that they had a good education, possibly provided by the state. Some kids do not get that. It is offered to them, but they need a supportive household to get to school and in such a shape that they can actually learn. Some people do not have the good health that many of us in here have. People may have congenital issues or they may develop something along the way from an injury that was possibly self-inflicted by not looking after themselves—poor choices. We need to look after the people who do not have the same privileges that many of us have.

The Greens also say a lot about the need to help those people who are unable to find, afford or maintain a home. Living homeless in our society, in this wealthy state, is abysmal and appalling. It should not happen. We can do better than that. I appreciate the \$315 million or so in the budget for social housing. That is very good. People need support. I have been following the group Just Home Margaret River, which I have spoken about a number of times in this chamber. That group helps people in its community. It is a great idea, but the regional community has had to take on the issue itself to help those people. If it did not, these people would have to travel half an hour—some people might have to travel for longer than that—possibly not on public transport and without owning a vehicle, to try to get in touch with a service that might be able to help them. The Greens believe in investing in the people who cannot find, afford or maintain a home.

People with challenging mental health issues is another area. They are not there by choice. People with mental health issues need our support because we want them to be active, functioning and contributing members of our society if that works. Even if they are not able to contribute, we want them to live a healthy and fulfilling life. Another group to support is people who face discrimination because of a prejudice or bias that is based purely on their physical presentation. We like to think that we do not do that and we are not biased against people because of that, but I catch myself at it all the time. I am trying really hard and it is an effort. We have to notice when we judge somebody differently just because of the way they look—the style of their haircut, their clothing or the stains on their clothing or their shoes. Who would do that? None of us! We would not judge somebody based on how they look, would we? What about somebody who has glitter eyebrows or pink hair? One of the things for me used to be tattoos. Luckily, my daughter has taught me otherwise. Tattoos are not bad. They do not determine whether someone is a bad person who belongs in prison. Tattoos are now a part of many people's lives and I have come to terms with that. I have a friend who had a teardrop tattooed below her eye. Tell me: when she walks into a job interview at a bank, dressed perfectly to work there, wearing a suit or whatever, will the employer judge her differently? I do not know. She has had it removed and everything is just fine now.

The Greens believe—as the state government has done and the federal government has tried to do—that we should help those people whose industry is being phased out. I am talking about industries such as coal and gas. Yes, we want to help them, too. We want to help them transition to another industry. This morning, it was verified that, yes, China is saying that in some situations it does not want Australian coal. I do not know where that is going to go. I do not know whether it will continue with that approach and whether it will make a huge difference. We are beholden to China because it has the purse strings. It is the one that is buying so much from here. It may know that coal is on the way out; it is investing in renewables pretty quickly. Gas is also on the way out. Gas is expensive, dirty and polluting, and there are not that many jobs involved in the industry. There is no real reason for it, other than for somebody to make money from it, who can therefore give us royalties, which helps us invest in new job-creation programs. Coal and gas are on the way out. They will be phased out. We believe that we need to help the people who will be transitioning out of those industries.

Other industries have been devastated by COVID and we do not know where they will come back to. We have arts and entertainment, which I am watching closely, as I have some personal interest in it. My son is in his fourth year studying classical trumpet at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. Wow! A year ago, we thought this was going to be great and a year on from then, we started looking at a position in a philharmonic orchestra or a classical orchestra somewhere around the world when everything was open, but now COVID has come along and things are being done online. If members have not had the chance to listen to *Brave the Wave*, it is a composition by one of the WAAPA students. It has been played on ABC Classic. It is amazing what can be done when a lot of young musicians get together over Zoom or video links. They have recorded a beautiful song, which I think will be with us for a very long time. I think this was the first of its kind since COVID to be so beautiful and involve so many different musicians. Arts and entertainment has changed, and we do not know where it is going to go from here. It is very difficult being in WA, because of course we are in a pre-COVID bubble. We have not really been hit by it, other than through watching everybody else manage it. We are waiting to see whether we get a second wave and we are waiting to see its impact. It is going to be very hard to know where we are going to go from there.

Maybe international tourism will come back. Again, it all depends on COVID. Right now, I am sure that a few hotels in the city are suffering and do not have anywhere near the numbers of people that they used to. Most of the regional areas are doing pretty well, because Western Australians are travelling within their home state. It is really

looking good. It is very interesting in regional areas; a lot of people are making the most of this pre-COVID world, because we still know what might come. Let us do what we can now to prepare should it come again.

Universities are another area that we would like to support, because universities relied on international students. We made that a significant part of propping them up and allowing them to grow to the size they did. We need to make sure that we support universities to get them through this period and to help them look to the future and see how they are going to change. Universities may not go back to face-to-face lectures so much. They have realised that they are somewhat unnecessary. They can get students from anywhere in the world now. There might be a time zone issue, but learning does not require face-to-face lectures. Students may benefit from it, but it may not necessarily be required.

The Greens' spending could go in so many different ways. The way we would do this, if we had our choice, would be to invest in our future. We would look at making education better and having well-educated, informed critical thinkers who could make good decisions for themselves, their offspring, their neighbourhood, their community and their state and continue on. We would make it more accessible, or even free, because an educated population would be our inventors, artists and medical professionals. An educated population would make the state stronger, and that is what we need to look at. Australia has always done well with inventors and innovators. I think that is where we should be heading. The population needs to be able to get a good education. Many legislators in the federal government are white males and they got a free education back when education was free. It is interesting that now they do not see any reason to do that, even though it benefited them. It is kind of a nimby attitude: "I got it, but now you have to pay for your education." It is just not necessary. A well-educated population would be a benefit to the state, and that is an area that we could invest in. Even on a state basis, it is very important. We have TAFE colleges; we just have to make them accessible, because we want people to be educated.

I am now going to get on to debt. I remember 2007–08 when the Liberal government got in and WA had \$3 billion of debt. Wow! It was big—\$3 billion. Eight years later, when the Liberals left government, debt was \$30 billion and projected to go to \$40 billion. I commented on this many times: "How terrible; they spent so much and now they have this projection of \$40 billion, even after they have gone." Then Labor came in and said that it was going to pull it back and be the good economic managers that the Liberals always talked about being. It was going to cut 3 000 jobs, combine all these departments, tighten the purse strings and save for a rainy day and have some money so that future generations would not be lumbered with such a debt. Then COVID came along and there were huge increases in revenue, with an extra \$2 billion of iron ore royalties above what had been budgeted for this year, and the GST takings went up. The WA Labor government made lots of cuts and got lots of revenue, but now we are heading towards \$40 billion of debt. Why? How? Where did it go wrong? Why is this now okay? I recognise that if the government had not been in debt and had a bigger surplus, it would be hammered again for having too big a surplus because of COVID and the bad times, even though it had to keep the economy going. It is all smoke and mirrors. It is making the figures show what it thinks everyone wants to see. It is just that it is not "everyone"; we all want to see something different. We cannot put a lot of trust in it. If the numbers are correct, even though there are so many assumptions that go into that, we can see that there is manipulation happening.

If a deficit budget makes the community more resilient to expected impacts, it is a great idea. If a government can invest in things that will make people stronger and able to withstand problems in the future, that is fantastic; that is great. Sorry, but building roads does not do that. It is just moving sand from one place to another, and we just end up with larger roads with traffic problems. In fact, when we have larger roads and easier-moving traffic, people go that way rather than using the public transport that has been provided. It is backwards thinking. There is no integration.

Investing in fossil fuels will not do it. That will not make us more resilient for the future. That is stupid. Stranded assets is what we will be investing in. Great! Why? It is just shifting materials from one place in the world to another just so that we can say that we did it and we employed construction workers. We may as well just give the money to the musicians and let the construction workers have some leisure time, because we do not need to shift materials from one place to another.

As I have said, there is a bit of smoke and mirrors going on with this budget. It comes down to the forecasts that are used to determine the budget numbers. The forecasts that have been used are very conservative. It is conservative financially—conservative as in trying to keep the power as it is, like the old white males do. It is not conservative as in let us keep the status quo because that is how we like it. What I am talking about is conservative as in being careful so that the budget does not blow out. I think there is more to it than that. I think these figures are conservative to the point at which if they were not so conservative, we would be showing budget surpluses. When the world is hurting, as it is with COVID, we do not want to show off and say that we are doing okay, so let us just put these forecasts in there. I am not denigrating Treasury. The Under Treasurer and the department do a great job with the forecasts. My committee had a look at it and their forecasting is pretty spot on a lot of the time. I am not saying that the government is trying to change things like that, but it is a way to manipulate.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Were you talking about the iron ore price?

Hon DIANE EVERS: I am getting to the iron ore price. This is more general—interest rates, the value of the dollar, employment rates and all of that. I will focus more on the iron ore price after lunch.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: You mentioned the volatility of the market with China when you were talking about coal.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Absolutely.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm

Hon DIANE EVERS: I will pick up where I left off and try not to repeat myself. I was just getting on to how relatively conservative the forecasts we use are. Of course, in these difficult times globally, we are trying to not show off how well we are doing because nobody likes a tall poppy sticking up above everyone else. But we know that we are doing well. We have addressed COVID-19. We are doing really well financially with the iron ore price. Things are good for us. Some of the forecasts we use are going our way, and that is good. I have seen a three-year fixed rate for a home mortgage below 2.5 per cent on a comparison rate. That is not something I would have ever imagined. I went through the early 1990s with a home mortgage rate of 18 per cent. That makes a huge difference to a family budget. The value of the dollar has been pretty stable. It is pretty easy to assume that that will stay the same. We should not see too much change there. As I said, Treasury does make very good estimates of these things. Much variation can happen with our employment figures based on the decisions that this government and the federal government make. I hope that the government will try to address the unemployment rate and keep it from increasing to make sure that people who want jobs can find jobs. I think that is going along pretty well.

There is a whole new world of possibilities that could happen with consumer spending over the coming years. Things have changed and we do not really know where they are going to go from here, and it is very difficult to predict what will happen. The crystal ball gazing has to be conservative, because the government does not want its budget to blow out if unexpected things happen, but the iron ore price is tricky. It is currently around \$US120 a tonne, yet the budget has it at \$US64 late next year. It is possible, but it seems a very conservative expectation. Members have to remember that we are a boom and bust state, and we saw that happen just six years ago. Apparently, the government of the day did not see it coming, but I think others did. With a long-term average iron ore price of \$US64 a tonne, we have to consider that we are not in the same world as we were in pre-COVID. Things are changing and we are coming to a new normal—the Greens are trying to say a better normal if we make the right decisions as we get there. We also have to consider the reverse. Imagine Treasury predicted that the iron ore price was going to stay at \$US90 or \$US96 a tonne, budgeted accordingly and spent that money investing in the things that either I or the Liberals are telling the government it should invest in or what it thinks might be best or might get it more of the votes it desires. Of course, we do not have to imagine that, because it happened in 2014, when more money was spent than was coming in. When the iron ore price fell, again we were told that nobody saw that coming. But the government could have seen it coming, because iron ore had been building up on the wharves in China and the factories were filled with goods that could not be sold. It was well noted. I saw it coming and I was not even that involved. We need to be conservative on this one and I understand the government's motivation in putting the price at \$US64 a tonne.

Past that part of the budget, I would like to get on to the idea of risk. Budget paper No 3 has a new section headed "Statement of Risks". That is a great idea. It means a lot to me because I have worked a lot on risk assessments in different organisations that I have been a part of, looking at the different possibilities for what might or might not happen, assessing which ones need to be addressed and how they are going to be addressed. The statement of risk in the budget papers is about the risk of getting the projections wrong. It is not the risks of impending doom or all the possible things that could happen; it is the risk that Treasury might get the projections wrong, so the budget might not be quite right and what will happen if it is not quite right? Will the government have to pull things back or spend more? That is where we were at this time when the projections did not come out, but they were much better in our favour. I understand that the risks of getting the budget wrong could lead to poor decisions—not investing in things that the government could afford or over investing and ending up in a more serious financial situation of having to pull back programs. Nobody likes to see that happen.

I checked out the word "risk", because I wanted to make sure that we are all using the same definition. Maybe it is fair enough for the government to consider risk to the budget. Yes, it should, but it seems like there are so many more. Again, I went to Wikipedia, which states —

Risk involves uncertainty about the effects/implications of an activity with respect to something that humans value (such as health, well-being, wealth, property or the environment), often focusing on negative, undesirable consequences.

One could say that there are risks that will lead to opportunities as well, but let us focus on the risk of bad things happening. I think members would probably agree with that definition, because it effects more possible implications on some of the things that we value, not just budget assumptions or the economy. There are much greater risks than that. We look at not only whether there is a risk, but also the effect of that risk. Does the government's statement that addresses risks of uncertainty in the budget projections actually address our potential risks? It suggests that

one of the risks is a second wave of COVID-19. We see that in the news every day. It is most prevalent in our minds and we are thinking about it all the time. We hear about a vaccine every other day—or twice a day. Is it coming? Is it coming next week or next year? Will it ever work? The daily news cycle is telling us about this vaccine but we do not know whether there ever will be a vaccine that will protect us from the virus. People are going back to the idea of herd immunity. I have heard that herd immunity needs to be at around 70 per cent of the population. Currently, I think around 20 per cent of people worldwide might have some immunity—if people actually develop immunity once they have had the virus. The case is still open on that one as well as on whether it comes back. If the vaccine does work, great. I think it is projected that we should see that vaccine available by 1 June. There has to be some sort of assumption for it, but if we do not have a vaccine, we will still have the two choices that I presented earlier. The first is that we learn to live with COVID. We open our border. We let it in. It becomes part of our daily life. People are careful. The elderly or people who are health compromised die off, or become more infirm. We wear masks all the time. We do not shake hands. We do not go to public events unless they are outside. That is living with COVID. Other countries are now trying to face making those changes.

Our border is closed. It is working so far. In Western Australia, a lot of things are working well. I know that some industries are still struggling. That is fine for now. But what will it be like in five years' time? Will the border still be closed? I do not think so. I cannot imagine WA still having the border closed in five years' time. Somewhere along that line, if we do not get a vaccine, we will have to make the decision to live with it. I understand that Hon Dr Steve Thomas predicted that the border will be opened just after the election. The budget suggests that it will be sometime in that second quarter; that could be when it happens.

I am thinking more politically: what will the government be thinking on this? We have a couple of options. We know that the pressure at Christmas time will be tough. If New South Wales and Victoria are able to control community transmission, there will be pressure to open the border for Christmas. I feel strongly about this, because I have a daughter who lives in Sydney, and she had flights booked to come back to Perth. That pressure will be on. The government will then have to make a decision. If it opens the border, either COVID will come in and there will be community transmission and it will be bad and everything will be closed again, or COVID will not come in. If COVID does come in and it is a problem and everything is closed, the government will be toast. Nobody will think it made the right decision; it will be over. If the border is opened for Christmas and families are able to get together, and we are able to control COVID, it might be another boost for the government, and its popularity will go up even further because people have been able to get that extra surge of Christmas love and affection. The other side of it is if there is no COVID over east because they have been able to stop the spread of it, and the government does not open the border, that will be really bad. The newspapers will be talking about it—well, not *The West Australian*. It will be out there in the media that New South Wales and Victoria are all okay, and the government has to open the border for Christmas. If the government does not make the decision to open the border, it will look really bad, and it will have a tough couple of months in January and February. But I have to say that I am not all that hopeful that New South Wales and Victoria will be able to manage it. I think community transmission will continue for some time.

It is a health decision; I get that. It is all about health. Can we keep COVID-19 out? The day will come when we do open the border, and it is not certain that we will be able to keep COVID-19 out. I have to say that even the people who named it COVID-19 knew that there would be more COVIDs. We may have COVID-21 or COVID-25. That is because of the system we live in—our population, the way we travel, the impact of climate change, and other diseases and vectors for transmission. Pandemics will not occur every 100 years. Just as one-in-100-year storms are now happening three times in a decade, one-in-100-year pandemics can pick up that pace as well. That is a bit scary.

Page 18 of budget paper No 3 has the subheading “Risks”. It reminds us again of a COVID second wave. Last year, the word “risk” was in the budget 167 times. It is now in the budget up to 213 times. But it is mostly related to COVID, because we now understand that to be a risk. It is so in our face that it is hard not to be aware of it. Page 18 mentions some of the other risks. It refers to the COVID-19 second wave. It refers to the uncertainty of a COVID-19 vaccine. It also refers to the stimulus support ceasing, or demand not being strong enough to drive growth. The risk is that our economy does not keep growing. It is possible, and many people are starting to say this, that maybe we do not need an economy that keeps growing, sort of like a cancer in a human that just keeps growing uncontrolled. Maybe we need a steady state economy. Maybe we can go back and live within the confines of the planet. That seems a good idea to me. Maybe constant growth is not what we should be aiming for. Maybe the budget papers should say the stimulus support ceasing, or demand not being strong enough to maintain the situation that we have. Maybe growth does not have to be part of that.

The next risk is that China's increased construction will lead to an eventual weakening of their financial system. Yes, it says increased construction activity. That is exactly what we have done. Who is to say that our increased construction activity, and bringing out all the architects, engineers and builders, who will be working massively quickly to get that construction done because the demand is happening now, will not inflate the price of labour and materials, and possibly lead to situations in which these new young apprentices are not trained before they are put

on the job, as we saw with the home insulation situation? Sometimes, we need to put steps in place to make sure that we move at a measured pace through the construction. It refers to the possibility that China's increased construction activity will be a problem. What about our own construction? Should we not look at the housing stimulus increases that we have put out to get people to build a home of their own? The state is also investing in roads, infrastructure and buildings. There are also stimulus measures from a federal and state perspective to get business investing.

The aim was to keep us going after COVID, but it is almost as though we have overdone it. We are going to create our own massive pressure on the system. If we build everything in the next two to three years, then what? Once we have too many homes for the number of people we have—that is, for those who can afford them—and all these new buildings, and once we have a whole bunch of stranded gas assets and finally realise we do not need them, what will we build then? When all these people have been trained to be in construction, and we have built the lion's share of what we need, our own construction may drive us to that risk. We need to consider what the housing construction market will look like should another pandemic come along and our economy tanks. We will have done all that investment. We need to plan ahead. We are jumping at this with no thought for the future. We are jumping at it with thought only for the next election cycle. We need to get out of that habit. The problem is that with all these housing projects, a lot of people are investing in their own home. They are getting money to do that. But the pressure will be on, and the price will go up. They will have over-invested, and it is very possible that we will end up with a negative equity situation, as we have in the past, because of that boom and bust nature. I just ask that we plan ahead. Maybe it will actually happen this way. Instead of aiming all that construction activity for the 1920–21 year, we should look at shifting that into the 2021–22 year and further on. We cannot rev up the whole building industry and expect it to cope with that in one go. We need to spread it out. There is no point in spending it all this year. We need to understand risk. We need to prepare for the future. We need to work towards a steady state so that we do not have the highs and lows of the booms and busts that we are so accustomed to.

What we are looking for is resilience. We need to consider that another pandemic may come along, with increased health impacts due to the climate issues that I mentioned before. There is also the potential for conflict, both internal and external. People only have to look at the United States to see what I mean. The US is having plenty of internal conflict. We are talking about putting on 800 more police. I am not saying that will lead to conflict. The idea is that it will lead to a better situation and a better society. We only have to look at the US and the interactions it is having internationally. Globally, there are economic issues. There are just so many possibilities of what may go wrong. We need to be prepared.

Access to water—water wars—is another thing we will be fighting over. That could happen in our state. There could be market issues with China saying, “No, no more of that” and sending us into a tailspin. That is an issue we really should look at. Another issue is biosecurity threats to our food supply, our export markets. The tomato potato psyllid that came in four years ago happened very easily and it can happen again. That is something we need to be prepared for. That is why we plan ahead and look to maintain our resilience.

I acknowledge the costs associated with climate change and water at page 651 of the 2020–21 budget, which refers to the state climate policy that is due any day now. There are some issues in the budget. I will go through those rather quickly because a bit of pressure was put on me to speed up my unlimited time for responding to the budget papers. I do not get the opportunity to do this but once a year and this is a very important day. It is a very good chance to talk through a lot of those things that I believe need to happen. The pressure and bullying is unfortunate. It is not the way we need to work in here. I have talked about how this place works. I do not think the system is perfect but I do not see anybody looking to change it either. I will leave that to members. I will take my time. Members might notice that I have been chastised in here before for not saying anything good about what the government is doing. I will try to leave out some of those bits. I note that the government has done some good things, but in the essence of brevity, I will try to speed through some of those.

The government is putting quite a bit of money and effort into estuaries. Budget paper No 2 states —

Poor water quality in rivers and estuaries leads to a decline in fisheries, loss in amenity, decline of environment values ...

It goes on. Members can read it at page 651. The government recognises that climate change is having an impact on our estuaries and that sea levels are rising as well. This sounds a lot like Busselton. They have some issues down there. I was surprised to see that there are still cattle in the streams that lead into the waterways. Twenty-five years ago when I got to Albany, we worked on fencing off the streams and keeping the waters clean as they came through the rivers into the estuaries and Oyster Harbour. Now, 25 years on, with all of that community effort, funded by state and federal government grant systems, we are growing two and maybe even three sorts of oysters in Oyster Harbour, including the ones that were there originally, a couple of metres deep in oyster shells when we first got there, which we then used to build our buildings. The native oysters are put back there. “Twiggy” Forrest is down there with a business and there is another one. There is a mussel farm. It is clean enough for that. That is what we need to do, and that is what we can do when community groups are well supported. I am pleased to see that the climate

change effect on estuaries is being acknowledged. I am pleased to see some money going into that through the green jobs plan. Great—go for it. That is a use of royalties for regions—good. It is in the regions. We need to get our estuaries healthy and we need to get those streams fenced off and find other options for the farmers and the landholders there because we can make a difference.

The budget also mentions Perth's water supply. Another one—again, I will not read the whole thing out. I point out that there is not a single mention of desalination. Desal, especially when I am saying that energy is going to be next to free in the not-too-distant future, really is not a problem except that if we do not have to, why put our energy, resources and effort into building the building and running and operating it if we can find other ways? This is all about finding those other ways. What I like best is that a line in there says —

This program facilitates the collaborative delivery of actions by eight Government agencies ...

Eight agencies are working together on the water supply system collaboratively. That is perfect, wonderful, because we cannot do this in silos. The system of our environment and our society does not work in silos; they have to interrelate. We cannot just have them working in straight silos and we cannot just have somebody come in and say they are going to do climate change across the board. They have to be intertwined, working together and interacting. I will speak more about that later. The budget is worth a read. It is good that there is some thought going into it. We really want to do some good things, and the government is trying to do some good things there. I find it necessary for the Greens to stay in here to keep a watch on it. I am really pleased the language is being used, but we need to hold the government to this and make sure it happens. That is what I feel my role is at this point in this building.

This is a good start. It is great planning ahead by the department and by the minister. I am really pleased to see it. We need more of this. We have been carting water to 12 declared deficiency areas in the great southern since May. To date, \$3.3 million has been spent. It may be a part of our life that we have to do this. This is what happens, which makes those communities more expensive to live in and more expensive to support, but we need the population spread out. Having us all centralised in the city will not be a good thing for the state.

The Denmark pipeline is another issue because we did not manage the water supply there. Something could have been done earlier. This was just thrown in there as though the easiest way to deal with it was to take more water from Albany. Albany's aquifer itself is in danger of being compromised in some way by extracting too much, and we are going to send it to Denmark and possibly to Walpole one day, and I believe it is also going out to Jerramungup. It is still not planning ahead. It is using band-aids on the system, so I am looking for more. We need to use the same concept as we have seen with the collaboration in water and apply it to fire, farming, drought, forests, health, education, sport, transport, waste, mining and energy—all of them. We need to work collaboratively across departments. I know that somebody in Planning gets it, too, because page 697 states —

... support the cross-Government response to improve bushfire preparedness and reduce risk across Western Australia.

Great, but I want more. Saying it once is good and actually doing it is better, but it needs to be clear in every department how they are working with the other departments. It is not an issue that can be addressed one department at a time. The climate impacts will account for rising sea levels, heatwaves, increased violent storms, increased bushfire, increased likelihood of pests and increased likelihood of contagious diseases. These are the big risks that we are going to face and we can plan for them. It seems as though it is beginning; this is happening and I am really pleased to see that.

In addition, we need to do something to help facilitate more of this. I have asked questions in here over the past few years about the departments and whether they interact. A get-together was held with the directors general from each of the departments. They got together and said hello and got to know each other. They took each other around to each of their operations and showed each other what they are all about. They learnt a lot from each other, and I am really pleased. I had an updated briefing on that a year or so ago and it was nice to see. They are getting together now, but I hope that they also do more than that. They have to get their staff together across the departments. We know that staff can now work from home, so let us see whether staff can work from each other's departments. In that way, Planning and Water can work together side by side when they are working on a new development. Roads and public transport could ask, "What is our point here? Our point is to get people from A to B. Can one side do it better than the other side and actually decrease some of the impacts?" It has got to be collaborative. It has got to be deliberative. It means that they cannot just say, "I know the way to do it. This is the way it is. Do it my way because our department has more money than yours and we are more important, so we get to say how it is." That is not how it should be done. They have to deliberate. They have to look at all the options and the material they have. There should be an outside facilitator who has no interest in the outcome, but interest in the process, to make sure that all voices are heard and that the best ideas or solutions come forward. It needs to involve everyone and it needs to have some research. It has got to have significant research because we are not the only ones facing this. This stuff is being done all around the world. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is looking at climate impacts, and there is a lot in its report that we can learn from and adapt to. There is also the Intergovernmental

Science–Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Biodiversity has another huge impact on us. It is one we do not see as often and we do not make as much noise about. It does not appear on the news so often, but that biodiversity loss will have an extreme impact on us.

If Western Australia gets another pest that would normally be controlled by a different species but that species is gone, that pest can overtake it. Where do we go from there? There are so many examples of this. We have got to look at it. The CSIRO has done plenty of good research and we could be drawing on it. It is unfortunate that its funding has all been cut. This state used to have an office of climate change; why do we not have an office of climate change now? Why do we not put it in place again so it can work with and help integrate those other departments so they can organise that collaboration and deliberation? It can be done. We are now looking at preparedness. I suppose it is the new word. It occurred three times in last year's budget of 2019–20 and it is in this year's one 11 times. When the budget says "preparedness", it is not just about bushfires, but in relation to seven different departments. The idea of being prepared for the future is making its way into the budget. The words are there and I am very pleased to see that.

There is another thing we need to do that I have spoken about, and I still do not see it in this budget. I am looking forward to it, because, of course, the budget does not give us all the detail we might like. We need a state of the environment report. I quote from Wikipedia —

The term **State of the Environment** normally relates to an analysis of trends in the environment of a particular place. This analysis can encompass aspects such as water quality, air quality, land use, ecosystem health and function, along with social and cultural matters.

There we go. It is quite a broad look at the current situation, the current standard, of where we are. Given that the last report was in 2006, we need to do it again. We really need to find where we are at. I wish Hon Dr Steve Thomas was not away on urgent parliamentary business, because I am about to quote him when he was the member for Capel. Dr S.C. Thomas said in a motion —

That this house condemns the state government for its lack of action and long-term vision on the environmental damage occurring in this state as identified by the draft "State of the Environment report" 2006.

There we go. Even Hon Dr Steve Thomas wants us to have a state of the environment report and to implement the recommendations of it. That is what I would like to see too. He then goes on to mention weeds, feral animals, phytophthora, greenhouse gas emissions, population, consumption, salinity and reforestation. I could go on, but we get the idea. He knew the right words to read into *Hansard*, and that was when he was the member for Capel. Many other members of the opposition at the time supported the call to implement state of the environment recommendations. Gee, it sounds almost like collaboration—if we only could get onside with this, go that way, start looking at our environment and what we can do to make it better.

Another step I would like to see, but I have not yet—that does not mean it will not be coming in the next term—is the environmental tribunal I asked for last year, I think. It is unfortunate that we do not have an environmental tribunal or court, and we are not even really helping the Environmental Protection Authority. I believe the EPA needs more support. There is a bit of a change in the numbers of staff through the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation doing the work for it and a little bit of difference in the amount from 2019–20, but it was related to a change in allocation methodology. It was not actually anybody doing any more work. There are many experienced people in the EPA, but they are stretched very thin and there is a rapidly increasing number of developments. I wrote this part of my speech before COVID, so the rapidly increasing number of developments is only getting faster because of the fast-tracking of developments we want to go through. In addition, independent blind peer reviews of project proposals are needed to assess their validity and technical adequacy. We need those blind peer reviews. We looked into an EPA assessment of a report that was given to it, and if the writer of the report had been in high school, they might have got away with it, but if they had been at university, they would have had it sent back. Here is the report that somebody presented to the EPA to justify development. Even the EPA said to go back and try again, that it did not understand what the report meant and that the figures used within it did not even match up. That is unacceptable. We need to have peer review available for the EPA. We urgently need realistic funding to enable the EPA to undertake its role effectively and to engage subject experts to undertake independent blind peer reviews of project proposals. Let us give the EPA some teeth; the way it is is just outrageous.

There are further risks. We could go on forever, but there are so many risks in our future, such as bushfires, and we are turning a blind eye to them and just fixing things when they occur. Bushfires like the ones they had over east could happen here. That could have been us. We know all the devastation that occurs with those bushfires. There are also a lot of emissions. We do not want that to happen either. There is also de-vegetation, and not just with fires, clearing and logging. Our woodlands and farmlands are deteriorating because we are mining them for their nutrients rather than restoring and regenerating them. We are losing our bush as people want to clear, whether legally with permission or not so legally. We are just losing the landscape. We are losing that green space. All that

keeps coming back to me is that desert does not burn. If anybody is fearful of fire, where will they live? Really? Even cities burn. We lose many, many more houses in house fires in urban areas than we do in bushfires. Even if there is cleared land, if there is grass growing there, fires can travel across agricultural land very quickly. The way we are looking at this is beyond me, and if we do not have some sort of collaborative, deliberative session to try to work out our intentions and how we are going to maintain this, I just do not know where we are going.

I turn to sea level rise. There is mention of coastal repairs in the budget. We are shifting sand back and forth and building sea walls. Bunbury and Albany have both been beneficiaries of this work. It creates jobs and adds to the gross domestic product, but to what benefit? Is it not better if the damage does not occur in the first place? Does this not tell us that we need to find a better measure than GDP? Gross domestic product—great. If we have a fire, GDP goes up. If there is a car crash, GDP goes up. If a parent raises their child at home, as they might like to do, GDP goes down because the parent is now out of the workforce. If GDP is our target, that is what we are going to end up with. We are not going to end up with good decisions; we are going to end up with the GDP we choose to have. That does not lead us to a healthy society. Again, that is probably something the federal government will have to look at. I think we need to be aware of it and support any efforts to go down the line and try to find what we are trying to do. What is a good measure of our society to say that we are doing well? It could be the wellbeing index that others have tried.

Does this not tell us that we need to address the factors that are causing climate change? I know that we can just borrow and make younger people pay for it so we can continue to have exactly as we have, but it just does not make sense to let climate change continue to degrade our landscape and then repair it, and just try to keep the same place that we are at. I think we are smarter than that, I really do. I believe that collectively across this room we could come up with some other ideas. If that is expanded to other departments, I am pretty certain we could come up with some better ideas. I know the climate policy is coming out, and I really hope we see something there, but we have got to do something and do it quick.

There are also significant issues impacting on transport. There is the assessment of coastal erosion hotspots reporting 55 identified coastal erosion hotspots. In the WA Recovery Plan, there is assistance to local governments and coastal managers to ensure appropriate measures, including coastal management, are in place to protect high-risk areas. That is great. It is good to see this. In transport, there is work with the federal government to make electric vehicles more affordable, just like what was done to increase the uptake of solar panel installations. These all affect transport. There is a lot of cost in the budget happening with climate and a lot of good things could happen too. I turn to electric vehicles —

Point of Order

Hon DARREN WEST: Mr Acting President, I know that budget debates can be very broad, but I draw the member's and your attention to standing order 48. I have been sitting here for half an hour and I have not heard a single reference to the budget. I have heard a lot of valid points and mention of important matters, but I have not heard a reference to the budget. I think it is perhaps time that we moved back to the issue at hand, which is the state budget.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Martin Aldridge): Members, Hon Darren West has made a point of order with reference to standing order 48, "Irrelevant or Repetitious Debate". I have been listening to Hon Diane Evers carefully and I do not think on the count of repetitious there is a point of order. On the other limb of relevancy, I think Hon Darren West said in his point of order that budget speeches and appropriation bill considerations are very broad-ranging debates. Hon Diane Evers' contribution is consistent with the practice of this house with respect to noting the budget papers, so there is no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Hon DIANE EVERS: I appreciate that. I could go back and read the bits that I summarised, which were from the budget. As I said, I have been pushed to try to speed this up and I am doing my best by leaving out some of the good bits, but I will continue.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order, members! I am struggling to hear Hon Diane Evers with interjections coming from every direction. It would be much more expeditious for the house if we were able to have only one speaker at a time and that speaker is Hon Diane Evers.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Thank you. I was talking about electric vehicles. We need to make them more affordable, and that should be in the budget. Under Synergy and Western Power, we could be looking at electric vehicles. We need to make them more affordable, as we did with solar panels. I was one of the beneficiaries of the 50 per cent solar panel rebate in 2007 for the five-kilowatt system. In 2007, it cost \$56 000, but I know we can get them much more cheaply now. The rebate allowed us to put the panels on our house and benefit from the free energy by selling it back to the state. It paid itself off in seven years, and it made sense. Regarding electric vehicles, many other countries are

picking this up and we are seeing that the vehicles end up costing people considerably less, although the up-front cost is quite significant.

We need to not only make them more affordable but also have quick charging stations. We have a very big state and we all have heard about range anxiety. For me to use an electric vehicle to get down to Albany where I could then charge it with my solar panels, I would have to stop someplace along the way—Kojonup, Katanning or Williams—where I could plug in and then wait for two to six hours, or however long it might take, to get enough charge to continue on my way. That is not good enough, but I think we can do better. If we go this way, our fleet exhaust will be much cleaner and healthier. We will need to draw more electricity from the grid, which will balance things out. The vehicles will have more batteries in them to provide energy back into the grid. There are so many positive aspects to it.

I should say that Western Power is also investing in the integration of distributed energy resource technologies. On the issue of power, I think the new agency is called Energy Policy WA. A lot of good things are coming from it. There is a lot of hope for what it might deliver. It is really tough to understand why the government says that it is going with renewables and will put solar panels on various places, but at the same time says that it will invest in gas, when it does not really need to. We do not need it. I should say how different this is from when I asked a question three years ago about Western Power and the distributed energy sources. It kind of snubbed its nose at people who had solar panels because they were disrupting the grid and it would not be good for Western Power because it already had energy sources that it wanted to use. However, it seems that Western Power has changed its ways and is adapting for consumers who have changed and taken those steps forward on their own. It is not just greenies, hippies or whoever who have gone for solar panels; they are across the board now. Everybody is realising that it makes more sense to go that way. If we can, we do. That is great, and I hope we can continue that.

There are also some good things in the budget for Horizon Power, but I will not spend too much time on them. Thirteen Aboriginal communities will be upgraded to utility standard electricity services, including clean, lower cost, solar–diesel hybrid generation. It would be better if they were solar batteries rather than solar–diesel because we would not need to transport the diesel and there would be a long, ongoing reduction in fuel costs. It is short-sighted: “We’re going to try to do some good but we’re not going to do as good as we can.” I do not know; it must be to appease somebody who says that we have to keep using diesel. It does not have to be done.

The amount of \$30 million will be invested into a battery energy storage system in nine regional towns. Again, it looks like it will be a very good idea to make the distant parts of the grid more reliable and more sustainable. There is another \$4.8 million for renewable energy into the Shire of Derby and Derby Hospital, as well as rooftop solar panels.

A week or two ago, I asked a few questions about Esperance’s future power solution. Great! We will reduce carbon emissions by almost 50 per cent. Why not make it 100 per cent? Why build a power station that will use 54 per cent gas? Get this: the gas will not go through the pipeline that goes to Esperance; it will be trucked in. Really! Talk about stranded assets. If the energy generating system in Esperance will not use that gas, what will? As I said, talk about stranded assets. There has been no forethought; there is no planning ahead. It is privately owned so it is not our problem, according to the answer I received to my question, but it does seem to be our problem if we are putting it out there that people should be building gas assets, but then they turn around and lose money on them. I would love to see the detail or the numbers for the power plant in Esperance. I cannot see why it is not going fully renewable with batteries as the backup. It does not have to be just solar and wind. It could use wave energy, geothermal energy or, as I said, batteries. There are options; there are opportunities.

Coastal adaptation is also in the asset investment program. The department will spend an additional \$5 million assisting coastal managers, local government and community groups to ensure that appropriate measures and management are in place and works are implemented to protect coastal erosion hotspots. That is not asset investment; it is asset protection. It is saying we have an asset and because of climate change it is damaged so we will try to repair it and keep it strong so that climate change affects it more slowly. That is about the best we can do. We should be looking at that. I think 55 coastal erosion hotspots were mentioned. If I were making up the key effectiveness indicators, I would want one that says we will decrease the number of coastal erosion hotspots. That would be something. We should be looking for how we can make it better, not just how we can slow the process of it worsening.

I will not go into detail on the Energy Policy WA scenarios, we heard them on Tuesday, but I need to draw attention to the new “Whole of System Plan”. It has a lot going for it, but not one scenario includes a price on carbon or offsets for emissions. On page 39 of the plan it says —

As there is no explicit climate or emissions reduction policy targeting the electricity sector, no State or Federal target or carbon price has been included in the modelling.

We could do something about that. We say it is a federal issue—not our problem—wait till the federal government does something. We know it will not do anything. The companies are looking for somebody to take some action

on this. They are looking for a government that has a bit of guts and says what we need to hear. The banks know about it. The insurance companies are fully informed about the problems that climate change is causing and are probably desperately trying to backtrack from their responsibilities or are increasing their premiums, as they did on the north coast with the expectation of more frequent cyclones.

We need to have something. The Environmental Protection Authority put up a suggestion for offsets and the government knocked it back pretty quickly and told it to do a little more research. It did more research and came back and said, "We need some offsets"—nothing. We could do that; we could have offsets. We have talked about how it would be great to get more royalties out of mining companies, but maybe we can do it a different way. Maybe they should be required to have offsets that go into rehabilitation, regeneration, farmed forestry and plantations—things that are going to develop the landscape and make it more resilient, and balance the emissions that mining companies spew out on a regular basis.

I am pleased that the government is embracing the potential for renewables, but why the continuing investment in gas? The only reason I can think of is corporate influence, because it just does not make sense. I guess it depends on who you listen to, but if you listen to science, science knows what is coming in the future. There are some good things in this budget, and I will take some time to list a couple of them before I move on. There are allocations for solar panels on HBF Stadium; the goldfields major solar feasibility project; and \$1.8 million to install solar panels on 60 bus and rail stations in the public transport network. Those are all very good and I am very pleased. There is \$3.5 million for the community energy exchange pilot project, which will transform selected schools into smart, green, virtual power plants; and \$700 000 for the renewable energy for social housing smart energy project. There are a lot of good things happening. Western Power is investing in communications infrastructure to monitor two-way flows in the electricity network, which is likely to increase as demand for solar panels and electric vehicles continues to grow. That is great; we should be working with that. We should keep going that way. That all seems to be going very well; a lot of good things are happening.

I have to comment on the \$644 million election bribe that is going out through Synergy and Horizon Power to non-targeted people, including ourselves. The government is doing well enough; it does not have to bribe the electors, but it sure feels like it is. If anyone in this chamber had children back in 2005, they will remember the \$600 bribe per child before the election; if we voted the Liberals back in, we would get another \$600 per child. I had four children—that would have been nearly \$5 000. We did not need it; we were doing okay. The government is just sending money out there. Why can we not use it for the people who need it? That is just my thought on this. This is coming from Bell Resources—great! I am glad we finally got that money, but it took \$300 million in legal fees to get that \$644 million back, but I guess the legal fees were counted in previous budgets. I am sure the government cannot go back on it now, but it should show some spine. Rather than the \$644 million going into a bribe for everyone, it could have been invested in the state. It should have been spent on making us more resilient and on planning for the future. It could have provided for the people who are struggling. The people who are struggling need it, I agree, but it could help to make this more energy resilient in the long term. The government could have put it into battery rebates, charging stations or electric vehicle subsidies—things that could get us progressing into a future of renewable energy, low emissions, carbon drawdown and a reversal of climate change. I owe it to my children to do everything I can to get us there. We can only do that for ourselves. We only represent the state of Western Australia, but gee, we send out a lot of emissions, so we have a lot of opportunities to make things better.

The Western Australian energy policy is ready; it could do it. We could go through that and say it should be 100 per cent renewable. I guess that is why the Greens are here, and I am really pleased that we are, because we can keep reminding members about this. We do not take corporate donations. We believe that donations should be transparent to the public in real time so that people know who is actually funding their political parties. It has to change.

I now turn to royalties for regions. A quarter of royalties for regions funding is going to the country water pricing subsidy, and that makes no sense. That was not the intention of royalties for regions. An amount of \$1 billion over four years is going to something that used to come out of consolidated revenue. There is also a quarter of a billion dollars over the forward estimates for the regional school bus service—\$80 million for each of the next three years. Will that be ongoing after that? Will it always come from royalties for regions? I could not even find mention of what it was for. It is in addition to the other funding there, but is that really what it should be for? These are good programs—I do not want to knock that—but why from royalties for regions? The Water Corporation can afford the country water pricing scheme. It had a pretty good surplus this year, I believe.

As Hon Dr Steve Thomas said, we need to make rules for this brown paper bag, this slush fund of regional funding that the government of the day uses at its own discretion. Having it there for whatever it chooses just does not make sense. I suggested earlier this year to put 10 per cent of it towards the environment. I am pleased to say that a lot of money is being pushed towards the environment, and that is very good to see, but I think it needs to be a regular part of the budget. It should be there every year, not just in an election year. If we could put it towards the environment, it would help businesses and jobs. We could invest it in a range of programs and get people back on

country, more connected to the landscape, and give them a positive way to use their time. Some sort of environment or nature funding would help cool the planet, and we would have something for the metro area. That is not within royalties for regions, so it would need a fund of its own for on-ground works.

There is only \$2.6 million for the green jobs plan, which is going to community groups, so it does not really add much more than the \$7 million or \$8 million that is already going there. I am saying that we need \$100 million to get those community groups and volunteers more actively participating and willingly helping to clean up the planet. It just makes a lot of sense.

The royalties for regions program is how it is because of the way in which the Royalties for Regions Act was written. We will not be able to change that without other legislation, because as it is written under “Object” —

The object of this Act is to promote and facilitate economic, business and social development in regional Western Australia through the operation of the Fund.

Section 9(1) provides that expenditure may be authorised for the following purposes —

- (a) to provide infrastructure and services in regional Western Australia;

Any dollar funding that goes into the regions that is related to services or infrastructure can come from royalties for regions, so really, between education, health and other programs that are already out there, it is probably already well over \$1 billion. It could all be listed as coming from royalties for regions without anything added to it, other than maybe the election promises the government wants to put in there to make sure it is known and loved. Paragraph (a) opens it up to anything, as long as it is in the regions. Section 9(1) continues —

- (b) to develop and broaden the economic base of regional Western Australia;
- (c) to maximise job creation and improve career opportunities in regional Western Australia.

These are all good, valid ideas, but it leaves it open to basically anything that is being spent in the regions. Sometimes governments have even tried to get away with things spent in the metro area because they are doing work for the regional areas. It is very loose.

The green jobs plan is a positive thing; I may come back to that. I do not need to spend too much time on it. I am pleased to see that it is happening and I am also pleased to find out that it will use the state natural resource management offices, which are already geared up to work with community groups, rather than reinventing the wheel.

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development got some significant research grants into grains, which is very good to see, but as I said, regeneration was mentioned only once. I think we really need to focus on repairing our landscape rather than degrading it any further. In my talk on forests I said we needed to have more plantations and more forests. That means we might take up land that might currently be used as farmland, like the blue gums did back in the 1990s and early 2000s. If that is happening, we need the farmland to take back some of the land that we have degraded and actually restore it to a healthy space that can flourish and grow the food that we eat and export.

There has been a bit said on biosecurity groups while we have been in here. I just want to add my bit to it. I have heard other reports about the Blackwood Biosecurity group. The minister said that the Blackwood group is a good one and people are happy with it, but I have heard otherwise. I have heard that a number of local governments are not happy with it and that quite a few people are concerned that most of the funding is going to more research and staff costs and not on-the-ground work. Does it expect the volunteers to come out and do the on-the-ground work? Many of them are already doing it on their own properties in any case.

The other issue is that a lot of the pest species are on state land and the state is not doing anything about it. With this dollar-for-dollar funding, the state is wanting to look good and as though it is contributing to people doing work to eradicate pests, but it needs to do it on its own properties as well. Maybe this is a place where we can look at using royalties for regions. People in the regions would appreciate it if the state were able to manage the pest species on its own land. I think there is more work to do. I have heard reports that the Blackwood group was not set up in a way that was representative of the entire area that it covers and that, in fact, some of those areas do not even want to be a part of it because of the way it was set up. I think more needs to be explored there. It is a good idea, but in this case, I do not think we have the solution yet.

I refer to the southern forests irrigation scheme. Thank you, thank you, thank you! I know that the nails are not in the coffin yet, but pulling \$12 million from the budget is delightful. That says that the government is washing its hands of that scheme and will stand back and let the Environmental Protection Authority decide. Why does the government not let the EPA decide whether we have carbon offsets? That would be my next thing, but the government will let the EPA decide this one. We know that this is a rotten scheme and I think the government knows it and would love to get out of it any way it can, as long as it can hold onto that \$39 million of federal funds. We know it is a rotten scheme. It has climate impacts, changes the demand for water and makes it less equitable. We need a new

water act that is equitable and we have to decide what we mean by equitable. The current act says that it has to be equitable, but there is nothing to describe what that means. We know that climate impacts are coming and that water is becoming more scarce and demand for it will go up. We even have to look at what we encourage our farmers to plant. They can plant whatever they like, but they would likely choose something that is within their resource means, which means their water supply. It does not make a lot of sense to plant something that is dependent on a water supply from somewhere else that they do not have equitable rights to, so we should not facilitate those situations.

Hon Jim Chown: What are you suggesting they plant?

Hon DIANE EVERS: I am not a farmer. Hon Jim Chown knows that. However, I know a lot of good farmers down there who probably have a lot of good ideas.

We need guidelines to support efficient, sustainable and high-quality use and re-use of the water. We need to make the water stay on the land longer and stay within the landscape. Compared with other areas of the state, they have had quite good rainfall, which gives them many more opportunities, many of which are being taken up. I look forward to working with them in the next term.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: We've got to feed that growing population. People keep having babies!

Hon DIANE EVERS: No, they are not. I would not bother too much with that, but population growth is going down. People are not having children.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: If everyone had four children, it would be going up.

Hon DIANE EVERS: It would, but they are not.

Another interesting thing I have seen in the budget is that as of 1 July 2019—I am surprised I did not celebrate this back when it happened, but I was not aware of it—the biological assets of native forests and sandalwood have been handed back to the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions. I noticed that because their devaluation appeared in the DBCA's accounts. They have been taken out of the Forest Products Commission—yay! I have not yet comprehended the whole significance of this, but in my book anything that makes it easier to wind up the Forest Products Commission is good. I think this is one step closer to that. It is wonderful and I am happy to see it. We need quite a bit of work there and I am really looking forward to it.

I refer next to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the emergency services levy. I have been a strong advocate for the bush fire brigades. I find them to be a really strong part of my community. They are necessary in our landscape, good at what they do and willing to be out there fighting fires on behalf of the whole community as volunteers.

Hon Jim Chown: I hope you're not going to suggest that they need electric vehicles!

Hon DIANE EVERS: No, but did the member hear that they are getting Tatra trucks. They have three of them lined up already. This is wonderful and really good news. I am pleased to hear it. We need to keep them fully —

Hon Jim Chown: Mobile.

Hon DIANE EVERS: That is useful, but I mean prepared, with proper protective equipment and training. It is really good to see. It only occurred to me in this budget. It was remiss of me not to have worked it out before, but of the emergency services levy that is collected, which is \$372 million a year, that is currently going to fund the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, which has a total cost of service of \$472 million. It is about three-quarters of the amount that is funded from the ESL. I have started trying to get information about how much of that goes back to the brigades. Although DFES is statewide, a lot of people are not that close to a DFES-managed career fire department. A lot of people I know in the regions are dependent on their fire brigades. It would be nice to know how much is collected from all that land and those people. I have asked the question, but I have not got the answer yet, about people who are more than 50 kilometres from a DFES-funded site and those who are reliant on the brigades to make sure that they are getting their fair share of the ESL. I notice that in the forward estimates for 2022–23, it looks like the total cost of services for DFES will stay pretty much the same—around \$464 million—but that the ESL revenue will rise to around \$450 million, which will be nearly 100 per cent of the DFES budget. Let us make sure that over the next four years, and ongoing, those brigades get their fair share of that. I think there is a lot of room for growth and development. We need a lot more well-trained volunteers and we really need to look at that. If we were to have a conversation about bushfires, my thoughts are that suppression is the way to go. We really need to put these fires out—controlling them in areas where we need to protect assets, of course—but letting them go and watching it burn makes no sense.

I will move on to the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation. A sum of \$125 000 was spent last year and will be this year on the natural disaster resilience program, but Perth metropolitan stormwater drainage is not doing so well. That money will not even scratch the surface. Drainage has many serious problems, but it is not a vote winner. People will not even notice it. It is not something that they are interested in. They want water to come through their pipes and into their house when they need it and have it taken away when they no longer have use of

it. The quality of water in metropolitan drains is a serious issue. Problems predominantly arise from water contamination from decomposing organic matter that has built up in the drain pits. There are also contaminants and particles from roads, trash, toxic pollutants and microplastics. That results in substandard water entering our waterways and can lead to significant environmental and health issues. It is a growing problem. Last year—I think it was during the annual report hearings—it was made clear to me that no agency has responsibility for ensuring the quality of the water entering the groundwater, rivers or oceans. Local governments and other governments have responsibility until the water enters the system, and DWER cares about the quality of the water in the rivers, but there is very little connection through that. I think that we need to address that issue. I will not see it in the budget, but I hope that is addressed.

I want to mention a few other things. Members have heard of Clean State, which is a group of a lot of concerned people. It has made its own response to the budget and I thought I would give it a chance to be heard as well. One statement it has made is —

The WA gas industry creates less jobs and more pollution than any other sector, and government investment in a gas-led recovery is not supported by the majority of West Australians.

That group would have done its homework. Some very good people work in that group. We do not need gas. It also stated —

... the budget's record spending on roads includes projects which present significant environmental impacts and risks. Allocating \$6 billion to road building presents a missed opportunity to invest those funds in initiatives that deliver more jobs and cut pollution, such as energy efficient social housing, renewable energy, and conservation programs across our regions.

Clean State has some really good ideas and I hope that its voice gets heard more strongly than just mine. Clean State is really focusing on not only climate, the environment and emissions, but also recognising that there are jobs in these industries unlike the few that we might get in the gas industry. In these industries, we will find many more jobs—another vote-winning word that we hear so often at this time.

When we talk about which jobs we will invest in, maybe we should look at the emissions created per job, not just the dollars per job. We would then get an idea of the relative benefit of the jobs that are created. I recognise that people need to make a purposeful, meaningful contribution; we may call that a job, employment, work or whatever it is. We need people to have money to buy the things they need, but if we invest in things, let us create something with lasting value, not just something that will work for the next 10 years. I believe we can do better than that.

I have to acknowledge that building roads get votes, but we build roads and more people use them and then we get traffic problems, so what is the benefit? Why do we do that? We build ring-roads for people to travel around urban centres, like Bunbury. The Bunbury Outer Ring Road cost \$750 million. What is the benefit? The Albany ring-road cost \$175 million. What is the benefit of that? Members can bet that Main Roads has a return on investment on those projects. It has the numbers to prove that the government will get back \$6 or whatever for every dollar invested. I know where it gets those numbers. Again, it is manipulative; it shows only what it needs to show. If it is always going to benefit us by so many dollars, why would we stop? If for every dollar we invested in roads, we got \$2 back in return, we would just keep building roads. We might as well pave the entire state. We could do that without any trouble whatsoever, but that will not work. There will come a point at which we will say that we have got enough. We are still at that point as a society, because of the way we operate, that every time we build a road, we fill it with more cars. That is not the way to work things out.

Hon Jim Chown: That's the population growth, isn't it?

Hon DIANE EVERS: We do not have that population growth and maybe we will not for a little while.

A member interjected.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Main Roads has a stack of projects that are ready to go at any time and when we have some money, we just put it out there and we build more. It is crazy. One thing I have noticed is that roads get votes. Politicians need votes and so we keep building them. That has the support of Main Roads. It is delighted to keep doing that, but it makes no sense when planning for the future. Will Greens voters vote for more roads? I hope that they vote for more public transport and more efficient roads and maybe even electric cars, which do go on roads, and maybe autonomous vehicles, but we have to look at the benefits of the work that we are doing. What are the emissions and how much space and time does it take up and so forth?

I want to read a small quote because I have research that indicates that when people are surveyed regarding their general feeling of wellbeing, one of the strongest correlations is the quality of their commute to and from work. The book called *Happy City* will be available in the library here and I think members will find it is a really good read. My copy will not be available. I will not go through the whole thing, but one thing that is really nice is —

Take the simple act of choosing how far to travel to work. Aside from the financial burden, people who endure long drives tend to experience high blood pressure and more headaches than those with short commutes. They get frustrated more easily and tend to be grumpier when they get to their destination.

...

Their finding —

The researchers —

was seemingly straightforward: the longer the drive, the less happy people were. Before you dismiss this as numbingly obvious, keep in mind that they were testing not for drive satisfaction, but for life satisfaction.

So, their discovery was not that commuting hurt. It was that people were choosing commutes that made their entire lives worse. They weren't balancing the hardship of the long commute with pleasures in other areas of their lives—not through higher income nor through lower costs or greater enjoyment of their homes.

The research found that a person with a one-hour commute has to earn 40 per cent more money to be as satisfied with life as someone who walks to the office.

Hon Michael Mischin: Did you walk to Parliament?

Hon DIANE EVERS: My office is across the road, so yes.

Hon Michael Mischin: You live there, do you?

Hon DIANE EVERS: No. I have walked to work, though. It took about 45 minutes. I imagine that is too far for the member.

Hon Michael Mischin interjected.

Hon DIANE EVERS: I do not have an hour and a half and I am not big on the car thing. We have already been through this. I know the member was away on urgent parliamentary business, but if he had been here earlier, he would know that I have already talked about my commute. The quote continues —

On the other hand, for a single person, exchanging a long commute for a short walk to work has the same effect on happiness as finding a new love.

How about that. Members can think about their own commute. We are in a privileged position, so maybe members are excited about coming to Parliament and being a part of this lovely place, but people who commute for 40 minutes by either driving or walking need a 40 per cent increase in their salary to get to the same level of happiness as those who walk. The research is showing that people are not aware of the decisions they are making. These decisions occur for whatever reasons, but that is how it turns out. Their life satisfaction goes down when they have a long commute. That leads to difficulties at home, health issues and financial pressures because they feel they have to make up for the terrible time they take commuting.

Hon Jim Chown: What are you suggesting—that they stay home and don't go to work?

Hon DIANE EVERS: There are so many things. If the member had been listening —

Hon Jim Chown: I have.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Good. No; I am suggesting a lot more than that. I am suggesting that we plan our cities to make them more liveable and for people to be able to more easily get to where they want to go. I am suggesting we have good public transport so that people can get to where they want to go when they need it. They could then do other things while they were on public transport and they might possibly find it more enjoyable. That is where I was going with that. I am pleased that the member is engaged.

I will refer to other asset investments. A lot of schools and hospitals will be either built or refurbished. There will be plenty of ribbons cut in 2024. That is good planning from a political point of view by this government. It seems that all the bad news for the Department of Education and others was delivered very early in the government's term. It is good planning to get it out of the way. It is a textbook example of an ideal political term. Who could have guessed that it would be topped off with COVID and the financial issues as well? It is going along swimmingly. To have ended up where we are now is quite amazing. I will leave it to my colleague Hon Alison Xamon to continue talking about those issues. The \$319 million for social housing is a great start. In my book, the goal would be to have no homeless people. I note the extra 800 police. I am interested in, but a little concerned about, this. The Under Treasurer said that the additional 800 police will lead to more arrests, more court time and more prison time. That will add another \$57 million to the budget for all those extra prisoners and arrests. I hope our key effectiveness indicator for each officer is not the number of arrests they make, because that would not make sense. I would have thought that with more police, we would have less crime, but maybe that is in an ideal world. I believe that is our plan. That is what we are looking for—less crime. I will leave that to my colleague Hon Tim Clifford to address.

I expect better from the government. I think the path it is on is showing a lot of good intentions and good ideas. I know that things move very slowly but I expect more and I expect to be pleasantly surprised by the next budget. Throughout this term there were many initiatives to make improvements. Progress has been slow and piecemeal, but there are some good initiatives in the budget. I think it makes sense at this stage to be conservative in our expectations of how much revenue we will receive from royalties. We do not have to say that we will get more and we do not have to spend more on constructing assets, because there is a limit to how much we can do. Investing in the battery future fund by exploring for the minerals that we need for batteries is the kind of strategic thinking we require. We can manufacture these things here as energy becomes cheaper. If we get our transport systems in order and working better, we will be able to build things, manufacture and create industries in the places where these materials are either extracted or, in the case of agriculture, grown. I was really pleased to see in the budget that we are looking at doing that.

We are continuing the rail future fund with \$28 million from royalties for regions, and rail from Bunbury to Kemerton is very good. I hope that when we are in our “better normal” that we are heading to, we get back on track with the industrial areas at Kemerton and the lithium from Greenbushes. I know that the link with China and the world market for lithium are making it difficult at the moment, but I think it will pick up again, and I hope that when it does, we put in the money to get that train line from Kemerton to Greenbushes. Had COVID not occurred, maybe we would have got that there. We would not need the funds from royalties for regions funds for rail if we could redirect the Albany ring-road funding. If we could redirect that \$175 million to improve the rail line from the Down Road industrial site to the port, we could futureproof the port. We could make it easier. The grain would only have to come by truck to Down Road, then it could go on the train, as we need it, to get to the port for the ships as they come in. It just makes so much sense. Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd was onto this idea. It was looking at doing it when the federal government thought it was going to lose the election and handed out all that money, including \$135 million for the Albany ring-road. It was not meant to happen. It was somebody’s pipedream, then all of a sudden it got funding. Trucks carrying grain could just as easily go across to Down Road and grain could be put on a train there. Then we would not have all the traffic that goes past the port. If members go down to Albany when the grain trucks are going through, they will see what I mean. The trucks come often. We could have that grain on rail very easily. CBH understood that. There is \$175 million—going once, going twice! Come on, take it up and pass it on.

I see in the budget papers that funding for the Office of the Auditor General has increased. I am a fan of the Auditor General. She is an accountant who has just got on to the Australian Accounting Standards Board. I hope that she will have a good impact and we will see some more sense going through there. Another sort of department will be created within the Office of the Auditor General to look at data analytics. The office is getting a specialist in that area. They came over to set up the department around the time COVID happened so there was some drama. The best thing is that we will be able to pick up misappropriations, fraud and financial negligence. Auditors might be able to pick those up at the end of the year; by using data analytics we can maybe pre-empt that process by looking at where they are more likely or able to happen so that we can play a tighter role and pick things up earlier in the game and stop those things from happening. I look forward to that.

There is a lot about water and environmental regulations. As I said, it is great that \$1 billion of royalties for regions funding has been allocated for each year, knowing that sometimes funding does not go through because it might be for project ideas that are wishful thinking. The funding has been fully allocated in this budget. Unfortunately, as I said, a quarter goes to the country water pricing subsidy. It makes no sense to me to have that subsidy in the budget. I think we could do more with that funding. There is \$25 million for national parks. That is very good—keep going. There is more to be done there. We need to consider that national parks are our carbon stores now and for the future and provide the biodiversity habitat that the state needs so much. There is \$56 million for the *Australind* line fleet. I am really glad to see the railcar fleet funded in the budget. I hope that the line works efficiently and well into the future. It would be nice if it could be on time more often and cheaper so that more people found it worthwhile to adjust their time frames to ride it because it would encourage people to get off the roads.

There is \$16 million over the forward estimates for the food and beverage value-add fund. I have been looking forward to this. I have been hearing about value-adding to our agricultural produce since I was on the Great Southern Development Commission board in 2000, I think. No, I worked there in 1997, so we were already talking about it then. Let us hope it actually works. I know a lot of people out there have some good ideas. It is just a matter of putting those ideas into action and helping small businesses develop and market them to make it work. We need to keep it local. We need to help the small growers when we can. We need to help the co-ops develop because they can share their research, equipment and buildings to do this. We need more mobile and micro abattoirs. They work and can be done on a small scale, which can be healthier, localised and good for the economy. We have to look at healthy regenerative stuff. The first round for funding closed last Friday, and I hope it was well subscribed.

I also have a few concerns about the budget. Page 22 of budget paper No 3 talks about red-tape reduction. Along with the emotive words “roads” and “jobs”, and other words that make people like the person who is using them, are the words “red-tape reduction”. I agree. Certainly, we do not need duplication and onerous, slow systems that

are there only to keep an employee looking through forms. We can speed up the process and make it more efficient, but not to the detriment of the reasons those regulations are in place. We have regulations because we need to protect what is being regulated. Hopefully regulations do not just spring up because somebody wants to keep their job. Hopefully they are put in place for a good reason. If that reason is no longer appropriate or no longer exists, we should take them out. But, again, do not throw the baby out with the bathwater; we have to make sure that any easing of reductions or removal of red tape is not to the detriment of the environment or the people of the state. We have to be careful of that. But they are lovely words to say. People like to hear “red-tape reduction”. The words “green-tape reduction” irritate me a lot, because that means, “Oh, no, let’s just ignore the environment”, and that is not what we have to be going for.

Sometimes regulations and red tape will delay the process. Sometimes that delay is the opportunity that an individual or a community group needs to become aware of what is about to happen and it gives them the opportunity to raise the alarm and shine light on the error, omission, inconsistency or whatever the issue is. That is tricky. When we start speeding up processes to get projects through, people who watch for these things, and those who are barely aware of them, need to be on their toes. They have to get in quick to challenge a project before too many decisions have been made and too much money has been spent on it. We need to be aware of the purpose: why we are removing red tape?

On page 649, funding for the environmental assessments of significant proposals has increased. The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation will assess the environmental issues of proposals for mining, oil and gas, infrastructure, processing plants and irrigated agriculture. We will be doing this for a lot of things. I recognise that that is to facilitate these developments because they will generate jobs and help our economy and so forth, but effectively it is a subsidy to the proponent. If we are doing this for them and helping them get through all that stuff, it is a subsidy to them. Given all I have said about climate change and the serious situation that we are in, I think we need some sort of sliding scale of the fees to recover them based on CO₂ emissions of the projects or the proponents of the projects. I do believe that we are trying to reduce our emissions. We have signed the Paris Agreement and so forth. We talk about it. I hope that wanting to reduce emissions and stem the tide of climate change is in our hearts and what makes us go. I have to believe that. I do not want to think that that is not helping to drive us. Therefore, why not base it on the CO₂ emissions of the project? If a project will be spewing out a large amount of emissions, possibly creating very few jobs, maybe the proponents should pay the full amount of whatever it cost to assess that project. Maybe they do that already. However, I have a feeling that it is one of those subsidies that we provide by having the organisation there to do it. Oil and gas projects should definitely pay the full amount. We do not need them. Their time is up. However, if it was a renewable energy initiative or a regenerative farming initiative, maybe they should not have to recompense the department to the same degree. We need to make our polluting industries pay for the support and the approvals that we give them. That would allow us to give the subsidies to the other proponents and projects that we want to develop.

We should cut out those subsidies, ban the corporate donations and influence, and make sure we are aiming for what we want to have and not just what we are pressured into. Sure, we want jobs, but we want sustainable and meaningful jobs. I wish I had a dollar for every time someone said, “How are you going to pay for it?” What the government does not realise, and what the opposition may not realise too, is that we have been subsidising the wrong industries. If we were to put the industries that the Greens or Clean State and others are suggesting into renewables, healthy food, people and caring communities, that is what will make us strong. It is not by creating billions of dollars of gas assets that will become stranded in the next 10 years if the price of gas is so much higher compared with renewables. It is not going to happen. This is the twenty-first century. Gas is polluting. It does not create that many jobs. It is not sustainable. We use it up and then it is gone. That is not renewable. That is not sustainable. The Esperance power station should be fully 100 per cent renewable. I cannot see any reason to create another gas power plant. We could run our trucks on batteries. It is being done in other countries. For the gas pipeline, they are trucking the gas to Esperance, using diesel to get it there, to get energy that we could get out of the sun that is shining there every day. It does not make sense. Talk about stranded assets. More and more often we are hearing about ships that were set for extracting gas from the ocean, and when the companies are finished with them they walk away and the company goes broke. This state has 60 000 drill holes on its mining register that are now defunct. Those 60 000 holes may never be rehabilitated in any way and will possibly present a significant danger. We will have junk floating in our oceans from stranded assets for oil and gas. It beggars belief. It does not make any sense.

I come now to carbon offsets. The EPA handed the government a plan. It was a good plan. It has reviewed it. It makes sense. We should have carbon offsets. That should be coming up in the budget. I look forward to next year. On climate policy, again, we need to look at that. It will be coming out. I probably missed it. I think the draft is probably ready. It must include the requirement that those who emit CO₂ and equivalents cover the cost of addressing the impacts of anthropogenic climate change, and the cost of reversing climate change. That should be paid up-front, as they are doing it. If we wait until they have finished taking the gas out and they have gone broke, they will be gone and we cannot get it. It does not make sense. I am really hoping. Even though the state government might say this is a federal issue, it can do something about it.

I am coming close to the end, but I need to talk about forests. I notice that Hon Dr Steve Thomas scoffed at the idea that the Product Forests Commission should have to show a profit. In many ways, I agree. Putting in the act that the FPC was supposed to show a profit has made it do unconscionable things. I know how it tries to make a profit. It was not able to do it in the native forest industry, because it does not work that way. It made some terrible deals on the pricing of pine so that a pine sawlog business could come here and set up. This information goes back a year or two. The FPC was selling pine at \$80 a tonne and had a contract at that rate, when the going rate was around \$120 a tonne. Farmers who had pine plantations on their properties were not able to sell into that mill and had to look for other buyers, because that was the only price the FPC would go for, causing more difficulties and more dramas. It makes no sense. We have to do something about it.

Sandalwood is another case. The Forest Products Commission has control of the sandalwood market in determining how much sandalwood Western Australia produces. What happens? Who gets to produce 90 per cent of it? The FPC, on crown land. The native title holders there were given the other 10 per cent, even though the FPC has admitted now that that was incorrect, and it is doing research into it; again, I have not seen that report yet. The FPC has also made it nearly impossible for people who planted sandalwood plantations to harvest them at a profit. The FPC could have started holding back on the amount of wild sandalwood being harvested on crown land and allowed the industry to do it. We are always talking about getting it out of government and letting people do it. The industry—the farmers who had planted the sandalwood plantations—are now not able to sell the sandalwood on their properties at a profit. So, yes, I do not think the FPC should try to make a profit, and it hurts me when I hear people push it to try, because it sounds ridiculous; it is so poor. I want the FPC to be out of existence.

Let us talk about the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and the Conservation and Parks Commission. The Conservation and Parks Commission will be reviewing the forest management plan when it comes up for review in 2023. We have to stop logging native forests. I think it will not be long before we will get the industry to the table to discuss how we will manage that transition. We need more plantations. I notice that there is very little in the budget for FPC to do this. There is very little in it for anybody. It seems to me that that would fall within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. We could look at integrating plantations into farming systems. There are trees that will grow just about anywhere. There are many different uses for trees. We just need some research into it, some motivation and encouragement, and the right things to happen. We can do it.

We need to recover the degraded landscape, as I said. We also need to embrace regenerative agriculture. I cannot say more about that. I am not a farmer, but I know farmers who are doing this and doing it well. I was really pleased to see Charles Massy on *Australian Story* with Hon Alannah MacTiernan bringing that idea along. I do not know about other members in here who have regional constituencies, but I am hearing from more people who are starting to take an interest in this. They want to see how it works and what they can do about it.

We need to stop clearing, stop degrading, and stop building over our land. We are losing our landscape. We need that land for storing carbon and for growing our food. We need to stop entering into contracts that destroy our state. We have done that so many times over, not just in the timber industry. We should stop further contracts for native forest timber. The forest management plan will allow this to happen until 2023. I am pinning my hopes on that review. DBCA understands its role in managing and conserving the plants and animals. I have hope that the Conservation and Parks Commission will take some really good steps in the next term to review the forest management plan. I have put a suggestion to the minister and have sent it to a few people about a deliberative process. I know I am talking outside of the way this government and this state normally functions. But we need to get the values, opinions and ideas of a wider cross-section of people, not just those whom we know, who donate to us, whom we are friends with; not just those who read the newspapers or watch commercial television and say that whatever is in the media today is the answer, because tomorrow they might change their mind and say something else; and not just those on Facebook and social media. We need a facilitated and deliberative process where we get people to talk through what the plans are for the future, and what we are looking for. We need to empower those people, or at least involve them to such a point that if they come up with something that is reasonable and could work, we will need to have a damn good reason to not do what they are asking us to do. My suggestion was to start this with the forest, because it is a small, contained area that could be worked with. But there is no reason why we cannot expand that to bushfires, water management and water allocation, and even climate change. I think we can go much further with that.

If we just review this current fourth management plan and let it go again for another 10 years, we can kiss our forests goodbye. It may be too late for a lot of our forests. Our forests already are not coming back like they were. Sure, there are some areas that manage to, but it is not happening and that is not sustainable, and people involved in the industry know that it is not sustainable, especially when we figure that 70 to 80 per cent of the karri goes overseas as woodchips or biofuel. Seventy to 80 per cent of our jarrah is burnt as charcoal or firewood. I am sure that everyone in here loves jarrah for firewood. When we see a standing jarrah tree in a jarrah forest we either think that we could have that forest, that tree, that habitat, that energy, that oxygen, that carbon—whatever—or we could burn it in our fire at home. Other woods burn; plantation wood burns. I love jarrah. We have jarrah on

our block and we collect it off the ground. It is good, but we are going to have to change. I am not sure whether it is 50 000 or 80 000 tonnes of jarrah—somewhere in there—that are being burnt in people's home fires in Perth every year. Really? We are clearing an area the size of Kings Park every day. That is how quickly they log our forests. Has anyone walked through Kings Park in the recent past? It is big—really big—and they are clearing that size every single day in our jarrah and karri forests. It is criminal—just outrageous. Let us hope that we go there. Let us empower and involve our society, because we can; we can do better. I wanted to say more, but I think I will leave it at that.

I have talked about key effectiveness indicators and key efficiency indicators. There is reference to bushfire suppression on page 682 of budget paper No 2. I suppose the line the government is trying to achieve is —

Suppress bushfires that threaten or occur on lands managed by the Department.

That is clear enough. What is the outcome? I would think the outcome is a suppressed fire. Got it—okay, that is the idea. We want to suppress those fires. We want to see that the fire has been suppressed and the land is not burnt. If we do really well at that, and suppress all the fires effectively with only 10 hectares burnt, we have done a great job, right? Or we do a terrible job and say, “No, I cannot be bothered. My son has a footy game on. Let us just watch it burn for a while because it is not doing too badly. It is in a controlled area. It should be okay.” We end up with the fire getting out of hand and a million hectares burn. If we do a bad job, we burn a lot. The key efficiency indicator is average cost per hectare burnt. Under those scenarios, we would actually have a very high value for achieving our aims. By putting out the fires, spending the money, trying to suppress it, doing a good job, the value per hectare burnt will be huge. Help me out here, guys. If we look at our key efficiency and key effectiveness indicators, let us get some of that work to achieve the aims that we are trying to achieve. It is debatable as to whether anybody looks at these other than when they are writing them up for the auditor to assess them before they put them in their annual reports and budget statements. However, the more distributed our population gets, and our employment bases and people change jobs often, the more they need some sort of guide as to what is our intention. If our intention is not to burn extensively and to suppress the fires, would it not make more sense for the key effectiveness indicator to have the number of hectares burnt and then the lower the number, the better the fire has been suppressed? It is not rocket science. I do not know who we can get to be involved, but maybe when the directors general meet and get to know each other, they can talk a little about what that plan is. Anybody who has been a part of community groups or even businesses knows that they look at what is their vision, their plan, and what they are aiming for. It is kind of like sometimes we do not have that within governments. Somebody knows what it is but it is not the same as what the person sitting next to them thinks it is, and nobody wants to write it down because then it is stuck as fact. We must ask, “What is our point? What are we aiming for?” and then work back so we know how we will do that and how we can make it measurable. Some things may not be measurable, but that does not stop us. We still need to do the best job we can. This budget is making some really good steps in that direction. I am still expecting considerably more in the next budget and I hope I am here to see it.

HON CHARLES SMITH (East Metropolitan) [3.46 pm]: I rise to offer a few brief remarks on the estimates of revenue and expenditure—consolidated account estimates 2020–21, otherwise known as the budget reply. I will start with a few brief comments on politics, policy, economics and, dare I say, some philosophy, before moving on to more particular matters that interest me such as policing, justice, prosecution and so on. The latest budget delivered by the Treasurer was a rather dull affair. It was a dull affair that lacked ambition and included no real economic surprises, except one. That surprise is this: the Premier seems to be embracing a certain amount of economic protectionism or nationalism. From my point of view and perspective, that is to be welcomed. He has been trying to keep economic flow inside Western Australia, and keep it there, but I would question somewhat his means of doing so. For that attempt, he is to be congratulated. It is about time the Premier started taking note of my policies and acting on them, so well done.

I am sure that like a good Labor government should, the Premier will be asking our global multinational companies to contribute more to this state at a time of economic emergency, but I do not hold my breath. It is worth noting at this point that despite delivering an alleged \$1.2 billion surplus this year, mostly from iron ore royalties and GST back payments—which, by the way, is another Western Australia Party policy—WA's state debt will peak at \$42.9 billion. That far exceeds the figure under Hon Colin Barnett's previous government, which I think was \$34.3 billion.

Hon Jim Chown: It was \$32.8 billion.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: I take your point; it was close enough.

Hon Michael Mischin: What's a couple of billion?

Hon CHARLES SMITH: Between friends? Quite.

However, because it is Labor, that debt is okay; nothing to see here. Despite the state receiving iron ore royalties, which has kept the economy afloat, I note that global multinational resource companies in Western Australia pay relatively small taxes. Not only that, those companies, in particular oil and gas companies, also rely on international

labour. If we compare WA with Qatar, for example, Qatar reaps a huge, healthy royalty for its resources. If we could achieve something similar, the state would be in a much better fiscal position. If the government does not have the nerve to inquire into that issue, it should insist that we employ locals first, or maybe use quotas, as a condition of a relaxed taxation regime. I want the house to note that if we look at one example, the Barrow Island project, that has a resource rent royalty attached to it, a paltry 25 per cent from that project comes to Western Australia, with the remaining being sent to the commonwealth. While I am at it, I will just raise the issue of another tax, the petroleum rent resource tax, which I have done before. From my point of view, it is a complete waste of time, as most multinational giants seem to get away with paying absolutely zero. What I am trying to say in a roundabout fashion is that Western Australia more or less props up the entire country financially, yet we still get a bum deal from Canberra.

Something of interest to my party and I think many people is what I have just said about getting a bum deal from Canberra. I think it is about time that we had a complete overhaul of fiscal relations between federal and state governments. For example, it is time the states were given the power to raise their own revenue, whereby federal income taxes can be reduced and the states reimpose their own income tax to make up for that revenue shortfall. Australia's Federation is not working effectively, largely because of the vertical fiscal imbalances embedded in the current system whereby the commonwealth raises around 82 per cent of total tax revenue, the states and territories around 15 per cent and local government just three per cent. This has the consequence of the states being the primary providers of public services—public health, education, transport, law and order and so on—without the practical scope to fund them. Accordingly, states are left heavily reliant on the commonwealth for funding top-ups and so on. That gives the commonwealth a duty to redistribute around one-quarter of its revenue to the states. The current system also has unnecessary duplication and cost shifting between both or all tiers of government, that of course comes with the never-ending blame game of who is funding what, whereby federal, state and local governments blame each other for sabotaging services to the public. I think that fiscal relationship is a worthy idea that all state and commonwealth governments need to reconsider, because, as I have just said, currently it is not practically working.

I was surprised by the Premier's economic nationalism, which is very commendable, but one thing that was not surprising and very, very predictable was the property lobby calling for and receiving yet more budget pork. It is amazing watching the sense of entitlement on display from the property lobby. It is never grateful. It always demands more from the taxpayer. I want to remind members of what the Treasurer said about the property lobby just a few short years ago. The Treasurer appeared alongside Gareth Parker at 6PR a few years ago and stated the following. He said that the property industry expected the government "to react to every demand that comes across their desk", and he is right, it does. He went on to say —

"But I have to say, it's a never ending supply of demands from these guys ...

That is right as well. He said that it was not the government's job to fix the problem the property sector created by itself by bringing on too much supply when there was not enough demand. He is right there, and the sector is doing it again right now. He said —

"We can't continue just to simply react to the whims and thought bubbles of the property sector."

And he is right. If only that were true, because two years later, guess what? This government is now the lapdog of the property development industry. What a change. The building industry got what it wanted—an extra \$470 million in so-called stimulus packages for the building industry. I want to remind members what is happening in the building and construction industry. Again, WA faces a supply glut of property onto the marketplace, with a forecasted 15 000 net dwellings versus population growth of 10 000 in 2021, and 15 000 net dwelling additions versus forecast population growth of 14 000 for 2022. What will happen? Property prices will go nowhere. We are chucking hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer money into a market that is going nowhere and only one group will benefit. Let us hear what the usual property parasites have to say. In an article in *WAtoday*, the Urban Development Institute of Australia chief executive Tanya Steinbeck said —

... the development industry was largely pleased with the budget but it remained hopeful the Treasurer would consider extending the building bonus timeframes to ensure the housing sector didn't overheat.

That is not happening. WA Property Council executive director, Sandra Brewer, said —

... by shifting their priorities from debt reduction to support and investment in the short term the government was showing it understood the economic challenges facing business but it needed a longer-term view to avoid a boom and bust cycle.

This is the key phrase from the Property Council. I quote —

"We'd encourage the WA government to develop a plan for safely and steadily reopening our borders to domestic and —

Guess what —

international migrants so we can keep the economic momentum going in future years ...

That really sums up what these people are about. That is yet more code for “Get the borders open, flog them a cheap house and let us make some money, and we will get the government to fund us.” What a great rent-seeking business it is. As I have pointed out to the house time and time again over the last three and a half years, this government, unfortunately, just like all the rest, ends up supporting the cabal of vested interests in the property industry. It makes policy that benefits them and then gives away taxpayer money that goes straight into their back pockets. As my party likes to say, privatising all the gains and then socialising all the costs.

I would like to call on the government, the opposition and all parties in Western Australia to abandon and reject the population Ponzi scheme in favour of a new policy of productivity-driven growth. That is how real wealth is created for the state. Let us be honest. The population Ponzi that is favoured in Australia only gives the illusion of economic growth. That is all it is. It is an illusion; it postulates that more people equals more GDP. The property lobby is the only one that benefits as it builds badly built houses in same-same Lego-brick suburbs. Sadly, as some members may know, gross domestic product per capita—per individual person in this country—has been going backwards for some time. That means people’s standard of living is declining. I do not know how our leading politicians think they can improve an economy with that logic. It has to change.

It is my dearest hope, if you like, that there is a refocus of how our economy is structured as we come out of this virus situation and out of this recession. By that I mean that we get focused on the real economic issue that matters most and that is productivity. That is the fundamental thing that we should be seeking to drive our economy forward through the 2020s. As a country and as a state, in fact, we have to be focused on generating more out of what we can produce. In turn, that means we need significant and massive investment into new manufacturing and productivity, which I note this and the former government have completely failed to do. Disappointingly, before COVID hit our shores, the McGowan government became enamoured with the brain dead policy of just importing people and building a house. The population was increasing here in WA significantly more than it was in the other states. All that will lead us to do is perpetually chase our tails across the whole policy spectrum—education, health care and so on.

I want to cast my mind back to the boom times under the last Liberal government. It is worth noting for everyone’s information that the Western Australian Liberal–National government significantly cranked up immigration population growth in this state, importing over 500 000 people between 2006 and 2016. Thankfully, that growth dipped for some time before the Premier twigged to it and opened the floodgates. Members may recall that I have mentioned the regional migration scheme a few times. The government took us out and put us back in and messed around with graduate occupation schemes to get more international student slaves in and so on. The good news is—there is some good news—that the budget forecasts assume much, much smaller population growth. In 2020–21, growth in WA is expected to increase by 21 000 people and in 2021–22, around 18 700 people.

We need to focus on a real value-added economy going forward that emulates what is happening to our north, to our friends in Asia, where they produce more productivity, if you like. In a roundabout way, I am saying that nothing good comes from crush-loading our infrastructure, housing or the environment. Moreover, the last thing our unemployed Western Australians need is to be competing against more new low-wage migrants for those scarce jobs. I note that importing cheap foreign labour is coming back into vogue with this government. The result will be the general crushing of wages and the decimation of our own working class people. It is such a shame that the Western Australian Labor Party has seemingly forgotten its roots on this matter.

I will move on to the next topic, because it is currently in vogue. It is one that I have touched on before—that is, the so-called panic in the agricultural sector around the lack of people working on farms. Just a few days ago, Channel Seven fake news media ran a segment decrying the so-called wages war between farmers, whereby, and I quote —

There’s plenty of produce to be picked and packed, but no-one wants to do the work.

According to this report, farmers cannot get backpackers in to do the jobs due to the COVID-19 hard border restrictions, and the turnover of local workers is incredibly high. As usual, the report failed to mention the abundant evidence that temporary migrants have been ruthlessly exploited on Australia’s farms. Let me pose a question to members: How does Australia’s mining industry attract workers to remote locations? Why do people choose to go and work in these remote locations? It is because they pay excellent wages. It is amazing, is it not? If we let wages raise, farmers will have to automate and that will maybe lift productivity. It might also boost both wages and profits. However, if farms continue to rely on cheap foreign labour, capital will shallow, productivity will stagnate and both wages and profits will decline. There is a reason that farms in advanced nations typically involve a handful of workers operating heavy machinery, whereas in low-wage developing countries, farms are manned by many workers doing manual labour. The higher cost of labour in advanced countries should force farms to invest in labour-saving machinery to boost productivity. If they need help to do that, that surely is a role for government. If our farm margins are so weak, maybe they should consolidate, which would drive economies of scale, improve productivity and lead to higher profit margins. The key ingredient for Australian agriculture to flourish is

productivity-enhancing automation, not migrant slave labour. That is the way forward. I note that there is a new motion on the books to debate the same issue next week. I am sure I will say something very similar in that debate.

I will briefly mention and address a massive failure in this budget and, indeed, of the government in general—that is, the failure to diversify our economy. We had better do something quickly to diversify. Why? Because guess what—our biggest trading partner, China, is diversifying its economy. I wonder whether members are aware of two enormous new iron ore deposits in Africa.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Member, we agree with you. That's why we're looking at the idea of green steel in 10 years' time in the Pilbara so that we do have an alternative.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: Ten years' time is too late, minister.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: I don't think so. I think the West African iron ore plants are going to take a while to get up.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Minister, it is not a debate across the chamber; let the member make his contribution.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: I am aware that there are Chinese state-owned companies in Africa that are about to bring on what Rio Tinto's boss has indicated is a huge problem for Western Australia, and the Pilbara in particular. This deposit is called Simandou and it will potentially kill off the Pilbara if we do not diversify our economy.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: It won't kill it off, but it certainly is —

Hon CHARLES SMITH: I am very happy that the minister is aware of it—that is promising—but what is the plan in 10 years' time?

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Well, we're working on massive renewable hydrogen plants north of Port Hedland that can then drive much cheaper power.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Matthew Swinbourn): Minister, I am going to interrupt you. It is not a debate across the chamber.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: What we need is massive investment in the manufacturing industries here and now.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Hon Charles Smith, if you could direct your speech to the Chair, it would be appreciated.

Hon CHARLES SMITH: Very good. Thank you, Mr Acting President.

I understand that setting up manufacturing industries is incredibly expensive; it would take hundreds of billions of dollars to do so, and that is why we need to start now. Manufacturing industries in an export-led country is how real wealth is generated—not by endlessly importing people and building them houses. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is this: there is a need for a local manufacturing industry. That is essential for preserving the economic health of this state and this nation. COVID-19 has shown us how reliant we are on foreign trade, foreign workers and the manufacturing industries of other countries.

That concludes my general remarks on economic policy and the state of the economy. I will now focus on a few things of personal interest and of interest to my party. There were very few surprises in this budget, but one thing I was very, very pleased about was policing. As members may know, I have been calling for significant additions to the frontline police force for some years. Every time that topic has been raised we have always been told, "No, no, no, there are enough police officers." The Minister for Police has always said that we have enough police to do the job. Amazingly, we are now getting another 800 police officers, so the minister has obviously awoken from her stupor and realised the state that the Western Australia Police Force is in. Well done, minister. Eight hundred more police is fantastic, and I thank the minister. I assume that the government now concedes that WAPOL has been short-staffed for some significant time. We have every right to feel safe in our state, and I applaud the government for finally doing something about it. What I do not like is the continual installation of more and more speed cameras, which is just revenue raising. I will get to that in a second. I just note that the 800 additional officers are budgeted at \$30 million or so, extending up to \$50 million into the next budget. We are seeing a slow trickle effect, if you like, in the recruitment of these new police officers. That is around \$60 million each, from a rough calculation, so I thank the minister, but we would like it now, not in four years' time.

I turn now to speed cameras, another pet issue. The speed camera replacement program received another significant budget increase. There was \$872 000 for 2018–19, and that ballooned up to \$7 657 000 in 2019–20—wow! What an increase. I am sure members have noted that there are speed cameras popping up everywhere. The expenditure in this year's budget was actually more—nearly \$11 million on speed cameras. I hope the government is getting a return on its investment, because I can tell members that the continual gouging of motorists is an unpopular policy. I was told about an article in *The West Australian* about the staggering numbers of people being caught using mobile phones while driving, despite the significant increase in fines. I fully support people not using any device in their car while driving, and yes, a distracted driver is a dangerous driver. I have seen my fair share of motor vehicle crashes and fatalities.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

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Sitting suspended from 4.15 to 4.30 pm