

ROYALTIES FOR REGIONS BILL 2009

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON MIA DAVIES (Agricultural) [4.51 pm]: I was talking before the break about the level of transparency and good governance built in and around the legislation making sure that it is of the highest order. I was particularly heartened that debate in the other house and, up to this point, in this house had been around the same discussion. I am sure that is because everybody desires to see longevity and support for this program from this and future Parliaments. It is true to say that the program has probably been one of the most scrutinised and reviewed pieces of government policy in recent history, and perhaps not so recent history. In fact, for just four per cent of the overall budget, one would have to say this program is punching well above its weight in both outcomes and review.

As a member of the National Party, and part of the team that championed royalties for regions throughout the state in the run-up to the 2008 state election, I welcome this scrutiny. We are determined that the legacy of this fund, made possible by the fact that we achieved the balance of power in both houses of Parliament, will be positive and enduring. Anything less will be unacceptable.

I now turn to some of the projects that royalties for regions has delivered so far in its first year of operation. Apart from the footpaths and toilet blocks that have attracted so much attention, which are very necessary but not necessarily that sexy, significant projects have been kick-started by these dollars. Many of these projects have actually been prioritised and identified by regional people themselves. As my colleagues and I travelled the length and breadth of this state in the years and months leading up to the state election in 2008, we turned our minds to how some of the royalties for regions money could be expended, if we were successful in achieving the balance of power. Without pumping our own tyres too much, we identified strategic projects that would make a significant difference to the quality of life for people who live, work and invest in regional Western Australia. Some of these projects have been mentioned already, such as funding for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which nobody would contest is an important piece of funding to an important service; funding for the patient assisted travel scheme; funding for the boarding away from home allowance; funding for the expansion and extension of the telecentre network, which I have spoken about in this house previously; funding for the exploration incentive scheme; funding for the Ord-East Kimberley expansion; and funding for Government Regional Officers' Housing, with the construction of 400 houses having been announced for our essential workers, and the construction of the 100th house recently commenced; funding to revitalise the Pilbara, which is the engine room of the Western Australian and Australian economies; and funding for the Country Age Pension Fuel Card, which we heard Hon Ken Travers speak about earlier today.

Members may well ask how we developed this priority list. The common themes articulated to us as we travelled around the state were access to education, quality health care and services, and decent housing. It is very true that the first thing that makes somebody leave a country town is the fact that they cannot send their kids to a decent school or get access to decent health services. We cannot have the people who deliver those services living in houses that are not fit for an animal.

On that note, I look forward to seeing to how my colleagues in the Greens (WA) participate in the debate and vote on this legislation. I note from an article in the *Fremantle Cockburn Gazette* of 18 August, which was probably before the bill was debated in the other place, that their colleague in the other place said that the Greens want to see regional spending that provides a long-term sustainable benefit to rural areas and that spending should be about improving services such as affordable housing, education and health in the regions. To echo the comments made by Hon Robin Chapple earlier today, I think that we are very much on the same page.

Aside from the funding for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which links regional people to the best health services in the state, and in the shortest time possible; funding for the patient assisted travel scheme, which means that people can get to their specialist appointments without undue burden on their pockets; and the top-up funding for the Kalgoorlie hospital and Nickol Bay Hospital, there were numerous examples of spending on health facilities and services via the regional grants scheme and the country local government fund. I will list just a couple. In Kalbarri, a new ambulance subcentre is being built using royalties for regions funds, and a grant from Lotterywest, I believe. In the Pilbara, the Pilbara Industry's Community Council is a great example of how royalties for regions works. PICC comprises major mining and oil and gas companies that have come together with the Chamber of Minerals and Energy to try to focus their spending in the Pilbara to get better outcomes. They put up \$5.28 million, in addition to \$32.8 million from royalties for regions. An article in the *Pilbara News* of Wednesday, 19 August, reports that the money will be used to strengthen emergency transport services, build a 24-hour helipad at Nickol Bay Hospital and train medical staff to better respond to large-scale medical emergencies. It will also provide for emergency, surgical and paediatric specialists to be employed in the west

Pilbara, as well as a visiting ear, nose and throat specialist for Tom Price. The initiative would also see a CT scanner and services provided at Nickol Bay Hospital, and Indigenous health training and employment programs provided across the Pilbara. I think that this answers several of the questions and points posed by some of the members who have spoken already. The program will provide sexual and family health programs and will also strengthen and enhance women's and children's health services in Tom Price. That is a fantastic example of the way in which royalties for regions, which is government money, can be topped up by industry and the private sector kicking in to deliver some really fantastic outcomes for those communities that will be coming under the pump again as this boom continues to roll on.

On the question of ensuring that the government is signing off on these themes that we discovered around the state, we increased the boarding away from home allowance and we continue to work on delivering a better deal on the district allowance for police, nurses and teachers. In housing, I have already mentioned that we have announced 400 new GROH houses, and the 100th has just commenced construction.

Perhaps members can indulge me while I flip through some of the projects that address some of the other areas of need. The regional grants scheme is one of the contestable funding portions of royalties for regions, and there are some great examples of strategic spending that have been identified by local decision makers about where they would like to invest the money. Members should remember that this has been possible from a portion of just four per cent of the entire budget.

In the Gascoyne region—which is not my patch, but I will start there anyway—the Carnarvon Christian School has used some of its money to build a new multipurpose school building. The Drug and Alcohol Office in the Gascoyne has conducted a scoping exercise to assess the need for a residential alcohol and drug facility in Carnarvon. Funds have been allocated to planning and putting enhanced high bandwidth in the Goldfields-Esperance region, and in Curtin University of Technology, thus encouraging people to stay in the region to study and access bandwidth, and not have time to make a cup of tea while waiting for everything to download! The Esperance Senior High School P&C has applied for money and received \$200 000 for the Esperance regional trade training centre and beyond. Again, that is really important to keep young people in the region and train them up into jobs so that they can stay in the regions, earn a living and contribute to the economy. The list goes on; there are many of them. I will go to programs that have been funded in the wheatbelt, parts of the south west and the mid-west, which probably comprises the Agricultural Region.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich: Don't read out all of them.

Hon MIA DAVIES: I will not read out all of them, Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich. If I did that I would send the member to sleep, and I would run out of time anyway.

I refer first to the C.Y. O'Connor College of TAFE, which was granted funding for its innovation in education program. Child Inclusive Learning and Development Australia applied for and received funding for Wheatbelt Regional Childcare Support. Funding has been provided to programs that are important in keeping people in employment, making sure people can return to the workforce and encouraging them to stay in the regions and train.

Doorways Inc, from Merredin—I learnt about this the other day when I was at Merredin talking to business owners about the Merredin trade training centre—deals with education, health and housing problems throughout the region. That has been identified and prioritised through the regional development commissions by people who have been selected by the community, the minister and local government. I challenge members to say that these people do not understand what are the priorities of their regions and that they are not spending that money strategically. I believe that everybody out there understands and values exactly what they are doing.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.