

McGOWAN GOVERNMENT — PERFORMANCE — REGIONS

Motion

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA) [6.54 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the McGowan government for its disdain and neglect of regional Western Australia during its first two years in power through its metro-centric attitude and mean-spirited decision-making processes.

It is only a short period until the house rises, so I will lay out a brief overview and this motion will sit on the notice paper until such time as we can revisit it. I am sure that we will be able to add to the list that we have accrued over the previous two years of some of the decisions that this government has made that have been detrimental to the people of regional Western Australia. Despite the contributions from the two ministers who spoke in the previous debate, I can tell members on the ground that when we are in our communities, there are serious concerns about the way this government conducts itself regarding the issues that are important to regional Western Australians. It is one thing to say it in this place and to make it sound as though a plethora of things is happening, but when the government gives with one hand and takes away with another, the community is rightfully concerned about a whole raft of things. We are talking about essential services like the Laverton Hospital, aged-care facilities, community resource centres, Moora Residential College and the Schools of the Air. It has not been a good start to this government's term and, two years in, everything that we predicted is coming to pass. That is very disappointing because we live in the communities and we are a part of them. We want to see them thrive. I am sure that is the aspiration of everyone in this place, but the decisions that have been driven by this government were made because it has made some serious commitments here in the Perth metropolitan area around Metronet. The project is unfunded at this point. We do not know what the taxpayer will be up for to deliver that project. At the same time, as I said, serious projects such as Laverton Hospital are going unfunded. We spoke about that earlier in the week, as part of the government's investment in health.

The National Party remains concerned about a number of things regarding this government's record. It would be of no surprise to anyone in this place that the number one issue that we are very concerned about is the complete and utter decimation of the royalties for regions fund under this government. It was a policy that was embraced and needed, and well understood in its simplicity, by the communities of regional Western Australia. It gave them some hope that, when government members were making decisions, they were making decisions with regional people in mind—not just the cabinet members, but also the Parliament and all those who work in our public service. There was a need for regional Western Australia to be at the top of the list when we were making decisions. That is what royalties for regions was designed to do. It was designed to leverage dollars from not only the federal government and local governments, but also the private sector to make sure we could deliver projects right across the state. There was a strong tenet to that policy, which was the closer a person was to the decision in this decentralised decision-making model, the better the decision would be. We had significant trust in local governments to deliver significant projects for the state and on behalf of their communities. If members travel around the state, they will learn of not only the things that they can touch and feel in these communities, but also the social infrastructure that was facilitated as a result of this program. Unfortunately, this government has effectively cut \$1 billion of the royalties for regions program that would usually come from normal government expenditure. There is nearly \$80 million in subsidies for the orange school bus system. No-one is arguing that the orange school buses are not essential pieces of infrastructure. They deliver many children safely to their schools every day. But that is a Department of Transport responsibility; it was never envisaged that something like that should come from royalties for regions. There is \$134.7 million for regional TAFE subsidies. Again, it is absolutely critical that regional people have access to higher education in the regions, but that is a Department of Education responsibility and was never envisaged to come from royalties for regions, unless we are talking about trying to leverage new courses or deliver a new model, such as in the Geraldton Universities Centre or perhaps what we have been trying to do in Muresk to test the models that suit our state. We know some models of funding delivery that come from the federal government in particular are very difficult to make work in regional Western Australia. Child care, aged care and higher education are three examples I can think of that would probably benefit if we had access to royalties for regions in the way that it was designed—to try to deliver a better outcome. The childcare model, to the credit of the former Minister for Communities, has been continued under this government, but it is one of the few models that did not get the funding ripped out of it as this Labor government swept into power. There is \$795 million for water subsidies, which goes straight to the Water Corporation. Everybody would understand that the Water Corporation provides an essential service. There is no questioning that, but that is absolutely a responsibility that should be funded from consolidated revenue, not royalties for regions. It is the day-to-day business of government to provide essential services for the communities of Western Australia. That is topped out with \$31 million for education assistants. Again, it is a great initiative, which I fully support. My mother was a teacher and I have many friends and family members in the education system. The value of education assistants cannot be overstated but they are a Department of Education responsibility, yet royalties for regions is

picking up the tab for the salaries of those who work in regional schools. That is not what royalties for regions was designed for.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.