

Ms Mia Davies; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Simone McGurk; Dr David Honey;
Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Shane Love

CORONAVIRUS — WORKERS AND VOLUNTEERS — REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Motion

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house acknowledges the difficulties faced by industry, business, not-for-profits and community organisations in accessing workers and volunteers, and calls on the state government to outline a plan to ensure regional Western Australia is given the support it needs to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before I start on the motion, I would just like to address the comments made by the member for Armadale. I know that he was trying to —

Point of Order

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member has got up to move a private member's motion. It has nothing to do with the debate about —

Mr P.J. Rundle interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you!

Dr A.D. BUTI: If she wants to bring it up tomorrow when that debate is resumed, she may. She cannot bring it up now in this debate. It has no relevance at all and I ask you to rule as such.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr I.C. Blayney): I will just check with the Clerk.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Let me speak! The member has not even heard what I was going to say. How does he know I cannot make a connection between what he was saying and what I am about to talk about?

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, members! The member for Central Wheatbelt has not actually said anything yet. Maybe I could call it a point of order in anticipation, but I remind the member for Central Wheatbelt to talk about the motion brought before the house, please.

Debate Resumed

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you for your wise words, Mr Acting Speaker. My comments were to draw attention to the fact that contributions such as that from the member for Armadale highlight exactly why there is a Nationals party and why we bring motions such as the one we are about to debate to the house. There is a limited understanding of the impacts on the agricultural sector of this legislation that the government has brought to the house. The member for Armadale was trying to fill time; he does like to throw the reel out and fire up everyone every now and then. But from our perspective, the Animal Welfare and Trespass Legislation Amendment Bill 2020 is the perfect example of why the Nationals exist, which is to make sure that when legislation is brought to the Parliament by any government, the voices of regional communities are heard. Our members bring some real-life experience to the debate on these matters, particularly when it comes to animal welfare. I know that the member for Roe in his contribution has outlined exactly those concerns.

I will get on with taking about the motion that I have brought to the house this afternoon, which is to raise our concerns about the impact of COVID-19, particularly on sectors that are very important to regional Western Australia, our communities and our regional economies. Those sectors—the industries, businesses, not-for-profits and community organisations—are all struggling to fill roles and responsibilities. We desperately need workers and volunteers. We all acknowledge that this is an unprecedented time in the world and that everyone is struggling with what the new normal might look like, but much has been said in this house about how Western Australia's economy is performing, that it is the best in the nation and that we are, as much as we can be, back to normal and that we should celebrate that. Indeed, we should acknowledge these things. The great record that we have compared with other states on community transmission and COVID, particularly from a health perspective, is something that we should acknowledge. I have not spoken to anyone as I travel around this state who has said that they want to be walking in the shoes of anyone from Victoria, New South Wales or, indeed, any of our international cousins as they face some of those challenges.

I want to start this debate by saying that the Nationals are very clear about our position on the hard border. We support Western Australia's hard border. We understand that this policy position underpins our ability to avoid the spread of COVID-19 in our state. If we look to the east, we can see the challenges faced by Victoria and New South Wales. We do not want to be in the same situation. But we all know, and this has been raised by the Nationals and the opposition, that behind that simple statement of "we support the hard border" are complexities and nuances

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that change on a daily basis. It is a complexity that does not sit well with the five-second sound bite that the Premier wants to repeat ad nauseam on the nightly news. The reality is, and this is something that we raised in the matter of public interest last week, that although we are supportive of the hard border remaining, it has always operated with exemptions. Given that we are now facing a new “normal” in which everyone is trying to get everybody back to living as close to normal as possible, we have to acknowledge that that has only been possible with those exemptions in place, including exemptions for essential workers and our mining sector. The mining sector is the golden goose that has enjoyed the steadfast and unquestionable support from the government, and rightly so. It has created a significant amount of wealth for our state and nation and kept people employed right through what is undoubtedly one of the most difficult economic circumstances that we have ever faced. We have exemptions for truck drivers who are keeping our nation moving, keeping us fed by moving food and water around and allowing businesses to operate as normally as possible. We have not really heard the Premier talking about that exemption process. We do not hear that coming off the back of “We support the hard borders.” When the Premier talks about the hard borders, it is normally followed by: “Somebody out there is trying to undermine the hard border” or “We hear about these different notions over in the eastern states” or “Perhaps the Liberal and National Parties in Western Australia are trying to change what we are putting forward here.” The Premier’s response after 12 o’clock when we were debating the suspension of standing orders was quite remarkable. He took some absurd line, intimating that in Western Australia, the Liberal and National Parties support some other model discussed or touted over in the east. It is simply not true. We have been unequivocal in our support for the hard border, but we have also been unequivocal in our position that we need to make sure that people are not falling through the gaps. That is clearly what is happening when it comes to the G2G PASS, and the processing of those applications, when we deal with the tourism and hospitality sector and the agricultural sector and the looming workers shortage that it is facing. Although there are absolutely no grounds for the accusations that the Premier hurls over this side of the house in an attempt to muddy the waters and make it seem like we are trying to bring COVID to Western Australia, it could not be further from the truth. There are grounds for us to be concerned, and for the sectors that we rely on to keep our economy safe concerned because it is playing out in front of us: our agricultural sector cannot get the workers that it requires. Although tourism and hospitality are enjoying some amazing visitation rates, particularly in regional WA, it cannot keep up with the numbers. The member for North West Central and probably the member for Warren–Blackwood will deal with that in their presentations. Significant areas in their electorates rely on the tourism sector. As the member for Central Wheatbelt, I have noticed that the community of York, which is very close to Perth, is experiencing high visitation rates. It, too, is experiencing challenges in meeting the influx of visitors. I am all for it. I want everybody to come to regional Western Australia, but we need to be realistic about the fact that we need the workers there to support them. If this is the new normal and how it will be for some time, with the G2G PASS system that we have, which is repatriating Western Australians, allowing workers to come in and supporting those businesses that can find people willing to move to WA, we need to make sure that that is operating appropriately.

Earlier, during the suspension of standing orders debate, the Premier spoke about international arrivals. That is obviously something that we have linked to bringing back not only West Aussies who have found themselves on the wrong side of the border because they have had to travel for compassionate reasons, but also people who are seeking to come back and work to contribute to the economy and be a part of our state of Western Australia.

This morning, we saw peak spin when the Premier tried to step away from his commentary about Yongah Hill and Christmas Island and his suggestion that we should be putting more people in those places because the commonwealth is trying to work with the states to bring more of these people back into Australia. Rather than just saying that he got it wrong and that he should not have said Yongah Hill and Christmas Island, we had a complete deflection across to the commonwealth. He could not bring himself to say that he would never send ordinary Western Australians to Yongah Hill Immigration Detention Centre for two weeks to be housed along with convicted criminals who have no citizenship rights in Australia. He did not address those concerns. Rather, he turned on the commonwealth government. That is what happens when things do not go his way; the Premier looks for a scapegoat. He does not want that “Mr Ninety-one Per Cent” shine to come off. I think he got a bit too caught up in playing politics and has not been paying attention on this front. My understanding is that the Deputy Prime Minister, Hon Michael McCormack, sent the letter that was referred to in the debate this morning to all Premiers prior to eight o’clock this morning in Western Australia. In fact, it was not released to the media by him. I have also been made aware that, rather than having been ambushed and this being spoken of as something that the Premier should not have been aware of, international air arrivals and passenger caps are discussed at nearly every national cabinet meeting and a fortnightly review of those passenger caps is conducted. I am not telling anyone anything that I should not know, because it was in a media statement that was released straight after the 4 September meeting. It states —

National Cabinet conducted its fortnightly review of international air arrival passenger caps and agreed to boost the capacity for international arrivals where possible, supporting more Australians to come home from overseas.

...

All states and territories, where possible, agreed to work with the Commonwealth to increase the number of international flights to their jurisdiction to enable more Australians to return home.

This morning, the Premier acted as though he had been ambushed and that the Deputy Prime Minister had, in some way or another, put him in a position in which he had not had a discussion with him about this. In my interpretation, that could not be further from the truth. If the Western Australian government had not agreed to that, it would have been noted in the media statement. Something relevant to the agricultural sector that we have been raising issues about was noted in the same media statement—that is, the Western Australian government did not sign up to the national agricultural workers' code. That goes directly to the question that was asked by the member for Roe earlier today during question time. We have some serious concerns about the northern part of the state. Businesses and those in the pastoral sector regularly move across the border between the Northern Territory and the Kimberley. A number of concerns have been raised on that front. One of those workers' codes or some sort of arrangement for the top end of Western Australia would certainly alleviate some of the concerns that have been raised by businesses, the pastoral industry and community members. People who live in the eastern Kimberley quite often spend time in Darwin, particularly to access medical services. There is quite a fluid movement across those borders.

The Premier's response this morning was a deflection and a diversion away from his very unfortunate comments about Yongah Hill and Christmas Island. Instead of saying that he had got it wrong, he said that he had been ambushed by the Deputy Prime Minister. I find that very hard to believe because it was publicly available information that had been regularly discussed. No-one is interested in this blame game. This motion is about trying to get through that spin and get through to the Premier that he needs to accept that there are some challenges facing industry, businesses, not-for-profits and community organisations in accessing workers and volunteers. He needs to accept that and provide an appropriate response.

I have a time line that shows that the Nationals WA and the opposition have not shirked their responsibility to raise these issues to make sure the government is aware of them. I know that industry has been doing the same thing. We have raised issues, particularly about the agricultural sector, but also about the hospitality and tourism sectors. As early as March this year, we started talking to the Premier and the government about our concerns for the broadacre sector, the commencement of its seeding program, and its reliance on backpackers and seasonal workers to complete the task. We made sure that there was a clear understanding that it is a time-sensitive activity, as it is in the horticultural industry. When things ripen, they need to be picked. We made it clear that we needed to work very closely with the federal government about whatever backpackers were still available in Australia on their visas. The Premier responded and confirmed that he would raise that at a national cabinet meeting. That was the first interaction we had, and we wrote to the Premier way back on 18 March.

On 3 April, our agricultural spokesperson, Hon Colin de Grussa, wrote to the Premier and requested clarification on skilled worker shortages in agriculture. We never got a response to that letter. His questions were posed in the following terms: he asked what steps were being taken by the state government to ensure that northern cattle producers had access to skilled personnel and service providers to undertake mustering; what actions were being taken by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to ensure that grain producers had access to necessary levels of skilled operators of farm machinery to undertake the 2020 grain harvest; and what analysis was being undertaken by DPIRD to quantify the current or potential skilled labour shortages across the agricultural sector that may arise from any travel restrictions imposed as a consequence of COVID-19.

On 6 April, Vince Catania, MLA, the member for North West Central, wrote to Alan Tudge, the acting Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, about ensuring access to labour for agriculture and regional communities. Amongst this activity, we have been meeting with farmers and key recruitment organisations. I refer here to Ley Webster from 2 Workin Oz, who plays a big role in making sure that we get people trained and out into the broadacre agricultural sector. Again, on 3 July, our agricultural spokesperson wrote to state minister Hon Alannah MacTiernan and federal minister David Littleproud about the skills shortages for the harvest. We have not had a response from Minister MacTiernan on those points. Again, it reiterated our concerns and asked what DPIRD and the government were doing to quantify this and work on things that might be able to resolve that challenge.

The time line continues through July and August. It ramped up at that point because industry was starting to see the cliff face get much closer. The opposition and the National Party, alongside industry, have made sure that the government was aware that this was likely to be a significant challenge. I do not think that the government has been switched on to the enormity of the challenges facing those sectors. I think that is particularly the case with agriculture. Despite the commentary from the government that it has more regional members sitting on its benches than the opposition and the National Party, the evidence is that it drags its feet when it has to come up with something. When it has announced something, it has been less than satisfactory. Despite the persistent and consistent advocacy

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from the Nationals WA, industry groups and individuals who were willing and ready to offer real data and evidence about this impending crisis, this government has dragged its feet in its reaction.

Last week, during the debate on the matter of public interest, I said that we had asked questions in this place of the Premier about what strategy the government was employing. The response I got was that jobs and skills centres were available and that there was an advertising campaign. I sought further clarification and asked whether there would be any support for accommodation or travel for people who were seeking to work in the regions. At that point the Premier just said that the government did not have to hold everyone's hand, that it is not the government's job and that people must do things themselves; they need to get out there and get on with it. Three weeks later the government launched the \$3 million incentives package for the agricultural sector, which, as we highlighted in our matter of public interest motion last week, has fallen short of the mark. I have some interesting commentary on that to read into *Hansard*. This article was written by Caroline Di Russo. It is an opinion piece. She has a particular view, and she qualifies her statement by saying that as somebody who grew up on a broadacre farm, she feels somewhat qualified to comment on the misunderstanding of the agricultural sector and governments' responses to challenges that we face from that perspective. She goes on to say —

One of the greatest challenges now faced by the regions is the dissipation of its seasonal workforce due to closed interstate and international borders. The federal agricultural minister has been trying to negotiate arrangements with state governments, but alas, playing politics on borders is more important than helping farmers get crops harvested and getting Aussies fed. I'm sure if food shortages or price rises hit supermarkets, inconveniencing city people, the narrative and the policy would change. Until then, regional areas have been given little reason to expect change.

Which brings me to the winner of the 2020 NFI Shinybum award: the WA Government and its 'Work and Wonder Out Yonder' advertisement. If you want to roll your eyes, [click here](#).

There is a link to the advertisement that is being rolled out. She continues —

Granted, it was a good idea to have an advertising campaign to encourage Perth people to take up seasonal work in regional WA for fruit picking, grain harvesting and the like. Credit where it's due. The problem is how that idea played out into one of the most cringeworthy and fallacious adverts known to modern marketing.

In short, it depicts peak hour in the Margaret River as going for a surf, watercooler chat in Exmouth as drinking at the pub and the company car in the wheatbelt as a \$750K harvester — something a little more complicated than the average Volvo SUV. No wonder city people think country Australia is a burden rather than a driver of our national economy — they think we are all surfing, drinking or chilling in an air-con cab all day. When you stop to think about it, it's actually quite offensive.

I do think that that advertisement has reduced some of the serious challenges we face, but I have to say I agree. She even says that it made Australian Labor Party MP and state agriculture minister Hon Alannah MacTiernan uncomfortable, so I am not sure where that commentary came from. She says also —

But the most hideously unrealistic part of the advert was when it cut to ... fruit pickers styled head-to-toe in agrarian chic. Let's be clear, when you pick fruit you don't wear an off-white cheesecloth shirt cinched at the waist and an oversized boater while you frolic through the orchard giggling semi-stoned in the soft late afternoon sun. That said, seasonable labour would probably be less palatable to the soft-palmed, knot-bun barista set if they knew they'd be dressed in work clothes and a baseball cap, while they sweated their —

I cannot say that word in here —

... off up the top of ladders in the summer heat.

That is one person's take on the advertisement. She is a journalist and has a turn of phrase, but I think that, unfortunately, the advertisement probably oversimplifies the challenge that a very important sector faces. To have it followed up by a \$3 million incentives program, I am not confident that that will hit the mark. When we are talking about a 7 000-person shortage, I do not think that that piece of marketing and the incentive package that the government is offering is going to work. That is why there has always been a conversation about what is the suite of things that we need to address. Why can we not work with the commonwealth to investigate a model similar to that of the Northern Territory and the commonwealth arrangement with the workers from Vanuatu? Why can we not sign up to the national agricultural workers' code? Neither of those has been accepted by the Premier. The latter is at odds with the view of the Minister for Agriculture and Food, who wrote to us and said that she was hopeful that the state government could bring in workers from Vanuatu or a similar country to assist with the fruit picking season and the horticultural industry. A majority of the state's broadacre sector produce is exported. Ninety per cent of what is grown in the broadacre sector is exported. What we will see translate to our supermarket shelves is what is happening from a horticultural, fruit and vegetable, perspective across the state. That is where we will start to see

a delayed impact and a pushback on people's hip pockets. That is the consumer. That does not take into account the impact of those who have already invested in the crops and are now unable to get them picked.

I have been very disappointed with the way the government has responded to those questions, to the point that I feel as though it has been quite dismissive. I feel that comes from a position of the Premier not having a good understanding of the sector and not taking the time to understand it. I listen to the Premier when he is interviewed and when he responds to questions in this place. If it is a question about the mining sector, he has a deep knowledge and understanding. I will be the first to say it. That is exactly right. It is an important pillar of our economy. So is agriculture, tourism and hospitality. It is very, very disappointing that what we have seen is too little, too late. It does not hit the mark; in fact, it is a fair way off the mark. I will go on record as saying that we would support the promotion of regional Western Australia at every opportunity, but we would encourage people to be realistic and provide more than the window-dressing in response to this. Perhaps if we had that better understanding, we would have had a more prompt response and a genuine engagement with the industry. I will be the first person to say that the agriculture, tourism and hospitality sectors are fragmented industries to deal with. They do not have the glossy front public relations machines that some of our bigger industries do, but that does not mean that we do not get in there and roll up our sleeves and try to figure out what is in the best interests of the many people who support the bottom line of our state.

I often hear the Minister for Agriculture and Food and the Premier say that the sectors must do more to help themselves, and that, to me, is patronising. They misunderstand the nature of advocacy in the sectors. The sectors do not have the big budgets. They engage in a different way. However, the agriculture sector represents a \$10 billion industry, and the tourism and hospitality sectors represent over \$13 billion, I think it is. They deserve more than lip service. The advertising is "pretty". However, I think Caroline Di Russo has summed up how it has been received by those it aims to support. It will not work. At best, it will get a few enthusiastic young people, but it will not meet that 7 000-person shortage that we know exists, and that is on this government. Despite our best efforts since March to get genuine engagement, heels have been dragged significantly. Essentially, a \$10 billion industry has been left to fend for itself.

When I asked a question yesterday in Parliament about Michelle and Craig, the couple who have been living in their motorhome in South Australia for the past six months, having come from Queensland prior to that, it was not because I was asking the Premier to say that he would sort it for me then. I am not naive enough to think that he has responsibility for signing off on those things. They are an example of the hundreds and hundreds of people who have fallen foul of the G2G PASS system. These are people who are trying to come back into the state because they have had to leave for various reasons, or they are trying to enter to assist in sectors that are acknowledged by both the commonwealth and state governments as essential, and agriculture is one of those. Michelle and Craig had their passes rejected five times. I am happy to say that as of an hour ago, they have had their passes approved. However, it should not take a member of Parliament to get it to that point. The letter we sent into the system said, "How about someone picks up the phone and calls them and tells them what they are missing in the fifth or sixth application they are making?" It must take more time than it is worth to deal with multiple applications. It cannot be the most efficient way that we are dealing with this. If the G2G PASS is the way the government will deal with this going forward and it is here to stay for the foreseeable future because our hard border will be in place for the foreseeable future, we must have a better way of dealing with it. When workers like that are willing and able and ready to come to try to whittle away that 7 000 worker shortage in the agricultural sector, I thought there would be a big red flag on them saying, "Let these people in." We need to make sure that they have done the right thing; that they have somewhere to quarantine; that they have not been anywhere they should not have; and that they have provided identification. Do they have somewhere to live? They can provide evidence of their employment. That couple had done all of that, yet they had to apply five times. That cannot be an appropriate way to do it; hence the conversation and the issues that are raised on this side about resourcing and ensuring that we support the Western Australian police to do that job effectively. If it is going to be like this for the next six, 12 or 24 months, maybe we need to think about what that looks like. Surely that cannot be the role of the WA Police Force for the next two years. I would think that if this continues, we will need to come up with a way to make sure that people like Michelle and Craig are not affected. Luckily, they had their own motorhome. They did not have work, which was causing them some grief with not having an income. They had a job and they were reasonably trusting that they would eventually be allowed through. There are multiple other examples. I know that other members who will be speaking today will raise those.

In a completely different sector, a lady in my electorate named Jenny has a son who is trying to get back from the Northern Territory. She has had a couple of operations, which means she needs full-time care. She would rather have her family home caring for her than putting pressure on local volunteers and groups. Her son is trying to get home. I think he has applied for the G2G PASS four times. If people call their local member of Parliament, they will get advice that will sometimes help. We have been very forthcoming about ensuring people have all the details to assist in the success of those applications being viewed favourably. Again, it should not come down to someone

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knowing their local member of Parliament or calling the ABC morning show to get approval, as these things are pretty basic. There are clearly some resourcing issues. If we are going to deal with this for the next 12 to 24 months, we need to ensure that we put in place things that allow us to deal with the human aspect of what we are facing and have some compassion. If we translate that into cold, hard cash, when there are Michelles and Craigs waiting to come across the border to work in the agricultural sector, and no doubt others waiting to do that in the horticultural and hospitality industries, we need to pull out all stops. We do not want to impact those people who have genuine and compassionate reasons to travel either. That must come back to resourcing and making sure that we are dealing with this appropriately, otherwise as we see changes to JobSeeker and JobKeeper and the real impact of industries suffering because they cannot continue to operate in the current environment, there will be other pulls on government services. That will also be a new challenge for the government to deal with.

It would have been far better for this government to have engaged earlier on some of these issues around workforce shortages. It is unfortunate that the response has been one of smoke and mirrors; it is a veneer and shallow, I guess, particularly for the agricultural sector. That is incredibly disappointing because people's livelihoods are important—they are providing food and creating jobs in our community—and they are relying on a government that they thought understood them. Quite clearly, that has not been the case. That is why we brought this motion to the house today. We want to ensure that those stories are on the record, so that the government cannot say that it has not had an opportunity to address them and also to tell us how it will address some of those concerns through this process over the next six, 12 or 18 months. If this is our new normal, we need to ensure that we are doing everything we can to support the people who are underpinning our state's economy.

MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren–Blackwood) [4.33 pm]: I would also like to talk to the motion brought into this chamber by the Leader of the Nationals WA. I do not get many chances to speak but, with the indulgence of the house, I would like to put on record the sad loss of Hon Tim Mulherin, the former deputy leader of the Labor Party in Queensland. Tim was a primary industries minister and I had a lot to do with him when I was the Minister for Agriculture and Food. He was one of the good guys in politics. Despite the distance between the two major parties on both sides of the house, it goes to show that we can maintain friendships. It is very sad to hear of his recent passing. I want to put on record the sad loss that no doubt his family and others would feel from his passing.

I return to the motion. The Leader of the National Party quite rightly said that a range of issues impacting regional Western Australia apply to the COVID challenge that we have right now. We will continue to raise those issues as regional members and as the Nationals WA because we have eyes and ears on the ground. It is hoped that the government is listening to the spirit of how we raise these matters because they are genuine issues that need a response. I suspect that the spirit of response from the government has waned somewhat since we first raised issues when we had the full lockdown in Western Australia. The government was very responsive to a range of issues, and we put that on the record, but we think that is waning somewhat.

One of the significant issues that has been raised by the Leader of the National Party is getting workers to support our core industries in regional Western Australia. One of the three sectors that is most significant is the mining and resources sector. I give a shout-out to those from Kalgoorlie who wanted me to mention the mining sector. I have been heavy on arguing the case for the agricultural sector and the hospitality sector, and those in the resources sector have been a little critical of me for not thinking of them. Certainly, the resources sector is significant to Western Australia. Those small to medium-sized businesses in particular also need a workforce. I certainly have a focus in my electorate on the agricultural sector and the hospitality sector in particular. The Leader of the National Party mentioned that there is a shortfall of 7 000 workers in the agricultural sector, comprising the horticulture and broadacre sectors. We will simply not be able to backfill that shortfall easily. I understand that that number is on a briefing note that went to the Minister for Agriculture and Food.

In our view, this government is resting on its laurels and expecting the industry to step up to solve that problem when it is at the edge of the cliff. I think there is a bit of tension around this inside cabinet. Despite the arguments that we have with the minister for agriculture, I have a certain amount of respect for her. I know that she endeavours to follow good advice to get good outcomes. I know that she put on the public record and said in conversations with people in our electorates that she was prepared to consider looking at bringing in teams of people to Western Australia from some of the Pacific Islands to support the annual harvest. That is on the record. The Premier knocked that on the head straightaway. I think a bit of tension sits in cabinet around this. As the Leader of the National Party highlighted, we have this hard border but with exemptions. That means people are allowed through. It is not a hard border that means no-one can come in; it is a hard border with government-approved exemptions. We know that there are a range of reasons for that. I know that Australian Security Intelligence Organisation officers, for example, have the right to travel across the border, have meetings in Perth and then go back to where they came from.

Mr W.J. Johnston: All commonwealth government officials can enter.

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Mr D.T. REDMAN: I am using a point that was raised in my electorate. It is a hard border with exemptions. The notion of not giving serious consideration to all the options in a very transparent way beggars belief. The government's agenda on the hard border seems to be, "No matter what happens, we're going to maintain a hard border for Western Australia and push that as hard as we can up to 13 March next year." I know there is tension in cabinet around how this issue should be treated. For the agricultural sector, the government put \$3 million on the table and expects a whole bunch of people to move to regional Western Australia and be prepared to work and support the spring harvest, including harvesting grapes until early next year, backfilling 7 000 workers. It simply will not happen. I will not go into the comments that have been made to me about the adverts on telly. As the Leader of the National Party said, it is somewhat unrealistic. I know that pressure has been put on regional businesses. Pressure has certainly been put on businesses in my electorate from the government, with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, saying, "We'd really like you to back this publicly." I think they find it kind of hard to do so. The comment to me was, "Yes, we like it; it's great that they are having a crack at it, but this will not answer the problem." In many cases, those who are managing, for example, the avocado harvest at present are significantly understaffed. In many cases, they are having to take people who are not up to the job. The term used to me, which is a little disparaging, was they were "chasing down people with two hands and a heartbeat." I know that as pressure comes on the labour market we get people who are less productive. That is certainly emerging in the agricultural sector and certainly in my electorate. Even now, these issues are emerging as sharp-point issues, yet we are not into the full swing of the harvest. We are certainly not into the full swing of the avocado harvest yet, which is just starting now. The notion of being able to backfill 7 000 workers is massively challenging. All options should be on the table. Some tension must exist in cabinet around how to manage this and that we do not have at least a transparent look at taking a risk-management approach to how we might bring in teams from perhaps the Pacific Islands. Pacific Islanders have knowledge of what happens in the south west in particular and understand how the harvest happens and can do it in a productive way. Consider in a transparent way how that might be managed. If it comes up negative, people will accept it, but it is not even on the table for consideration, and that is of great concern to us.

It has been put to me—we often hear some colourful language when we describe this issue—that there is the very real prospect of fruit and harvested product being dumped.

Mr V.A. Catania: It is already happening.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: It is already happening in the member for North West Central's electorate. That will flow through to the consumer and to the economy in a real way. The ag sector is worth in excess of \$10 billion and is not getting a light shone on it. The resources sector, particularly the big end of town, seems to get the Premier's ear but not the agriculture sector, which is in dire need of support at this time. It is not even on the radar.

The other sector, of course, is the hospitality sector. It is great to see the hospitality sector getting the benefit of almost a new norm. Certainly in my electorate, coming out of the COVID lockdowns, it is going pretty well at the moment compared with how it went last year. But those businesses cannot get workers. Restaurants are having to shut up shop. We have seen the reporting on that; the reporting is real and we have not even hit the hot time in the south west. I know that the member for North West Central has issues. The next school holiday period is some two or three weeks away when there would normally be a kick to hospitality with people coming into the south west and the great southern. We are moving into the summer season and massive issues are emerging in hospitality that the sector cannot manage and some businesses are having to close their doors due to a lack of staff. Not putting money into circulation affects not only hospitality businesses that need it dearly but also our broader economy. If we do not put money in circulation, it will have a very direct impact on the economy and the very thing the government is trying to trigger and push will be constrained, and that is certainly challenging.

The transport sector has come out strongly and said that there are concerns. I mentioned the other day in here that one of the businesses in my electorate, Warren District Transport Pty Ltd in Manjimup, lost four drivers to the resources sector. Chris Pavlovich, the president of the Shire of Plantagenet, who owns Southern Haulage, has said that the increase in licensing fees on trucks is having an impact on his business. That impost will apply to not only his business, but also across all haulage businesses. Those costs are moved on to the consumer or people who use those services in some way or another, so it has an impact on the economy. Having to pay more for drivers and losing drivers when there is tension in the worker market and a high demand for those skilled workers will have a very real impact on not only employment or those businesses, but also our broader economy. It is challenging at a time when we need the stimulus to support Western Australians coming through this difficult time.

I turn to the issue of backpackers. Right at the start of all this, there probably would have been a number of backpackers who went home. I do not have figures on that but I know the Manjimup backpacker facility is empty. It has hosted one or two people over the last two or three weeks. I have highlighted the owner of the Manjimup Hotel who, along with the Shire of Manjimup, did a lot of work in supporting a place for backpackers to go when they had no source of income, nowhere to go and were largely sleeping in vehicles in truck bays and parks alongside the

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highways. He took on 60 backpackers, but the number is now down to 20. He is putting in place some arrangements for some of the worker brokers who come into town, so he is working through some challenges. But what is very clear from talking to him is the lack of workers needed for the agricultural sector in Manjimup and the backpacker hostels are not doing it. The Manjimup community resource centre is doing a fantastic job trying to link people to jobs. It has 35 jobs on the books right now that it cannot find a home for. There are massive opportunities and out of their mouths, they say, “Why aren’t we considering the Pacific Island seasonal workers? Why aren’t we considering options that we have had before? They know the territory; they know what they are doing. We could manage, or at least consider managing, the COVID risk and the quarantine risk that sits around that, but it is not even on the table.” I do not think the Premier would come in for a tough time from the people of Western Australia if it were considered in a transparent way. Look at the options and see what is there to deal with this and what is there to support our economy to come out of this in a real but a safe way. That will be the commentary we get back: what about the safety? That always comes first, of course, but we can take a risk-management approach to everything we do. We are doing that now. We have a hard border with exemptions. That is a risk-management approach to this issue. Why not extend that to a workforce for the agricultural and hospitality sector? However, it is not even being considered. Some in Margaret River, in my electorate, are considering innovative ways themselves for how to get a workforce. David Rankin, who is a director of Vinepower, is going to set up his own promotional program and will market his business to try to get workers using surfing. Obviously, there are some enthusiastic surfers in Margaret River. A lot of people want to come and do some surfing, so he will pitch to the surfing market by saying, “Come down here and we will be somewhat sympathetic to the working day if surf is up.” He thinks getting a bunch of young, fit people who go down and want to get a surf in when the surf is right, but who can work in his business, will make a bit of sense. He is doing that off his own bat. I wish him luck with that. He is not relying on a subsidised workforce. I think the government’s \$3 million does not trigger until the twenty-third of this month, so that is not even on the table yet for him. He is taking steps of his own volition to try to secure an outcome to maintain his business.

We debated yesterday—the Minister for Culture and the Arts is not here now, unfortunately—the Arts and Culture Trust Bill 2020, appropriately, and the importance of arts and culture in Western Australia. The speech I made last night highlighted that if we are to build a community, the arts and culture component, which I described as the wedge that builds a community, is very important. That sector is really feeling the pain. It has an impact in two ways. I have two communities at both ends of my electorate: Denmark at one end is very arts and culture focused. Creative industries were identified as one of the strengths of the Margaret River region, so those bookends are certainly strong on that but it does not downplay all those little regional communities that have a culture and arts focus. Two themes run through the impact of resourcing being pulled and the inability to hold events or run programs that make their contribution to communities. The first one is mental health. Do not underestimate the importance of those community events on mental health, where people engage with others in areas that they enjoy. Culture and the arts bring a balance to our lives. Those events are often used as vehicles to support mental health within the community. Also, the people who work in that industry do not have the resources to play the role. I am referring to the artists, the musicians and actors, who are not able to engage in and get paid for some of the services, albeit they are poorly paid—that is one of those quirks of history—but nevertheless they are now largely unemployed.

A group from Denmark Arts came to me to express their concerns about resourcing. I have received a letter from the Minister for Culture and the Arts about this. I got the letter today but I have not had a good look at it yet. For the purposes of *Hansard*, the minister is back in the house. This group is really feeling it. The arts community is a group that is finding it pretty tough. Much of their income and the funds that they raise come off the back of events. Events are not able to run and they are not able to raise the funds that they would normally reinject into the community. In some cases, that supports mental health programs and engagement with those artists who are not able to do what they do. I want to give a shout-out to those culture and arts groups in our communities that are doing it tough. I highlight to the government the importance of sustaining that capacity within our regional centres.

That extends very nicely into the issue of mental health, and, I guess, the broader mental health challenge that the National Party has brought to the table before. The Minister for Community Services is in the chamber; she is aware of a number of issues that I have personally taken up with her. I am pleased to have been supported by her office on many of those. My office shared this with me. It is not a product of my office; it is a product of Mr Damian Barr. I do not know Mr Damian Barr, but he said —

We are in the same storm — but different boats

Right now, we are all facing the same storm, but we’re all doing so in different boats ... some have yachts, others are in tinnies. Some have a substantial crew on board, others are rowing alone. Some have life jackets (higher resilience, stronger relationships, more optimism, use their strengths and more positivity), others

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don't even have a working rudder ... This analogy explains why some people are handling the current crisis better than others.

We are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm.

I thought it was a great analogy. He is making the point that a lot of different people are managing and navigating the challenges in many different ways, and many people are being hit to a lesser or harder extent, depending on their circumstances. These issues are real. The importance of mental health services and its extension into regional Western Australia has never been so critical. These issues play out in areas that we never quite expect them to play out from. I highlight to all ministers who have a role in this area that the service provision into those areas is so critical. We need to ensure that we not only maintain those services, but also build them where we can because the mental health challenge is one of those great sleepers. When issues emerge, it is the effort we have used in the past to build resilience that comes through and pays dividends. The challenges nevertheless remain.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr D.T. REDMAN: My next area of concern is the agricultural shows. It is an area that is consistent with all my colleagues. In some cases, it is the biggest event that happens in town. In my electorate, the agricultural shows in Margaret River, Bridgetown and Upper Blackwood—the other name for that is the Dinninup Show—have all been cancelled. I have not had any feedback today on the Warren District Agricultural Show, but the point is that these agricultural shows in many cases are the single-biggest event in town. It is a chance for people to come together, and through that comes mental health support. It is also a source of revenue that many of those communities have for events in their community. Various plans have been pitched to government about how the Perth Royal Show and all the other agricultural shows might get support. I might extend it slightly to outside my electorate—there is a reason for doing so—to the member for Collie–Preston's electorate, who is in the house: the Balingup Small Farm Field Day and the Balingup Medieval Carnivale also had to be cancelled. There is a little circle that goes around Kirup and Balingup, which comes into my electorate at the next election. If they will have me, if I am re-elected, I look forward to representing them.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: We are very familiar with the minister in the house, and I can understand why they might make those judgements!

There are a number of regional shows. As we are moving into the show season, what had been there in previous years will not be there. They will be sadly missed.

As I conclude, I want to make a plea for travel agents. The travel agents in our state—I guess they are very localised in my electorate—are the ones doing it particularly tough. To use the words of the Minister for Tourism, they have lost 90 per cent of their business. JobKeeper in many cases only goes to one party, if it is a husband and wife team. I have had discussions with travel agents who have been in tears. I have a little sympathy for them, having been in a similar situation, which I will refer to in a second, but nothing like what they face now. They have reached the cliff face and stopped. There needs to be some sort of support for travel agents. For issues totally out of their control, travel agents are facing massive issues. They have limited scope to bring any sort of innovation to the table to get some revenue coming through their businesses.

My wife, Marie, and I set up a travel agency in Denmark, which we had for about 10 years. That was, effectively, buying a job for her—she was passionate about travel. We were hit by the 9/11 and Ansett crashes. That happened right at the end of our time. Again, that put us at the cliff face. The business was put on the market for a particular figure but sold at 15 to 20 per cent below the figure that we started with. That gives an appreciation of the scale and impact of that. That is nothing like COVID. We had it easy compared with travel agents now. Travel agents in regional areas do not have the scope to find innovations to bring to the table to bring some revenue in. It is a group that needs to be looked after. No-one in the community would be unsympathetic to directing resources to give them some support. It may even transition into other sectors or support for that transition. It is a group that is doing it particularly tough.

I support the motion moved by the Leader of the National Party. Many and varied issues operate in regional Western Australia. It is our job to put that on the table and we hope the government listens to this.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [4.57 pm]: I rise to support the Leader of the Nationals WA in this motion because the government is full of slogans. The Labor government is full of slogans when it comes to dealing with serious issues facing regional Western Australia. We have seen a frontrunner who believes in his own importance. He believes that he is the new emperor when it comes to politics in Western Australia; an emperor who is going to be tested in the coming weeks and months when he faces the real issues that are now facing people in businesses in tourism, horticulture and agriculture.

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Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Member for Fremantle, what do you think about the Fremantle port? Should we build a new outer harbour or does she support Fremantle?

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: Good question.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have been keeping it. Does the member support it or not?

Ms S.F. McGurk: I am happy to talk about the port. Is that what the motion is about?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Does the member support Fremantle port?

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I would be worried about the seat of Fremantle if I were the member for Fremantle!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, feel free to talk to the Chair and address the motion.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: As I said, this government is about slogans. It reminds me of the former Labor government, the Carpenter government, and also the Gallop government. I think this Premier has learnt to be a frontrunner—a Premier of good news. Here is some disturbing news that has come in: there is not just a pandemic when it comes to COVID-19, but there is a pandemic of not having enough workers in this state. There has been the announcement of Work and Wander Out Yonder calling upon people to have a gap year and trying to get people from metropolitan Perth to come out to the regions. I applaud the campaign that he has embarked on, but it does not scratch the surface. Seven thousand jobs are needed in the agricultural sector. In tourism and hospitality, we are seeing businesses close. Yes, Western Australia is in a fortunate position when compared with other states—absolutely! Has the Wander Out Yonder campaign worked? Why would it not work when no-one can go anywhere else? It is a slogan. No-one in Western Australia can go anywhere, so are people going to travel in Western Australia? Absolutely. Is there a shortage of workers? Absolutely, there is a shortage of workers. But there is not only a shortage of workers, there is a shortage of accommodation.

I think that we will find that a lot of the hotspots in Western Australia are in Nationals WA and Liberal Party seats. Is that perhaps why the Premier does not want to fix these problems? Is the Premier being political? Look at the language he is using and the hypocrisy when it comes to a hard border—yet there are exceptions. I think the Premier's plan is to hold off until March. What is in March? There is an election. He is trying to manage the situation, and so a Premier should. The leader of the state should try to manage things and make sure we do not have COVID-19 here. But when there are policies and procedures in place to protect the state—being the hard border—with exemptions, why can we not get some of the essential workers who are needed to plug the hole that we have in regional WA in the agricultural, tourism, small business and transport industries? The number of people who have jobs here in Western Australia, who need to come back and work—businesses need them to come back to work because they cannot find the workers here—are being rejected. Why is that the case when there are exemptions?

I will read out some of the exemptions because it is interesting what deal the Australian Hotels Association has struck. As I said, at the moment hospitality venues are scaling back, closing rooms, restricting opening times and losing hours of trade and income each week. Some are even shutting up shop because they cannot find staff. When someone goes to book a room in regional WA, they say that they are full. Yes, they are full, but they have scaled back because there are no cleaners. They cannot clean the rooms that they have. They cannot maximise the amount of people who want to come and stay at their place because there is no-one to clean their rooms. That is what we are seeing in regional WA.

I have written to the Premier. I outlined my concerns months and months ago. I will read out a section of a letter I wrote to the Premier. It states —

Some immediate repercussions experienced by visitors and businesses include:

...

Shortage of staff—exhausted operators are unable to operate at full capacity without more resources.

- Loss of a staff member has a dire impact, including increased stress levels
- Service levels compromised, such as venues closed at peak times, meals not available, check in times extended beyond standard 2pm, customer service levels impacted
- Burn out—physical and mental impacts (including ongoing management of accrued financial losses)

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 16 September 2020]

p6031b-6056a

Ms Mia Davies; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Simone McGurk; Dr David Honey;
Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Shane Love

- Difficulty for some essential workers to enter WA—some regional operators, including from Coral Bay and Broome have willing candidates for essential roles such as Chefs and Bakers from States such as Queensland and the NT with their applications recently declined.

Visitor expectations—receiving mixed messages after being encouraged to support the State and regions but unaware of the issue around “business is not as usual” often resulting in frustration.

Tourism Industry reputation— negative perception due to a lack of staff.

Our product is being damaged, yet the Premier refuses to get involved to protect our product and the experience that we expect. I also acknowledge that there is a role the federal government can play in this as well. I go on to say —

I am calling the State and Federal Governments to urgently work together, along with industry and businesses to remove barriers and find workable solutions, including a potential:

review of the Job Seeker and visa requirements

immediate short term solution for workers accommodation in some locations

modification to marketing campaigns—highlight a need to display empathy during these extraordinary and difficult times

program developed to encourage people to move from the city to the regions, which may see some re-locate permanently if they like the life style.

I applaud the government for trying to get workers from the city to the regions. That is great. We need to encourage people to move to the regions, but the reality is something different. We have a cliff face. That cliff face is coming these school holidays for the tourism sector and small businesses. But then the cliff face comes in my patch in the horticultural industry not being able to find workers. There is talk that half the produce will be left on the ground. The member for Warren–Blackwood mentioned this in his speech, but I found on Facebook something saying that \$100 000 worth of lettuce had been destroyed by a farmer who —

had to plough lettuce into the ground as he has no workers to help harvest it. This will soon affect his cauliflower, broccoli, celery and spinach harvests too.

He has plenty of work going in Lancelin and if people are interested, they should contact him. That is going to happen right throughout the industry. There is a problem. We will find out that there is a problem when we go to the supermarket to buy that produce and we find that it has increased in cost. It is a real problem. People are pleading. They can see this coming.

In my discussions with people in the horticultural industry, through associations like VegetablesWA, they can see it coming. They know it is coming. We see the ads on Facebook for backpackers, whose numbers have dwindled and will continue to dwindle towards the end of the year. We have a cliff face. We have a pandemic-sized worker problem in regional WA. If producers are able to get workers, there is still no accommodation in the hotspots of Kalbarri, Shark Bay, Coral Bay and Exmouth. If people are able to find accommodation, they are paying holiday rates for that accommodation. When the Premier says that it is up to private industry to develop workers’ accommodation—all those businesses—how? They cannot just build a house or build some accommodation. Perhaps the government needs to sit down with local governments and say, “Here is some land. How about we smooth away some of the red tape to allow someone to come in to build workers’ accommodation, to make sure that it is comparable with the seasonal wage that people get.” I emphasise “seasonal wage”, because that is what we are talking about here. It is seasonal work when it comes to tourism in the north west or the south west. Agricultural and horticultural work is seasonal. It might be fine to try to attract some people to come from Perth to do a seasonal job, but they are a very select few. The reality is something different. People need to have skills and qualifications in some of the agricultural sector jobs. It is hard work. People do not wear make-up, have their nails or hair done as has been portrayed in the ads. It is hard work.

Mr M.P. Murray: It’s obvious you haven’t done any work, then, for a while!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Clearly, that member has, because look at the sight of him!

It is hard work. We cannot sugar-coat it. We need people who are able and willing to work.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That member should just worry about the Fremantle port.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That member will have her time to come up.

Rex from Big River Range in Kalbarri said —

Extract from Hansard

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“we’re struggling to find people willing to work so we’re knocking back horse riding tours. It’s disappointing as we’ve got strong bookings until October and it’s only July and our team’s already feeling tired —

That was in the July school holidays. October will get harder and harder and harder. As I said, some operators have not been able to get chefs or bakers. They have applied five or six times and have been rejected when trying to get those specialty workers from Northern Territory, South Australia or Queensland. Jenna Clarke’s article titled “A wander can be a wonder: There’s lots to like about leaving the city to work in the bush” pretty much summed up where everything sits at the moment. The ads being portrayed by the government are not realistic.

As I said, the boom that we are experiencing in regional WA is a boom. It is wonderful, but when it comes to the real issues, the government members are putting their heads in the sand. This will be the test of the Labor government. I think the government has passed the test of protecting Western Australians to date. People absolutely do feel safe, but that does not mean that the government members can put their caps on and go off to sit down and have a glass of chardonnay—if that is what the Premier drinks; I gather that he would be a chardonnay drinker.

Several members interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: He does not drink? He sits down and has his cordial or whatever it is and says, “Geez, I’m Mr 91 per cent. I’m going well here.” Yet the looming problem that is escalating every day is the shortage of workers and dealing with small businesses that have not got out of the woods yet. They have not had a chance to go through their accounts. They have not had a chance to sit down and go through how the three or four months of trade that they lost has impacted their business. A lot of businesses have still not recovered because they rely on tourists from the east coast and internationally. We have exhausted business owners who have to shut up shop and that reduces their ability to earn money. Business owners are not able to pay for workers’ accommodation, if they are able to find workers, because there is no accommodation. We are seeing that right throughout Western Australia. One article after another is written about this: “Shortage threatens industry” is one. These articles are right across regional WA. “Staff shortage bites” is another article. Businesses in Exmouth are among those who are going to benefit from the new campaign. The article continues —

Exmouth is among the towns experiencing harsh labour shortages because of COVID-19 travel restrictions.

...

Exmouth Escape Resort manager Jeanette Caputo said anything to attract workers to Exmouth was good, however, the real concern was the lack of housing available for them.

They have at least five housekeeping vacancies. It continues —

“Affordable worker accommodation supply will be the issue for this campaign to be successful in Exmouth and we urge the Government to speed up the process in developing land for this purpose before market conditions change,” ...

These articles deliver warnings: iceberg ahead! Now is the time that we need this government to act on those issues when we hear about surpluses and when we hear the Minister for Transport talking about \$260 million a month being ploughed into metropolitan transport. When it comes to regional WA, we have massive infrastructure issues.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The previous government eased the pressure of workers’ accommodation in places like Karratha, which was going through the boom, Port Hedland and Coral Bay. Now places such as Exmouth, Kalbarri, Shark Bay and Coral Bay need workers’ accommodation. Those places are where the market fails those places because the wages are not there to be able to pay those high rents. This is when we need the government to step in and get involved to help out small businesses and tourism. The government will be tested on this come the March state election. It is not all beer and skittles for this Labor government. People are starting to see it and get upset. It is starting to hurt their hip pockets and it is starting to affect people’s lives.

As the Leader of the National Party said, we support the hard border, but we do not want to see what is happening now, which is that people are not able to return home to Western Australia. People are not able to come here because they have a job. The Premier says that it is up to the WA Police Force to choose who comes in and who does not, but I remember the Premier talking about how he will never let Clive Palmer in. Who is picking and choosing here? I will read members this from my notes. The AHA secures a pathway for migration into Western Australia of interstate specialised staff. The Australian Hotels Association has secured from the WA government a clear policy for employers in the hotel and hospitality industry that are seeking to obtain permission for specialist skilled staff to migrate and enter WA to commence work. With the support of the tourism minister, labour shortages for chefs, experienced cooks and senior operational and management staff will be recognised as areas of pre-existing need for the purpose of considering the G2G PASS. Individuals cannot enter WA unless they are an exempt traveller and are approved to enter. A G2G PASS is an online mobile application that allows an individual approval

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to travel to Western Australia for an approved purpose. The current quarantine directions provide an exemption for individuals who have specialist skills not available in WA. WA Police Force advise that every application is assessed on a case-by-case basis, and favourable consideration will be given to those who have contracts in place and are permanently relocating to Western Australia.

There we have it—the hard border! I think the hard border is now a slogan when it comes to chopping and changing things as the Premier sees fit. But I agree with the ability to get specialised workers here in Western Australia. I agree that if businesses cannot find people to work in their job, they can look abroad to get people to come into Western Australia, as long as those people adhere to the policies. They need to have a COVID-19 test. If a person lives over on the east coast, they need to quarantine for 14 days and perhaps have another COVID-19 test during quarantine or after it. The government needs to put those procedures in place to ensure that Western Australia is protected and, by the same token, they do not hurt our agriculture, small businesses, tourism, heavy haulage and other businesses around Western Australia.

I will read members this email that I received about someone trying to come home. This problem is growing on a day-by-day basis. This email was sent to the Premier and states —

Dear Premier

I write to you with regards to the hotel quarantine situation in Perth. Firstly, congratulations on keeping Western Australians safe and their economy functioning as close to normally as possible during this unprecedented global pandemic. I am supportive of your hard border stance despite it making it challenging for us as a family to return to our home state of WA from where we currently are in regional Victoria. I understand how imperative it is to not let COVID-19 unwittingly enter our beautiful State where the consequences would be truly devastating if it spread unchecked, particularly in regional areas.

My main reason for writing to you is to implore you to review the hotel quarantine situation in Perth. Whilst I understand and support it in principle, I ask that you consider reviewing the suitability of the arrangements for families, particularly those with young children. As a family with three children under the age of six it is completely impractical, unsafe and simply more difficult than it needs to be, to be made to stay in a single hotel room for 14 days with nothing more than a bar fridge and a kettle. Even if an adjoining room can be secured, at significant additional cost, there are still no facilities for preparing basic foods, snacks, washing dishes or a washing machine for doing the prolific washing that accompanies young children (even, or especially those cooped up in a single room!).

Whilst I am confident the hotels who are participating in the hotel quarantine program are doing their best to assist and accommodate families in these difficult circumstances, the fact remains that this style of accommodation is not suitable and as someone who has previously worked for Tourism WA during your time as Tourism Minister, I know there are many better options in Perth to specifically cater to this group of people, who genuinely want to do the right thing and are simply wanting to return home in trying times. I simply ask that you review this and consider negotiating another provider that may be able to better cater to families such as self contained apartment style hotels or at least one that has rooms with kitchenettes.

That is becoming a common occurrence. I know that person is finding it difficult to get back to Western Australia with their young family. Today there was discussion and debate in Parliament about opening up detention centres and so forth, but how could we put kids in detention centres?

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: How can this government put Australians who want to come back home, with children, into —

Mr W.J. Johnston: Australian citizens were put there by your government!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is what happened when we were trying to evacuate many people from China to save their lives. The member can get up and have a chat about that, but that was a very different set of circumstances from that of getting Western Australians, who have families and live abroad, back to Western Australia. We should not be sticking them in a place surrounded by a barbed-wired fence when we have the ability to quarantine people in hotels to make sure that they are safe. The hypocrisy that exists on the government side is amazing!

Mr W.J. Johnston: You're a disgrace.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The member is the disgrace because he does not want to put —

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The member does not want to put asylum seekers into detention centres but it is okay to put Australians into detention centres!

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

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The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just stop yelling at each other, please! Thank you.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: As I have said, this is —

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister! I call you for the first time. Go ahead, member.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Western Australians are unable to come back home, even if they are a doctor who is working over east in regional Victoria. It is extremely difficult for them to come into Western Australia, let alone deal with the complexities that exist between the Victorian, New South Wales and South Australian borders. It is difficult for a person who lives outside of Western Australia to come into Western Australia to take a job to fill one of those roles that small businesses desperately need filled to make sure that our tourism experience is a memorable one.

The Tourism Council of WA has been advocating for the extension of backpackers' visas. It has said that there are usually around 14 000 backpackers in Western Australia, but it estimates that around 5 000 to 6 000 remain, with backpackers leaving at a rate of 1 000 to 2 000 a month. This is a great opportunity for the federal government to extend their visas. I hope that the Premier has brought that to the attention of the Prime Minister in the national cabinet meetings to ensure that we might be able to fill some of those thousands of jobs that need to be filled, particularly in the hospitality and horticulture sectors. The shortage that has hit those sectors will only get worse during the September–October school holidays. As we move into the horticultural picking season after the school holidays, workers will be even more desperately needed.

As I said, this government has all these slogans but the proof is in the pudding when it comes to delivering on the needs of Western Australia. I have not even touched on the infrastructure shortage. When tourists visit places like Exmouth and Coral Bay, the sewerage ponds cannot cope with the amount of waste. Power is another issue, as is mobile phone communication—one cannot download because the system cannot take it. The tourism hotspots in regional WA are going through what mining or resources towns like Karratha and Port Hedland went through in the past. When the iron ore price is \$US126 a tonne and the government has a budget surplus, it needs to invest in those areas that keep our economy going. It needs to invest in our tourism areas and make sure that the infrastructure is there so that when people travel to regional WA, they can make the most of that wonderful experience.

I support this motion. We need the government to step up. We need the Premier to stop using slogans and to do the hard yards to help those people who need it in regional tourism towns and the agricultural sector, because they are suffering. This will bite the Premier when it comes to the March election because he has no plan and no understanding of what is happening in regional Western Australia.

MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Child Protection) [5.27 pm]: That was unforgivable; I nearly called you “Mr Speaker”—that is probably a penalty for a Minister for Women’s Interests. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the call. I want to address some of the issues in the motion. Part of the reason I am here is that the motion referred to the impact of the pandemic on not-for-profits and the community sector in regional areas, so I will take the opportunity to speak about that. I also want to put on the record some of the initiatives that the state government has taken to try to address the challenges that exist in regional Western Australia at this time. As many people have observed, we have almost been a victim of our success, in a way, particularly with the tourist accommodation pressures and employment pressures with the number of people who are visiting some of the regional areas. That has been particularly challenging. We have been trying to get people to visit regional Western Australia, but of course they do not have many other choices if they want to take a holiday. That has been fantastic, but it has brought its own challenges. Essentially, though, I understand that the motion is first and foremost about understanding that in regional areas the challenges of COVID and the situation we find ourselves in in 2020 is different from what is occurring in the metro area and, perhaps, also in regional centres. That particularly relates to agriculture, but also relates to the challenges of smaller population centres. I will speak about that.

First, I will make a few points. I listened very carefully to the Leader of the Nationals WA and the other two speakers, who are both members of the Nationals WA, and what they spoke about this afternoon. They were very long and detailed on outlining the problem, but very short on solutions. They outlined the problems, which we are aware of, but they were very short on the question of the agricultural workforce and the immediate issues that are being faced around the country with what is usually a seasonal workforce, whether that is composed of international backpackers or other transitory workers who are usually available to meet those seasonal needs in the agricultural industry. There is no doubt that that is a challenge. It is not an area about which I pretend to have any expertise, but even the most casual observer can see that there is a challenge. The state government invested in the Work and Wander Out Yonder promotional campaign, but even that was not sufficient for the members of the opposition, particularly for members of the National Party. They were insulted that we would try to portray working in regional areas as a pleasant or good experience. That is even though I think it was the member for Warren–Blackwood who talked about surfing.

Mr D.T. Redman: It was me.

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Ms S.F. McGURK: That campaign was to try to accommodate people who might be interested in going to regional areas and to show them what the pluses would be. That was clearly the point of that advertising campaign. It was to capture people's imagination and to get them to start thinking about how they could perhaps go out and get some work and some income as well as enjoy travelling and visiting the regional areas of our state. First and foremost, the state government has been focused on making sure that Western Australians are safe. I know that it has been incredibly frustrating and galling for the opposition to see the Premier at such high levels of popularity and appreciation of not only his efforts, but also his judgement on these issues. He has taken good advice from those around him at senior levels. The Minister for Health, the Deputy Premier, who has just joined us in the chamber, is amongst them. The Premier has taken advice from senior public servants and people in our public health system about all the strategic issues and exercised good judgement. He has been a clear communicator and has been consistent in his messages. At times, he has stood firm when those views have not been popular. People have had the opportunity to see those issues communicated on social media and to compare him with leaders who are not able to communicate well, or articulate the challenges or their position well. People in other jurisdictions despair of their political leadership, particularly those who are overseas. In Western Australia people understand that they are lucky to have a political leader such as we have. That is why he is popular. In everything I have heard the Premier speak about, he has not shirked away from the difficult issues or from communicating with the public that he is grappling with difficult issues. As a government, we are grappling with difficult issues, such as the challenge of wanting to make sure industry is kept going as much as possible. Very early on in the piece, around March, April and May, we made sure that key parts of our resource sector could continue to work without compromising the safety of the state with people travelling from outside the state or from areas that were perhaps contaminated. That was a challenge that was before us. There is no doubt about the challenge of the agriculture industry to make sure that there is a seasonal workforce that is skilled and capable of doing the work that is necessary is one of the current challenges before us. For the WA government under Mark McGowan, keeping people safe from COVID and making sure that we have policy settings that are now widely recognised as having been very effective has been a priority.

We have also begun a number of initiatives. Members in this chamber are well aware of the Work and Wander Out Yonder campaign, which encourages Western Australians to embark on a working holiday. Over 100 jobs are now listed on Seek under that campaign. Tens of thousands of page-views have highlighted job opportunities through Seek and Gumtree and the like. The Studium job-matching platform for Western Australian matches employees with jobs in the agriculture and food businesses. The Minister for Agriculture and Food has been very focused in her efforts to understand the problem and to come up with practical solutions and advocate for those in government. Again, despite what the opposition might wish for, there is no contention in cabinet about the challenges. We have a united approach to deal with those issues. The Studium platform is available to employers, labour-hire businesses and regional recruiting companies at no cost. It includes one-on-one support from Studium to register and connect with jobseekers. As of yesterday, more than 12 000 jobseekers were on that platform, with 255 employers offering employment. As of yesterday, there had been 1 772 connections made between employers and jobseekers. We do not rely solely on that and say that our job is done. There will be continued efforts to test that platform to see whether it results in solutions on the ground, but it is a practical mechanism that matches demand and supply for jobs in regional areas. Depending on the crop, each employer or labour-hire company may have one or hundreds of job positions on offer. In a tight labour market, employers need to proactively pursue interested jobseekers to get them to complete the recruitment process. We are trying to make sure that that information is out there. I do not doubt that regional members here want to see their employers and, in this case, the agricultural industry—farmers and the like—matched with suitable employees.

Members may be aware of the various support packages. There is \$3 million to help attract Western Australians to seasonal agricultural jobs across the regions. The state government will provide \$3 360 for an accommodation cost rebate and up to \$500 in travel support. The primary industries workers regional travel and accommodation support scheme—catchy name!—will assist agriculture, fisheries and food processing businesses in regional areas that are experiencing labour shortages as a result of the pandemic. These are practical measures that the state government is putting in place to make sure that there are clear incentives—not only bonuses—and practical supports to make sure that when people go to those areas, they have additional accommodation support. The state government continues to advocate for the commonwealth to do more to support the sector and to incentivise the uptake of horticultural and agricultural opportunities, including through flexibility with Jobseeker payments.

Yesterday, the federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Migration handed down its "Interim Report of the Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker Program". It supports the McGowan government's action plan to bring in this year's harvest. The inquiry, which began in June, examined the impacts of necessary COVID international border restrictions on the working holiday-maker program, with a focus on managing the disruption to industries that traditionally rely on backpacker labour, including agriculture and tourism. A number of recommendations were made in the interim report, which I think are worth referring to. These recommendations align perfectly with the steps that this state government has taken to deal with the issue in Western Australia.

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The committee's first recommendation is for the federal government to implement a Have a Gap Year at Home campaign to attract school and university leavers to regional work, appealing to young Western Australians' sense of adventure. This is completely consistent with the Work and Wander Out Yonder campaign. The second recommendation is that the federal government enables workers to stay on JobSeeker payments while undertaking agricultural work. This recommendation follows a proposal that was advocated to the federal government—members would have heard it raised by the Premier and Minister for Agriculture and Food. It is being discussed practically and in the media. It is a very straightforward and practical measure, if unusual. I have heard the Premier speak about it. It would be specific to this year and this season. Although it is not something that would usually be endorsed, it makes sense as a particular incentive for an urgent situation. The committee's third recommendation is for the federal government to "establish a one-off payment to help with the travel and accommodation costs" for jobseekers moving to the regions. We have already provided some of those incentives at a state level. The incentives will take effect from 21 September this year.

In Western Australia, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is engaging the regional development commissions and the Western Australian Local Government Association to explore accommodation options, which will work with the state government's incentives. We are starting to see the themes come through. No new ideas came from the state opposition, but there are consistent themes for the practical measures that could be put in place for an urgent situation in the agricultural sector. The agricultural support that is specifically available in Western Australia allows workers who move more than 100 kilometres to work in the regions to claim \$40 a night as an accommodation rebate for up to 12 weeks. The rebate also applies to regional accommodation costs incurred from 21 September. A minimum of two weeks' work must be undertaken in order to make a claim. For travel support, a travel rebate will be available for those relocating more than 100 kilometres from their usual place of residence. These are both state government rebates or assistance packages. The relocation allowance is \$150 for employment in the Peel region, the south west, great southern, wheatbelt, midwest, goldfields and Esperance; \$350 for employment in the Gascoyne and Pilbara; and \$500 for employment in the Kimberley. Similar to the accommodation rebate, a minimum of two weeks' work must be undertaken to make a claim.

The themes coming through for what the federal government can do are entirely consistent with what the Premier has advocated for and what we are putting in place in Western Australia. I listened very keenly to what the three previous speakers said on this motion and I did not hear a lot of practical proposals, except that we absolutely need to do something.

Mr V.A. Catania: Build some workers' accommodation was one.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I will get to the recovery packages; I am very happy to speak about them. On 26 July, the Premier launched an unprecedented and massive \$5.5 billion WA recovery plan. This followed significant stakeholder engagement through ministerial state round tables and the State Recovery Advisory Group. The plan focuses on reopening, restoration and reform. We are focused on getting industry back on its feet and fast-tracking Western Australian jobs, but it is equally important not to compromise community safety in that effort. We need to support the people who have been most affected and protect our most vulnerable.

The pandemic has impacted the community in many layers, and the Western Australian government is looking at ways in which we can give more support to the most vulnerable. I will briefly address those. We have invested over \$28 million in my portfolio areas for victims of family and domestic violence by expanding refuges, strengthening response teams and increasing the number of outreach workers across the state, including in many regional areas. One of those refuges is, of course, in the Peel region. Across Western Australia, \$6.8 million was provided to increase the number of financial counsellors and support staff, and to provide funding for traineeships and scholarships to help people cope with financial pressures. Many of these support packages not only support existing services, but also train people in order to increase the capacity of these services in regional areas. We are also providing funding to increase employment opportunities for vulnerable women through a job retraining scheme for women in refuges and to offer more financial support for those services. In addition, a one-off support payment of \$3.7 million is being provided to foster carers and carers, including grandcarers and people under special guardianship orders. I spoke about this in question time today. They will receive \$500 for the first child in their care and \$250 for each additional child in the household. The Lotterywest COVID-19 relief fund of \$159 million will also support organisations that are helping people who are experiencing hardship. We debated that in this house because we redirected the legislation to make sure that Lotterywest is very focused on supporting COVID-affected organisations. It will make sure that not-for-profit or community organisations, including sporting and arts organisations that have had some of their income displaced by COVID, are no worse off. We were able to respond to those businesses.

In the Department of Communities, a series of task forces was set up by the director general and senior people in the department. They will make sure that we have a really good focus on what is happening to people in the regions, including people with disability, the impact of family and domestic violence, homeless people, seniors, children in care, outcomes for Aboriginal people and partnerships, and remote Aboriginal communities. A huge amount of

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work was undertaken to assist Aboriginal people to get back to their communities and stay safe. Other task forces were set up for mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and young people. These task forces provided an input into the state government's effort at the height of the pandemic, as well as in the development of the recovery plan.

I will speak briefly about the early childhood sector because this sector looked very quickly like it was going to be affected. I was on a number of hook-ups through the Australian Education Council with my counterparts in other states and the federal minister responsible to look at the impact on the early childhood education and care sector. Parents had to stay home because of COVID, so the centres were challenged to keep operating when they had fewer people coming through the doors. On the other hand, essential workers absolutely relied on those centres operating in order to do their work in the health sector, schools and police—any essential workers. In Western Australia, of course, essential workers included anyone who could continue to work safely. The federal government came through for a time with a good package, which enabled those centres to not only continue to get a portion of the early childhood sector subsidies, but also access JobKeeper payments and allow parents to access those services free of charge. That was very welcome, but it also had a knock-on effect for a number of centres, which were saying that although they were full and adhering to the ratio requirements in their centres, they were not getting their full income; they were getting only a portion of the subsidy. We had a knock-on effect and we were trying to work our way through those issues and also understand that different centres were in difficult positions because of their locations throughout the state. Their status is not for profit. For instance, Goodstart Early Learning is a massive operation nationally, but technically it did not fit the low-income criteria of the not-for-profit sector. We were able to work our way through that. At the moment, I think centres in Western Australia are coping well. However, we know that once JobKeeper and JobSeeker support starts to change, that is likely to have a knock-on effect on the early childhood sector.

I want to briefly speak about the regional early education and development model. It was established in response to the need for innovative service delivery—a different model to address early childhood education and care services in the wheatbelt region of Western Australia. It had its genesis under the previous government. We picked it up and helped support it. Initial funding of \$811 000 was provided through the royalties for regions regional community child care development fund. We have spoken about that in this house. Essentially, it is a complex large-scale project. It involved the establishment of a new regional entity and the merger of between 20 and 25 individual small centres with the regional entities. The accreditation for early childhood recognition under the state government system is held by the regional entity. A number of smaller organisations sit underneath that and are able to operate on a scale when they would not normally be able to continue operating on their own as they would not have the capacity to undertake all that is required to maintain their accreditation. I am very pleased to report that as of July, I think 18 services across the wheatbelt were merged with REED. That includes some of the bigger centres such as Narrogin, Merredin and Wundowie and smaller centres such as Yilgarn and Darkan, and I think there is another in Dowerin, which will be the nineteenth centre to come on board. That is a very good example of an innovative approach in a regional area that in itself is a form of employment for mainly women in regional areas. It is attractive. It means that regional towns have viable child care, which is crucial for working families. As I said, they are able to operate on a scale that is a little more flexible than normal. I acknowledge the people who have worked hard to make that happen in their centre in regional areas, including Helen Creed, who has been working hard to ensure that it has continued, and others have helped establish that model. A couple of centres have been challenged during COVID but REED is a central regional body that is able to support those individual centres. Even if they have to close their doors for the duration of COVID, that is not ideal, but when they are in a position to start up again, they will have a body in place that can support them and pick them up again if they need that.

There was an interjection earlier about accommodation for regional workers. I am happy that the member has been paying close attention to the \$318 million social housing economic recovery package. This is a package of social housing that we have invested in. It will include a huge boost for the construction industry, it will create jobs and it will also present an opportunity to invest in new and existing social housing across the state. Of course, it will also assist some of the most vulnerable in our community. We are prioritising that work as we speak. The Minister for Housing is very focused on that, as is the Department of Communities. We understand that this will immediately boost jobs throughout the state and also the housing and accommodation that is needed.

Turning to volunteering, we knew that volunteers across the state, particularly many who are older, were challenged by the pandemic. People were worried about the services that rely very heavily on volunteering and the clients who rely on those volunteers being left exposed because of older volunteers, for instance, not wanting to expose themselves, quite rightly and fairly. It is a vital role. The Minister for Volunteering is in the chamber. A package of \$1.5 million was provided to the sector to support its development. I have been advised by Volunteering WA that it has been doing well. It took a hit early in the COVID response but now two-thirds of its volunteers are stepping back into their roles. The sector has also worked hard to look at different ways of providing services—working digitally, for instance. People know that virtual delivery and contact with people is not as hard as initially thought. People have picked up these opportunities and found that they can benefit from new ways of working under COVID. Volunteering WA recently conducted a survey of its members, which indicated that about 80 per cent

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of volunteer organisations are confident that they will be able to return to pre-COVID levels of activity. We have seen a loss of some volunteers, particularly older people, who chose not to return to their roles. If some programs are not reactivated, particularly in aged-care and healthcare centres, Volunteering WA has told us that it is working with the state government to reinforce messages pertaining to reducing the risk of community transmission. Members would be aware, particularly those on the other side of the house, that Volunteering WA operates regional hubs in the wheatbelt, the Pilbara and the Kimberley. We are investing in new training resources to ensure that we are not losing capacity in those sectors. It is a fantastic example of where we have invested in peak bodies in regional centres and then gone out and made sure that people are supported in these challenging times.

I have taken up what feels like quite a bit of time, but there is a lot to talk about in making sure we understand the challenges in the regions. We are responding to those challenges. As I said before, it galls the opposition that the Premier is being recognised so widely in Western Australia as providing solid judgement and attention to these issues, and he has yielded such good results.

Finally, I think TAFE investment is significant. It resonates well publicly because people know that investment in vocational training, particularly through the TAFE system, is such a fantastic opportunity. It is a really practical and immediate injection that we can make in skills not only immediately, but also in the future. Regional Western Australia will benefit from upgrades as part of the recovery stimulus totalling \$79.1 million into regional TAFEs, including \$17 million to South Regional TAFE in Albany; \$22 million to North Regional TAFE in South Hedland; \$2 million for upgrades to Central Regional TAFE in Northam; and \$5 million towards a new classroom at North Regional TAFE in Roebourne. They are the capital injections. In terms of the course subsidies, examples of free TAFE short courses include work in the agricultural skill set to rapidly skill workers to fill farm labouring positions left vacant by temporary work visa holders. The peak periods for employment are, currently, from June to September. A heavy haulage driver operator is another skill set. That will articulate—excuse the pun—into a certificate II traineeship. They are two examples of free TAFE short courses. There are also construction courses. The fees for full-time students have been significantly reduced for certificates II and III in horticulture and certificate II in rural operations. The certificate III in horticulture has halved from \$626 to \$313. There is also a certificate IV in community services. A better example is probably the diploma of early childhood education and care. Again, the fee is being halved so they are really significant subsidies, understanding that there is demand in those areas and that we need to push people to think about taking up those qualifications.

I hope I have demonstrated to the house how seriously this government takes not only the particular challenges of the pandemic, but also listening to regional areas and providing practical assistance where it is needed.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe) [6.00 pm]: I rise to enthusiastically support the motion put forward by the Nationals WA and certainly the Liberal Party supports it. The bottom line is that the state government, through conscious choice, will put Western Australian households in major distress because the price of fruit and vegetables will skyrocket to unparalleled levels and that will hurt most the poorest in the community. The reason for that is that the state government is actively choosing not to do anything to bring in the required workforce that this state needs to bring in the critical fruit and vegetables that come into our households and are exported. The minister made the point that we are offering no solutions. We have not offered solutions but there are solutions; the solution is to bring in those people in a safe way. There is no secret about how to do that. I believe that over 40 000 people have come into this state since the so-called hard border began. I understand that over 7 000 of those people have come into the state without any quarantine whatsoever. I might also say that the government appears now to be very shy about this. It does not want the people of Western Australia to know these numbers because it is refusing to provide that information when we ask questions in the upper house. Further to that, people are coming in and going out of this state and it appears that it is the people from the top end of town. I have seen one particular local billionaire, who a few days ago was in Papua New Guinea. Then he was nearly involved in a terrible incident in Afghanistan. I expect he will sail back into the state and I doubt very much that he will quarantine for two weeks. I met a senior businessperson from this town. The minister might be interested in this. I was at a meeting with him and went up to shake his hand, as you do, or offer my elbow, and he said, “Look, I won’t shake your hand, I’ve just come back from Melbourne.” I can tell you that it is not clear to me why that person is any more or less a risk to the state than people who could come into the agricultural region.

We certainly do not support people coming into this state willy-nilly. We have never supported that. We appreciate that this pandemic is a real threat to people’s lives and that we have to make sure we bring in people in a controlled way. I am really concerned about the way this whole issue of the so-called hard borders has developed. We do not have hard borders; we have controlled borders. The Premier is creating a myth that somehow people in this state are being protected because we are not letting people in and that we have a ring-fence, or a cement tank, around the state. We are not letting anyone into the state because of the so-called hard borders. It is rubbish; it is a myth. That is why I believe the government has stopped providing figures to us. It must know the figures. This is a highly controlled process. The police rigorously assess every application from people wanting to come into the state. I think I know why the government has stopped providing figures to us. Members opposite, including the minister

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and others, have referred by interjection to the 91 per cent popularity of the Premier. The Labor Party discovered along the way with the initial response to this COVID crisis that it is a popular theme. It is popular with the people of Western Australia to appear to be taking a hard stance and to appear to be in control. In fact, the tougher you talk, the more popular you are. There is huge popularity for the Premier. The Premier has always craved popularity. Some of us in this place have pretty good memories. Remember the Darling Range by-election. Remember who the Labor candidate was. I do not because every poster, every bus and every truck the Labor Party put out had the Premier's face on it—every one. The Premier believed that his popularity was so great that he would carry that by-election. What happened, members? There was a 9.3 per cent swing against the Labor Party. The Premier was disappointed and upset and we got an outstanding member of Parliament, so thanks for that. Then the Premier thought, "No; the public made a mistake last time; it did not realise how important and how popular and how prescient I am." Do members remember any federal Labor candidates at the federal election?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr S.J. Price): Member, you are drifting a little bit off the motion.

Dr D.J. HONEY: This goes to the motive for the approach the government is taking on this matter.

The ACTING SPEAKER: There is no mention in here of what you are going on about, so unless you come back to what the motion talks about, I will sit you down.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I will come back to it very rapidly. Thank you very much, Acting Speaker, as always. We saw that in fact the Premier using his popularity was a failure and we had a swing towards us. I will not go through the seats out of respect for your direction, Acting Speaker. The simple fact is that the Labor Party did not win those seats that it thought it would win.

Finally, the public got it wrong twice before they realised that the Premier is a wonderful person who is saving the nation. I might say that a number of states are performing as well for the same reasons; that is, good sensible control, and I respect that. I have known the Minister for Health for a long time and have always said to him that I respect his good work. I have said that outside this place and I have said it inside this place. Yes, there has been some good work, but the truth is that other states have done that as well. The reality is that Western Australia started in a profoundly good position. The number of infections in each state—I looked at some statistics on this at the start of this whole crisis—correlated almost perfectly with the number of overseas visitors they had each year. New South Wales has more than double the number of tourists per head of population that Western Australia does. In fact, I think that given what it had to cope with, it is the state that, overall, has managed to control COVID-19 the best. Obviously, in Victoria it has gone badly awry.

I respect that the government is putting a good amount of effort into that control. But, as I said, that is no reason whatsoever to stop people coming into this state who are required for the state. It appears that the people sitting at dinner tables with the Premier during a quarantine period are critical to this state. Somehow those people get through; they are coming to-and-fro and travelling wherever, but workers who are crucial to this state have not been able to come into Western Australia. This is a crisis—this is genuinely a crisis. I know that there are members opposite who do not do their homework and others who do. The Minister for Mines and Petroleum gets around and about, but I am not sure he gets around and about in the agricultural industry. Like other members, including the member for North West Central, the member for Roe, the Leader of the National Party and others, over the last couple of months I made a lot of effort to get out into the regions. I have been through Fitzroy Crossing in the Fitzroy Valley, and Broome; I travelled all through station country in that region. I travelled down all through the wheatbelt, out to Lake Grace, down to my old hometown of Cranbrook. I also travelled through the Peel region. I can tell members that there is an absolute crisis.

I will refer to the horticultural region in north Wanneroo. Members do not have to drive far; just drive up there. I will tell members what is happening today: vegetables are being ploughed into the ground because they cannot be harvested. Right now, major vegetable producers in the north Wanneroo area are planting half, or less than half, of their normal crop. Right now, one of the major strawberry producers in that area is burning strawberry plants because they cannot harvest them.

Right now, sheep farmers in the south west of Australia are looking for shearers. Anyone who knows anything about sheep farming knows that now is the crisis time for sheep. The spring feed is coming through. The sheep get this massive dose of feed and the sheep scour and get dirty. If they are not crutched, they will be fly-blown and die from sepsis because of flystrike. Farmers will do everything in their capacity to prevent it. There are simply not enough shearers in the state to cope with that load. There are a number of farmers in this chamber. Every day that a farmer waits, sheep are fly-struck and some of them will die. I know some of those farmers and it breaks their hearts. They will do what they can, but shearers are simply not there. When it comes to the clip, Western Australia is short by 300 shearers. I do not know whether any members opposite have ever tried shearing; it is a highly skilled task. It will take someone two to three years to go from being an apprentice or rouseabout through to becoming a shearer. Those shearers are simply not there.

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When it comes to truck drivers, one of the major trucking organisations has reported that over 300 trucks in Western Australia are parked up right now. A number of truck drivers for that organisation are probably members of the union that the Acting Speaker (Mr S.J. Price) used to represent. Those 300 trucks are parked up —

Mr W.J. Johnston: The Australian Workers' Union?

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes. They do everything, do they not?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr S.J. Price): They do.

Dr D.J. HONEY: They have broad coverage!

Mr W.J. Johnston: Don't tell the TWU!

The ACTING SPEAKER: It is an ongoing discussion.

Dr D.J. HONEY: He would have liked to have been in the TWU!

Mr W.J. Johnston: The AWU used to call itself the one big union.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, that is it. Sorry, I have given away the plans!

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I like the AWU—they are good guys! I was not perhaps as precise as I could have been, but that is life!

Three hundred trucks are parked up today. That is enormously serious. These are really simple issues. The grain crop last year was more than average. That grain crop is still being cleared from wheat bins to make way for this year's crop. This year's season has been interesting. It has been a season without good rainfall run-off. However, it has been a superb season for the crop. If the season continues as it is, and nothing bad happens—which it always could—this year we will have an above-average crop in this state. There is a serious risk that there will not be enough grain cleared from the bins to take that grain, but certainly we will not have the capacity to move that crop.

That will be a direct economic loss to this state. I understand the state government is doing things right now to try to increase the workforce. I celebrate that. Great; if it can get workers in this state to take on those jobs and those responsibilities, I really welcome that. However, someone cannot be trained to drive a road train in four days at Muresk. It is impossible. They might be able to learn to drive a small basic farm truck, but they will not be able to drive the trucks that actually carry grain or wool bales on country roads.

I grew up on a farm; I will not bang on about it. The farming I knew is totally different from farming today. The larger part of the workforce in all of our regional areas is in fact a seasonal workforce. I hear the term "backpackers" thrown around as, "Backpackers are jolly kids going out there and doing all these jobs." The overwhelming majority of these people are not backpackers. They are in fact seasonal workers from overseas who are highly skilled and who come back year after year. Some of those jobs in regional areas are quite menial, not in the sense of being trivial jobs but in the sense that the workers are picking something and putting it in a packing case. Many of those jobs are also highly skilled. I visited five different stations in the Fitzroy Valley region and received a bit of an education on a number of issues. Two-thirds of the workforce on the stations are, in fact, seasonal workers. The larger part of the work involved in drafting the cattle, sorting them and getting them shipped off the properties is carried out by a seasonal workforce. Again, it is skilled work. I know people might look at pictures and think they can do that. I welcome any member from this place jumping in a pen of cattle and trying to draft off the paddy calves from the rest. It is skilled, hard work. I applaud the efforts of the state government to try to get people out into the bush. This should not be a COVID-19 focus; this should be a focus that continues for some time. Get younger people out into regional areas. I think it expands their minds, broadens their backs and gives them a wonderful experience that will hold them in good stead for the rest of their lives. However, those initiatives will simply not deal with the crisis we have right now.

I visited a table grape company in Waroona. This company has invested, literally, millions and millions of dollars in developing the most fantastic horticultural set-up. It exports, again literally, millions of dollars of produce up into Asia—a large part into China. It is a specialist organisation. It managed to get its vines pruned and they are now fruiting. This is an enormously high-value product that will go into the Asian market. There is an absolute real risk that the majority of the crop will rot on the vine. It is actually true: the majority of that crop may rot on the vine. Not only is it a small business—a group of really enterprising people who have just put everything on the line to grow this industry—but also they are looking to invest millions more dollars in this industry. That would obviously benefit local employment. Critically, this organisation cannot get sufficient labour, even though it has tried. It would prefer local workers. It has actively brought in local workers. These are professional, good employers who offer excellent terms of employment. They offer a good salary; food and board is covered. If food, board and pay is combined, it is probably equivalent to \$50 or more an hour. They will transport people there and so on. They have never managed to keep a local worker for a season when it comes down to the pruning and cutting work.

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They have been able to get local workers for other work. There is an enormous risk that their crop, or a large part of it, will rot on the vine. It is not just that that private business will take an enormous financial hit and it is not just that it has lost income; it is that millions and millions of dollars of export income will not come to Western Australia.

Western Australia is a premium exporter of carrots to the rest of the world. Western Australia will probably not be at all this year. Millions of dollars of export income will not come into this state. This is a crisis now. I heard all the good words; I understand the good intent of the state government in relation to trying to get people to do that work, but it simply will not cover it.

When I went up to Broome, I was told by businesspeople there that, yes, they are full. They are as full as they can be, but they are actually half full because they cannot get workers to work in those places. Once again, we have a situation in which businesses are being held back. We need workers to come into the state in an affordable and safe way. No-one thinks that it is open slather. No-one thinks that we should just bring in these people—let them flood in, and let whatever happens happen. No-one thinks that. We know, the Minister for Mines and Petroleum knows, the Minister for Health knows and the Premier knows that we have the capacity to bring large numbers of people into this state in a very safe and controlled way. The art of government is not to say, “No. I don’t care”, or to appear tough and to have a high rating. The art of government is to do the hard things. I do not think that this is hard. I do not think that it is trivial, but I also do not think that it is hard. I think that we have the capacity to bring in these workers. I am certain that if the Minister for Mines and Petroleum—not to inflate his ego too much—sat down, he would work out a way to do this. The government needs to do it because this is serious. This is above politics. It is above inflating popularity by saying how tough the government is being. This is about the wellbeing of the state of Western Australia. It is about the wellbeing of households. Households will not be able to afford fruit and vegetables.

[Member’s time extended.]

Dr D.J. HONEY: This is above ordinary politics. This is about ordinary Western Australian households. I do the shopping in our house every weekend. My wife works full-time; I work full-time. She carries the load and I help where I can. I can tell members that at the moment I can buy tomatoes for about \$4 or \$5 a kilo. Tomatoes will be \$12 a kilo or more soon. At the moment I can get two good heads of broccoli for about \$4 or \$5. Those heads of broccoli will be \$6 each or more soon. The price of lettuce will go up; they will cost \$4 or \$5. At the end of the day, as impecunious as we are as MPs, I reckon we will be able to feed the folk in my house. But I tell members that those people who are doing it tough—there are people who are really struggling at the moment and there are people who have lost their jobs, and all those things—will be the ones who cannot afford to buy fruit and vegetables because they will be just too expensive.

I started on this point: this is going to be, unfortunately, at the feet of this Labor government. It is the government’s conscious choice not to bring seasonal overseas and interstate labour into the state in a safe way that will lead to an explosion in household expenses for basic food items that are produced in the state. I get no joy or pleasure out of that. I have deep empathy for people who are doing it tough and who are doing it hard. Those people should be able to afford fruit and vegetables.

I might also say that typically those people who are coming here as seasonal overseas workers are not coming from the wealthiest parts of the world. They are not idle European kids. Some might be backpackers, but they are a small percentage. They are people who come from poor Pacific islands. In many cases, the income that they earn from fruit and vegetable picking, whether they are working on stations or working on farms driving trucks and tractors, is often the main income for their families in the year. They come over here and they are able to take that money back to their communities and to give their families a better standard of living. This is not just impacting on our small businesses and our communities, and on people who live in households where income is limited and who will be hit right between the eyes by high prices for fruit and vegetables; we are also taking money away from people who come over here to work so that they can take that money back to poor communities, in the majority of cases either north of Australia in Asia, and the Pacific Islands.

There are templates on this. We know that the Northern Territory is currently participating in an experiment. There is the Pacific seasonal worker pilot scheme, which has been ongoing. There is also a trial of the seasonal worker program, as they call it, for the Northern Territory mango industry. The federal government wants to work with state governments to work out safe ways to do this. Again, they do not want open slather. They are going to bring them in. I exhort the state government to make every effort to come up with a way to do this. Get the Minister for Mines and Petroleum to come up with something. Anyone who mentions the laws of physics in question time has to be pretty sharp! But they need to work among themselves to work it out. Come talk to us. There has to be a way that we can safely bring people into this state at an affordable cost so that we are not crippling our agricultural industry, quite literally, from Kununurra to Esperance. It is affecting every part of the state. I strongly urge the state government to take that opportunity and to look after the welfare and wellbeing of this state.

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MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Mines and Petroleum) [6.25 pm]: I want to participate in this debate. I am always amused when the Nationals WA come in here demanding that the government support fly in, fly out workers and demanding that we allow FIFO workers to come and do work in regional Western Australia. Previously, I have heard the National Party criticise FIFO workers, but I have noticed the difference: they criticise FIFO workers who live in Busselton, Albany and Perth, but they do not criticise them if they live in Berlin. I do not understand this. I do not understand why it is okay to FIFO from Europe but it is not okay to give jobs to Western Australians. I also do not understand why, given that they are talking about seasonal workforces, which are used every season, they then say that even though there was a workforce in these locations last season, apparently, there is nowhere for people to stay. I get confused by that. They say that these workers from overseas locations came out and did picking jobs and worked on farms last year, and were accommodated, but, apparently, the accommodation that was used by those European and other fly in, fly out workers is not suitable for people from Perth. I do not get that.

We have had National Party and Liberal Party members talk to us for two hours about this problem. Why did they talk about Coral Bay? I have listened to National Party members on dozens of occasions talk about how they had solved all the problems of workers in Coral Bay during their eight and a half years in government. Apparently, when they said those things, they were not telling us the truth. I do not understand why they want us to cover up for their failure.

Let me make it clear: Western Australia's economy is stronger than that of any other state in Australia because we have had that hard border that has allowed us to have the most economic and personal domestic freedom within Australia. Those two things go together. Members are right: it is not as though nobody is coming into Western Australia; that is not correct. There are processes run by the police service of Western Australia that deal with people who apply to come in, in the same way that there are processes run by the commonwealth government that allow certain Australians and not others who seek to return to this country. There is a process for people who want to come into Western Australia. As members know, one reason our housing construction industry is going so well is that 6 000-odd workers from the resources sector came here at the start of COVID-19 when we started to change the way that FIFO work happened, and then there are those people who have continued to return to WA through our hard border after quarantining. However, there are still dramatic problems with Western Australia's economy, which is hardly a surprise. We are in the middle of a global pandemic and there are still restrictions on industry in Western Australia; therefore, we would expect the economy to continue to be disrupted.

One of the consequences of that disruption is that more people in Western Australia are without a job than we would like. We want to make sure that those people are given the option to take up work. In cooperation with the industry, the government started advertising and job-matching campaigns to assist people in Western Australia to seek employment in the rural sector in regional Western Australia. As the Minister for Community Services pointed out, 12 000 Western Australians have registered as part of that process and are available to fill these positions. As I understand it, over 250 employers have already started to offer employment to those workers. As has been outlined, we are providing assistance to workers to travel, and we are providing accommodation assistance as well, so it is not as though the government of Western Australia has not been listening to industry.

The criticism of the Nationals WA is that the adverts say that regional Western Australia is a nice place to stay. I always thought that that was the National Party's position. I always thought that National Party members said that regional Western Australia was a good place to live, so I do not understand why they say that it is bad for the government of Western Australia to advertise that regional Western Australia is a decent place to go to. The member for Warren-Blackwood pointed out that a business in his constituency says to people, "If you're a surfer, we'll give you flexible hours. If the break's on, go out and do it!" Guess what? That is one of the images in the advertisements that the Western Australian government is running. The very point that the National Party raised is exactly one of the points made in our ads. This shows members the depth of the ridiculous commentary of the National Party.

National Party members also said that it is tough working in the agricultural sector. No question at all, it is absolutely tough work, but that is to say that Western Australia's young people are not able to do hard work. What a ridiculous comment! It is ridiculous to say that Western Australian workers are not up to the task. That is what National Party members tell us. That is ridiculous! I back Western Australian workers and I am happy that these 12 000 people will be supported in seeking agricultural jobs.

There has also been discussion that skilled workers cannot train someone to drive a road train in four days—of course, everybody understands that. But the point is, of course, that the government is trying to assist people to become qualified to drive road trains, and there is a whole series of steps that people will need to take to do that. I also point out to members that if we create a pipeline of skilled workers, that will be to Western Australia's advantage. If we train somebody to drive a small truck, the person driving a small truck will learn to drive a bigger truck. If somebody can be found to replace the person who is driving a large rigid truck, they can go and learn to drive a semi, and the person driving the semi can learn to drive B-double or longer vehicles.

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The training has to start somewhere. The idea that the only solution is to ignore Western Australians and bring in skilled workers from other parts of Australia or the world is ridiculous when we do not have enough jobs for Western Australian workers. More people are unemployed than we want to have unemployed. The good thing about Western Australia is that we have a very high participation rate—we have the highest participation rate in the country. That means that more Western Australians, as a percentage of the population, are either in work or want to work than in any other state in the country. That means that there are more employed Western Australians as a percentage of the population, but it also means that the unemployment rate, which is the percentage of people who are looking for work and do not have a job, is higher. Western Australia has the highest level of employment in the country. The reason we have more unemployed people than we want is that those people know that they can find jobs in Western Australia. The other states, particularly Victoria, have what is called the “discouraged worker syndrome”, which is the theory that people who cannot find a job cease to look for a job. The Australian Bureau of Statistics’ unemployment statistics are not a record of the number of people who are drawing an unemployment benefit; they are an estimate of the number of people who are actively looking for a job. They are two different things. The unemployment rate in Western Australia needs to be carefully analysed when it is compared with the unemployment rates in the other states, because people miss the point that more Western Australians are in work as a percentage of the population than in the other states.

Nonetheless, we still have people who are unemployed and that is tragic. That is why the government is very strongly seeking people to go into the agricultural sector, because it has a clear need. We need to make sure that those workers are available to that industry because, as the member for Cottesloe outlined, the agricultural sector is performing an essential service to our state and we need to support it in every way we can. Part of that is the government supporting the training of the workers who are needed for that industry. As the Premier outlined in question time today, we are making an unprecedented investment in our TAFE system so that workers are able to re-skill and train up for the jobs that are available now, rather than the jobs that they may have had in the past.

The National Party, again, raised the tragic situation of travel agents. There is no question that the situation for travel agents is tragic. Many travel agents continue to operate, but only to give refunds to customers who have cancelled travel. Let us remember that the reason the travel agent industry has gone so bad in Western Australia is that the commonwealth government has banned Australians from leaving Australia for holidays. The largest proportion of people who use travel agents are those who go on long or more expensive trips. The people who do a day trip to Kalgoorlie for work do not, generally speaking, look for a travel agent. Some businesses use travel agents, but, generally speaking, when individuals are making a booking, they do it themselves, either through one of the online national travel agencies or directly with the airline.

Generally speaking, travel agents provide services for people who want to have a holiday. Australians are in the top quartile of global travellers. It is natural that we have lots of overseas holidays. I suspect that everybody who works in this building, not just members of Parliament, has probably had an overseas holiday in the last few years, because that is what Australians do. Naturally, when the commonwealth government bans Australians from travelling overseas for holidays, that will have a direct impact on travel agents. What I am shocked about is that the commonwealth government, having banned overseas travel, has not supported travel agents. We had a previous discussion about that in here and the government is looking at what support it can give. A range of support is already available to all industries in Western Australia and we continue to look at what we can do to support individual industries that have suffered more. But what I am surprised about is that the commonwealth government, which banned overseas travel, did not step up and provide support. That is exactly what I would have expected the commonwealth government to do, and I urge it to do that.

Yesterday, the commonwealth government made its announcement on the supply of gas in Australia. It is a plan that completely ignores Western Australia. It announced that it would construct a 1000-megawatt—or in combination—gas-fired power station in the Hunter Valley to support the electricity system on the east coast. I cannot believe that the commonwealth government has done that. I look forward to the commonwealth government supporting our energy supply system in Western Australia. It is appalling that it has a national energy plan that does nothing at all for Western Australia’s energy systems, and we have exactly the same set of challenges. Of course, we have managed our system better than the east coast, but we still have a range of challenges that will continue to impact the future of our electricity and energy system in Western Australia. It is appalling that the commonwealth government—the Liberal–National Parties—have ignored Western Australia again.

Dr D.J. Honey: You’re doing such a good job you don’t need any help, minister.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: We need to spend money on our system in Western Australia to take account of the change in technologies and I look forward to getting support from the commonwealth government for that. If it wanted to help us more in the transition to the hydrogen economy, we would be very happy for it to do that. If it wanted to support the battery industry in Western Australia, we would be happy for it to do that. It might want to get out of the way and stop delaying a number of mining projects in Western Australia through the duplication with its

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environmental approvals, including the threatened use of Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act approvals to delay the Lynas project in Kalgoorlie—the member for Kalgoorlie is probably not listening to me. That is a real struggle, because that is another opportunity for some highly skilled, highly paid jobs in Western Australia. We look forward to the commonwealth helping us out.

I also want to point out that in July, the Premier of Western Australia launched the “WA Recovery Plan”. I accept that Nationals WA members have not read the recovery plan, but this is now an opportunity for them to read it. The Liberal Party has endorsed our approach to recovery. It has said that our recovery plan is the best approach for Western Australia. It has accepted the strong and stable leadership of the Premier in this state by saying that the plan is the right way forward in Western Australia, so I assume that they have all read the recovery plan because that is a strong endorsement by an opposition for the government’s leadership. I thank them for accepting the Premier’s leadership in our recovery plan. But I urge the Nationals to get on board as well and have a look at the recovery plan and support their friends in the Liberal Party in endorsing the Labor government recovery plan.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I point out to the Nationals that a separate recovery plan has been launched by the Premier for each of the regional areas in Western Australia to make sure that we take into account their community’s specific needs. We understand that the needs in the south west of the state are different from the needs of the people in the Gascoyne, and that the needs of the people in the midwest are different from the needs of the people in the Kimberley. I understand that the Nationals have not read these plans and I accept that, but I urge those members to get on board, like their colleagues in the Liberal Party, and support the government’s leadership in this area because at least the Liberal Party understands that our plan is in the interests of Western Australians. The Liberal Party might be lost on other issues, but at least it recognises that the leadership of Western Australia’s Premier on the WA recovery plan is to be greeted with support.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! You have done so well.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I want to point out that we will continue to roll out the individual aspects of the WA recovery plan, but I am really pleased with one aspect—that is, the \$66 million being invested into renewable energy resources. A lot of that is actually going into regional Western Australia.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Warren–Blackwood!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Horizon Power is rolling out battery energy storage systems across nine communities to increase the amount of renewable energy that can be put into those systems. We will continue to invest in renewable energy for Aboriginal communities as we continue to regularise the power of those communities. It is completely unfortunate that in the eight and a half years of the Liberal government it did not address the challenges of remote Aboriginal communities. As we all remember, the former Premier wanted to shut those communities down. I remember who the Minister for Housing was at the time that the Premier planned to shut them down. It was a disgrace that they wanted to chase Aboriginal people off the land that they had occupied for 60 000 years. The Liberal Party plan was to shut down those communities; that is exactly what it was planning to do.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for North West Central! Thank you.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: It was disgraceful behaviour and it cannot be allowed to stand. Liberal Party members cannot go back and try to rewrite history on this. The Liberal Party was the party of the black-hand adverts on television—we actually remember what they did.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: What is that?

Dr A.D. Buti: You were probably not born then. It was in 1993.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: What was it?

Dr A.D. Buti: They were Liberal Party ads.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: They were not actually Liberal Party ads; they were ads that supported the Liberal Party. It was coordinating them. The member for Dawesville has such a short memory. He comes in here and claims that the Liberal Party was at the forefront of every social reform. When Colin Barnett was opposition leader, he came into this chamber —

Point of Order

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Dr D.J. HONEY: Mr Acting Speaker, you have given me some coaching on the very topic of drifting away from the subject of this debate. I think the minister is certainly drifting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr S.J. Price): Yes, I am sure that the minister will come back to it very shortly.

Debate Resumed

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Thank you very much. I want to address this issue. I recently met with the Pastoralists and Graziers Association and we talked about what it could do to improve the opportunity for recruiting workers into the agricultural sector. Everybody recognises that it is a problem. One of the suggestions that I had, and I will make it here, is that regional councils fly the rainbow flag because there needs to be a message that regional communities accept everybody. Whether agricultural people like it or not, there is a perception problem for the agricultural sector that agricultural industries are not accepting of every Australian.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Everybody knows that various types of people live in every community, but that is not what I am talking about. I am talking about making it clear that the community accepts it. Why does the PGA not include in every publication an endorsement of an inclusive society? That would change people's perceptions. The agricultural sector says that it has trouble recruiting to its industry. I do not say that; that is what its representatives tell me.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: The PGA and WAFarmers have both said to me that they have trouble recruiting workers. Nationals members have all just spent two hours telling us about the trouble that its industries are having recruiting workers.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: I am saying that they should make it clear that every person in Western Australia is welcome in their industry. I have said it directly to the leadership of the PGA and now I am saying it to everybody.

Why does the Pastoralists and Graziers Association not write a column in its journal explaining that it has an inclusiveness attitude? Why do farmers in Kununurra not have a local employment first policy so that they hire Aboriginal people from their own communities and state that in their documentation?

Dr D.J. Honey: They do. Many stations do.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: Many stations do? The member is missing the point. This is about a change in perceptions.

The members of the Nationals WA representing its special interest groups have said that they are having trouble recruiting labour into their industry. What is that definition of madness? It is doing the same thing again and again and expecting a different result. This is a time for change. It is a golden opportunity to change the nature of the community perception of the agricultural sector. This is that opportunity because it will need to recruit a new group of people. Instead of getting fly in, fly out workers from Brazil, the Pacific Islands or Germany, it has an opportunity to get local Western Australian workers to enjoy the advantages of a regional lifestyle. This is its opportunity. These industries need to change their perception.

One of the arguments I heard from the National Party today was that the adverts that were run by the government do not show how hard it is to work in the agricultural sector. Another way to improve the chances of hiring people is to improve the nature of the work. One of the challenges in the agricultural sector is that it has the highest rate of injury and death of any industry in the state. The industry average workers' compensation premium in Western Australia is 2.4 per cent. In the agricultural sector, it is seven per cent. That is three times higher than the industry average and nearly double that of the next highest industry, which is transport. That is the problem. The cost for workers' compensation premiums is high because the industry injures workers at a faster rate than any other industry.

I have talked to the Pastoralists and Graziers Association, the Western Australian Farmers Federation and a range of others in the agricultural sector. There needs to be a change in the performance of the agricultural sector. Let me make it clear: this is about getting a benefit for the agricultural sector. It will get two benefits out of this. Firstly, its costs will be lower. Fewer injuries in an industry means costs are lower. One way to have fewer injuries is to improve efficiency and get more production out of each individual labour component, just as has been done in every other industry. These are genuine ways to improve the performance of the agricultural sector. By the way, improving productivity means that it will get more profit out of its business and change the dynamics. Millions of dollars—I think it is \$20 million—is available to the agricultural sector that can be invested into productivity improvement

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if it were to bring its health and safety behaviour into line with the industry average. It would get \$20 million back. That money is currently going out of the agricultural sector and into the pockets of large insurance companies and then to workers who will not go back into the industry. This is a tragedy for workers who are injured and killed. I got into trouble because somebody said that the rate of injury and death was not six times higher than the mining industry; it was only four times higher than the mining industry. The point is that more people are killed in Western Australia in the agricultural sector than in the mining sector, which has five times more employees. This can be done and the industry will benefit. The agricultural sector will make more money.

One of the people who gave evidence to the upper house inquiry on behalf of the agricultural sector said they were sick of wasting time on health and safety. He corrected himself when he was challenged by one of the committee members during the inquiry, but the point I make is that time spent on health and safety is not wasted. Health and safety is fundamentally of benefit to the industry. One of the interesting things about this is, of course, that the people who work in the agricultural sector, on family farms in particular, are often family members. The biggest benefit will be for the people who sit around the dinner table on a Sunday night. They are the ones who will benefit the most. This is not about costs; it is about savings. Safe workplaces are efficient workplaces. Safe workplaces have less trouble recruiting staff and are more productive. There is \$20 million on the table for the industry by improving its health and safety performance.

The government is very pleased to work with industry to support the Work and Wander Out Yonder campaign, which is an investment of \$1.7 million to encourage Western Australians to embark on working holidays in regional Western Australia. We are highlighting job opportunities through Seek, Gumtree and Studium. As I said, 12 000 registered jobseekers are on the platform and over 250 employers are now using that database to try to select extra staff. There is no question that we are all changing because of COVID-19, but that is to be expected. This is a global pandemic that has changed everything. I accept that the agricultural sector is changing too, but the government is damned interested in partnering with industry to make those changes.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA) [6.55 pm]: I have only a few minutes left today to contribute to this motion put forward by the Nationals WA through the leader, Hon Mia Davies, member for Central Wheatbelt. I want to highlight the section of the motion that refers to volunteers and outline why they are important in regional areas. We know that volunteers are very important to many local communities. Organisations such as St John Ambulance in Western Australia quite uniquely, and across the whole of the country, rely greatly on volunteers. They help to keep the community safe. St John is a very important volunteer organisation in rural communities.

Perhaps the best way to highlight just how important volunteers are to our communities is to outline a little story about one person—a friend of mine. It is from a publication in the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council from November 2016. It talks about a gentleman called Peter Waterhouse. I quote —

This is a story about Peter Waterhouse, the people of the NACC NRM region, and the amazing community spirit that exists out here in the bush.

Both a generous catalyst and recipient of that community spirit, Peter Waterhouse, through his many volunteering efforts, has become more than a pillar in his local community.

His community contributions have come over many years, in many ways, such as through his work with the Moore Catchment Council, Shire of Perenjori, North Central Malleefowl Preservation Group, Latham Bowls Club, or while serving as a St John Ambulance emergency volunteer and contributor to the local bush fire brigade.

I might add that he was also a very keen local photographer. I continue —

These are only a few of the groups for which he has made a significant contribution over the years.

Devastatingly, Peter was recently diagnosed with liver cancer, and yet he has still continued to make his contribution to the community, as evidenced by him being on St Johns Ambulance first aid duties at the recent Blues for the Bush event at Charles Darwin Reserve.

With the current, and stressful harvest season now in full swing, —

Bear in mind that this article was from November 2016 —

along came an opportunity for that famed rural community spirit to also come into full swing, with the local community jumping at an opportunity to say “Thank You” in a very special way.

Hundreds of people embodied that spirit last weekend when, to show their support, they turned-up on mass and in a military-precision-like-operation, went about harvesting almost all of Peter’s property—in a single day.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 16 September 2020]

p6031b-6056a

Ms Mia Davies; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Simone McGurk; Dr David Honey;
Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Shane Love

NACC Natural Resource Management Officer Heather Legge who was at the property and witnessed this amazing community effort in action and said she was “amazed and humbled” by the effort.

“About 1,100 hectares were harvested by the community between about 5am and 4pm. There were 15 headers, 20 trucks, 5 road trains, several chaser bins and even an aeroplane,” she said.

“The scale of the operation, and logistics was a sight to behold. The local CBH bin even opened their doors especially for Peter’s wheat. The local IGA donated bread, fruit and soft drinks for everyone on the day, an entire tanker of fuel was out there to re-fill everyone after the day and there were so many people from all over the place who turned-up with something to contribute.

“Neighbours and people from far and wide gave up their Sunday, provided their machinery, and their own precious time and that of their workers as well. There were also many hands in the kitchen making sandwiches, and a ‘pop-up’ childcare centre was practically in operation at Peter’s house.

“Later there was a fabulous celebration at the Latham Bowls Club at which there must have been more than 200 people. Many got a bit teary during the thank you speeches.”

Heather said it was Peter’s son, Blake, who had organised the day’s massive effort despite having many obstacles, such as no phone reception.

That is something that has since been cured. The article continues —

“This incredible display of community spirit and generosity has taken a huge stress off Peter, but he still has some of the smaller old paddocks around the old house to enjoy harvesting in his own time ...”

Heather said Peter was overwhelmed by both the effort and generosity of his community.

I am sad to say that, last Monday morning, at home with his wife, Sue, Peter lost his battle with liver cancer and passed away peacefully, also surrounded by his five children. I think that story illustrates how important volunteers are in communities such as those we represent. As we journey through this COVID experience and we move from a time when we are talking about an acute emergency response to the realisation that we are in this for a longer period, we need to make preparations, considerations and plans within the community to support volunteers, and ensure that communities remain healthy and people can remain whole and happy throughout this quite devastating period that we are all facing.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.01 pm
