

## REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

### *Grievance*

**MS A.E. KENT (Kalgoorlie)** [9.21 am]: My grievance this morning is to the Minister for Regional Development, and I thank the minister for taking the grievance. We all know the importance of small and medium enterprises to the local economy, and none more so than in the goldfields region. These businesses play an indispensable role in driving economic growth, fostering innovation and creating job opportunities. SMEs' flexibility and responsiveness allow them to adapt quickly to market changes, which in turn leads to a more dynamic and resilient economy. One of the most compelling aspects of SMEs is their ability to foster innovation. This innovation leads to the development of new products and services, and SMEs are a breeding ground for fresh ideas, technological advancements and solutions. Furthermore, SMEs play a pivotal role in job creation. They are responsible for a significant share of employment as well as fostering social cohesion. By engaging with local communities, SMEs help build strong social networks and local initiatives, and promote community development. These businesses often have a deeper connection to their surroundings, fostering a sense of pride and belonging among residents.

In today's globalised world, SMEs can tap into international markets. They are not just limited to domestic business; their reach can extend far beyond national borders. I have heard the minister announce the regional economic grants to some areas of the state, and I know how important these have been previously to business in the goldfields, enabling them to grow and expand. I know how important the regional economic development grants are in the regions, and I have seen firsthand the difference they make.

There was the \$250 000 grant towards the Laverton Training Centre, supporting local Aboriginal people into employment in the northern goldfields. It allowed Australian Potash to establish a community vocational training hub, that runs in conjunction with Central Regional TAFE Kalgoorlie campus, providing Aboriginal people with valuable qualifications. Students are engaged from across the region, and work closely with ranger groups across the whole northern goldfields. The centre is delivering a certificate II in rural operations, which is structured to allow participants who are long-term unemployed and have significant barriers to employment to participate in a program that gradually builds their capabilities. The training centre has only been established for 18 months and has already been able to provide vocational training for 75 students in the northern goldfields. This is a fantastic project, kicking some great goals in the northern goldfields!

Then there is the funding that went to the Judumul Aboriginal Corporation hub in Coolgardie. The Aboriginal corporation received a \$113 000 RED grant to purchase specialised equipment that has enabled local Aboriginal artists to design and create art products. They are just about to launch their Woman's Dreaming wearable art exhibition. We will see stunning wearable art that tells powerful stories and traditions and support Indigenous artists and their incredible craftsmanship.

What can the minister tell me about what more can be done to support SMEs across the state, particularly in the goldfields?

**MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Regional Development)** [9.24 am]: I thank the member for the grievance and for her extraordinary advocacy for the goldfields, and for the communities and people that make up the region. In fact, throughout regional WA, from Kununurra in the far north to the goldfields and to Albany in the great southern, we have a team of people, local and upper house members, who work hard to find local solutions and to support the regions and their aspirations—particularly, the opportunities for job creation and growth. They work hard. There has never been such a comprehensive and consolidated regional representation to a government. We work as part of a team, and it is great to have regional members like the member for Kalgoorlie. Our team has been based on strong financial discipline, teamwork, supporting local jobs and, importantly, helping to build careers in regional WA. It is not just a job that someone goes to and leaves—leaving the region—but a job they can build a career, business and future around and, importantly, at the same time working hard to improve the quality of life in regional Western Australia.

To build jobs we are investing significantly in infrastructure and development. I note the total economic output in the goldfields region has been very significant, with it growing by more than \$7 billion to \$37.46 billion, representing growth of over 20 per cent in the last year alone. That is extraordinary growth. In the previous year, the goldfields–Esperance region recorded growth in economic output of almost 15 per cent. That is part of this government's agenda of getting the settings right, investing in appropriate infrastructure, supporting industry to develop and locate and, importantly, building the careers that we want in regional Western Australia.

But we know that it is not all about big industry. The big end of town is very important; it provides an anchor for regional growth. But small and medium enterprises provide an extraordinary opportunity for career diversity, innovation, as the member spoke about, and the opportunity not only to support major industries but build alternative industries so that rather than having long supply chains, products can be developed locally, capacity can be improved locally, capability can be improved locally and, importantly, training can be offered locally. All of those things are part of our agenda to support the small and medium enterprise sector.

That is why we developed the locally driven regional economic development grants. Decision-making about these grants is undertaken by the boards of the regional development commissions that operate in the regions, know the regions intimately and are there to support local businesses. Since those grants have been in place, 25 projects have already been funded in the goldfields alone. They support local businesses, not-for-profit organisations, regional organisations and local governments, providing opportunities for career development, diversity, innovation and growth.

As the member indicated, the regional economic development grants have had some great outcomes in supporting businesses that otherwise would not have had the opportunity to take that next step in growth. The member mentioned Judumul Aboriginal Corporation, which received a \$113 000 grant to purchase specialised equipment and training for the Judumul cultural hub. That will be available to local Aboriginal artists in the Coolgardie area. I have received an invitation to the fashion show the member mentioned, and it would not have been possible to have that exhibition without this grant. Importantly, First Nations fashion is taking off globally. We are seeing it grow everywhere. This is not a hobby business; it is not a little local market business. This is a business that has the potential to make an impact in joining with other First Nations fashion businesses around Western Australia and provide an extraordinary offering both at a national and international level. We are seeing more and more interest in that area of creativity than we ever have seen before. Regional economic development provides the support and leverage to take it to the next step.

I also talk about the goldfields non-destructive testing. NDT belies an extraordinary business. It received a \$75 000 regional economic grant to support the purchase of a new hydraulic cylinder repair bench for its Kalgoorlie–Boulder workshop. The repair bench enables cylinders, which are in great demand in the goldfields, to be tested and repaired locally, rather than be transported to Perth and back again. It is a great example of building capacity and capability, and providing the opportunity for training and innovation in Kalgoorlie itself, rather than shipping those jobs back to Perth. That is what regional economic development grants are about and how we promote diversity. It was great to join the local member at the opening of that new facility and see firsthand the impact of the state government's support on a local business.

I have been around the regions recently to announce round 6 for a number of grants. There is an extraordinary diversity of businesses ranging from child care, which I know is in great demand, right through to manufacturing. Member, I am coming to the goldfields soon! I will be there to announce round 6, and another round of businesses will benefit from our regional economic development grants. The member can be assured that as a regional member her voice is heard. The member is looking at, and working with, people to find local solutions, harness local capacity and enable regional communities to address their issues. When she needs to, she represents community issues strongly to me, as do all our other regional members. We are a great regional team out there, representing the interests of regional Western Australia. We are doing great things with small and medium enterprises, and we will continue to do so. I thank the member.