

## HOUSING SOLUTIONS

### *Motion*

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [4.00 pm]: I move —

That the house implores the McGowan Labor government to take a statewide, holistic look at the housing crisis and consider innovative solutions to prevent the housing crisis from worsening.

As we know, there is a housing crisis. There is a shortage of regional accommodation, builders, workers' accommodation in regional areas and skilled labour. That shortage of skilled labour is being accentuated, as we know, because of this government's changes to the immigration arrangements for skilled migrants in 2017, which has led to a backlog of housing workers required right across the state. From the Kimberley to the Pilbara and down as far as the great southern, the goldfields and Esperance, and all points in between, there is pressure on housing stock and shortages of accommodation. Opportunities for economic growth are going begging because of a lack of houses, workers' accommodation and workers generally. Our state is growing, but the housing situation is a slow-moving train wreck, with a government that refuses to acknowledge that there is a problem and thinks that if it makes an announcement, the problem goes away. This government's own decision-making in the past to slash the number of social houses, the availability of skilled labour and the migration of skilled labour into the state has led to this shortage of both houses to house that labour and labour to build the houses. It is a wicked problem that this government has helped contribute to.

I turn to rental housing stock at the moment. I read a report from the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia about rental housing stock. The CEO of REIWA, Cath Hart, was talking about the situation in Perth. In this report from 1 March 2023, Ms Hart says —

“Perth's vacancy rate is currently at 0.7 per cent, during a balanced market it usually sat between 2.5 and 3.5 per cent,” ...

This means that there is very, very little housing available. We hear stories of people who are unable to find accommodation. When the shadow cabinet took a trip to the northern growth corridor last week, some councillors and businesspeople told me stories of people living in cars in various car parks throughout their own city. They are people who previously had accommodation and have work and families. There are families living in cars and just moving from one car park to the other so that they do not attract the authorities' undue attention. This situation is striking right across the metropolitan area and the regions. In the report Ms Hart goes on to say —

... according to rental bonds data, in the past two years nearly 19,000 rental properties have been removed from the rental pool ...

I suppose that is because people are coming back to the state and taking occupation of their own houses. These people might have had a house they had let when they were temporarily out of the state. There also could be people simply taking advantage of capital growth and moving a house into the market. As we know, houses do not sit very long in the market. Despite interest rate rises, houses in Perth are still selling quite strongly. Ms Hart goes on say —

“Delays in the building industry have also played a role as many tenants who took advantage of COVID building incentives are still waiting for their home to be completed and need to retain their rental accommodation ...

As I say, people cannot build houses because they cannot get the labour and they cannot get the labour because they do not have the houses to put the labourers in. In the meantime, there are all these houses sitting half built in Perth. I am told it goes in a cycle. There is a big demand for concrete slabs, so there is a shortage of grano workers to put down the concrete slab. Then there is the experience of putting the bricks together. In Perth, most of the houses are double brick with what is called a stick roof, so a bespoke roof is made on those bricks. There is a shortage of bricklayers. The price to lay a brick went to \$3.50 a brick, which is well over the long-term price for bricklayers. A lot of the brickwork has now been done, so the emphasis is on getting the roofs on houses, and there is an extreme shortage of roof carpenters. I am told that some of the brickies are now not so heavily employed. I will get to that at the end of this sad story about the unbalanced market we are in at the moment. The price for roof carpentry has moved from \$20 per square metre about two to three years ago to \$60, so it has tripled. The cost of labour and the cost of getting the roof on has tripled, not to mention that there has been a shortage of timber and virtually every component of houses as we have moved through this cycle. A lot of housing stock is sitting half completed, a lot of people are sitting in rental accommodation waiting for their house to be completed and there is an inability to bring in labour.

In the past when we have had a situation like this, there has been an inflow of labour from the eastern states into Western Australia because, typically, we seem to run at a bit of a countercycle to some of the eastern states. At times when they have had downturns, we have been in a bit of a boom over here, so it has been possible to attract

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staff to Western Australia. For the reasons I have outlined, that being the fact that there is nowhere for labourers to stay and also because of the strong building demand in the eastern states, there is not the impetus to bring them in. We cannot seem to attract them. This is just unfolding slowly; as I say, it is a train wreck unfolding in front of our eyes, with a government that does not seem to understand that this situation needs to be addressed.

REIWA also points out that there is a need for about 18 000 to 20 000 houses to be brought on to the market to compensate for those that have been lost to the rental market because, as I have said, of people taking up opportunities here and the need to keep up with population growth, which we hope will continue in the future. The government's response has been abysmal in the sense that we have seen no real action to attract labour, to find accommodation and to put a cure on the situation. In some ways, the government caused some of this because of the overstimulation of the market at a particular time. That led to a very large number of building starts under the stimulus. As I will point out later in the final part of my speech, we now have very few housing approvals. It is a strange situation; we have all these half-built houses, but there are very few in the pipeline after them. We will not see a quick solution to any of our problems in providing housing.

This is not just happening in Perth; as I said, it is right across Western Australia. The country rental situation is also dire. In the past, I have highlighted an experience in my own electorate of people having to leave their communities because they cannot get a house to live in. They go somewhere else. They will end up in a larger community or they will go and live with a family or somewhere else where they can find some shelter. It will probably be in Perth or somewhere else, but not in the small community that needs their skill, whether they be the local mechanic, the local hairdresser or even the local chemist, who I am aware left town in one of the cases. These situations are manifesting across Western Australia. The Real Estate Institute of Western Australia is a great source of information on these matters because, of course, that is the agency that helps to rent out the houses and it seems to have a good idea of what is going on around the state. Its report in the *Farm Weekly* on 24 January outlines some of the situations that are occurring in many regional centres. The report indicates that very limited stocks are available in places such as Broome, Albany, Bunbury, Busselton, Esperance, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie. At a time when we are finding it hard to get people to invest in and build and put on the market long-term rentals, the government is reviewing the Residential Tenancies Act 1987. That concerns people who potentially are thinking about investing in rental accommodation because there is uncertainty about what the legal position will be between the landlord and tenant in the future. Comments have been made by members of the government that people should be able to have pets without the approval of their landlord and should be able to make modifications to the house. Those types of things are very worrying to people who are thinking about whether to make an investment in a property or just put their money into the share market or superannuation or some other vehicle. They are real concerns for people. Those types of considerations that the government is reportedly going through are very worrying to people who are potentially putting their life savings on the line in building or buying a rental property and then putting that out to the market with the uncertainty of what this government is going to change with the legal situation in this state.

Nothing has changed since that report came out in January highlighting some of the shortages. A refresh of the *Farm Weekly* in March outlines the same types of problems with the figure that between 18 000 and 20 000 rental houses will be needed as demand continues to exceed supply and regional areas are feeling the pressure the most, with a handful of rentals listed on most markets. Persistent inflation and wages struggling to catch up are causing a problem for affordability and for families looking to rent in those markets. We know, too, that many houses are in another market altogether, the Airbnb market. I was in the south a couple of weeks ago in the member for Bunbury's electorate at a regional development conference and I spoke to many mayors and local governments in the area who said that there are houses available, but because of the need to cater for holiday-makers, many of those houses are not there for the people who need them. There is an allocation problem as well. That sort of problem will not be improved if the government threatens to bring in tenancy changes that will worry the owners of the properties even more. It will drive them into platforms such as Airbnb rather than putting their house on the market for long-term rental. That is a real issue going forward.

In the state at the moment there is tremendous opportunity in all sorts of industries in many regions because of the state's position as a supplier of critical minerals. At Eneabba, in my electorate, Iluka Resources is building a \$1 billion refinery—the only one of its type in Australia, where rare earths will be processed and it will add value to the product. It will kick off a new range of industry in that area. But again, there is no housing, so what to do? It must be workers' camps. A town such as Eneabba, which has relied on the mining and mineral sands industries since inception in the 1970s, risks not having the ability to grow from that \$1 billion investment and the hundreds of jobs it will create because no land to speak of is available in the town. Land supply is another issue that needs to be taken seriously by this government. In every town we visit, we hear stories that DevelopmentWA is either inactive or it drip feeds the blocks onto the market in a way that maximises the price, but it is not enabling the state to capture the opportunities that exist in various areas of the state, from some of the new ministries and new opportunities that should be driving growth for those regions, simply because there are no houses—whether it be in Port Hedland, where there is a real need for serious investment, or a change in the way of doing business for DevelopmentWA to ensure the market

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demand is met. We know that there is a voluntary buyback in the Port Hedland west end improvement scheme. That is having a limited effect. I understand that it has attracted about only a 50 per cent take-up.

One of the reasons is: where will the people go? They can stay there in a long-term rental, but if they have to stay there, they are not thinking there is a need to sell. People do not sell unless they want to leave, basically. That town is unable to grow its permanent population because there is not the availability of land, but that is only one town. Dalwallinu in my electorate is not exactly what people would think of as a growth community; except that it is, because it services the mining industry. It is the last jumping-off point of the wheatbelt before moving into the mining provinces. Because of that, many industries are located there that service the mining industry. There is everything from plastic tank manufacturers to exhaust manufacturers for large earthmoving equipment and concreters et cetera. That town has never been able to get the land supply it needs to either grow its industry properly or provide accommodation for the local workforce, despite having tried for a long time to have it supported by government. We face a time when we have these opportunities, but we will not be able to capitalise on those opportunities if there is not accommodation available for people who want to move into the area.

I saw a media release today announcing that the government will invest \$80 million in the headworks fund to boost infill and regional land supply. That is \$80 million across the entire state. Seriously? Is \$80 million the best the government could do to invest in what is a crisis situation? I was in the member for North West Central's electorate the other day and we were looking at the situation in Kalbarri, where this government had promised workers' accommodation. That \$80 million is actually only \$40 million for regional WA and \$40 million for the metropolitan area. A lot of that \$40 million allocation would be sucked up into that development and also in Exmouth where I understand the regional headworks are extremely prohibitive and are holding up the development of much-needed workers' accommodation. It is \$80 million across the whole state to address a crisis. The government is sitting on billions and billions of dollars—I think it is \$11 billion to \$13 billion in combined surpluses in the past couple of years—and \$80 million is the best it can do.

I have had the Premier as Treasurer pouring scorn on the opposition because it put forward a \$1 billion headworks fund, but that is the sort of investment needed to unlock opportunities for Western Australia. The opposition proposed a fund of \$1 billion. Mind you, that fund is over 10 years, so it would not be \$1 billion into the market today; we do not want to cause the type of splurges seen since this government overstimulated the market. We want a steady growth. Nonetheless, we have to understand that we need to unlock opportunities in various communities across the state. Allocating \$100 million across the state for regional communities to grow is not a huge investment. That would be \$1 billion over 10 years to cure one of the most wicked problems in Western Australia at the moment—the cost and lack of supply of housing. If we step back from that, it is actually stopping us from growing. It is stopping us from unlocking approaching opportunities for many communities around our state.

Kalbarri, one of those town affected by cyclone Seroja, is in the North West Central electorate; it used to be in my electorate until a few weeks before the cyclone, and I still have a great deal of connection with Kalbarri. I recently visited with the member for North West Central and was shocked to see how many empty blocks are still there. I saw the house of a man whom I had spoken to before; I know he has spoken to members of government, but he is still living under a tarp, and that situation has not been resolved. I understand that throughout midwest areas affected by cyclone Seroja, probably half the people who lost their houses still have no house two years on. That situation has not been adequately addressed. The state and federal governments combined have put up over \$100 million in investment under the cyclone Seroja recovery arrangements, but we know from questions asked in the other place that very little of that money has actually got onto the ground. There will be further activity on this from the opposition over the next weeks as we head towards the two-year anniversary of cyclone Seroja. The opposition seeks an understanding of how poorly this government has handled the response and how little it has cared about making sure that people affected by Seroja are in a recovery situation.

Apart from Kalbarri, one town badly affected was Mingenew, one of those communities in the north of my electorate in which we have seen a hollowing out of the community since the cyclone hit. Many of these towns have had population decline as people have been unable to re-establish their lives in the communities. This is despite the fact that some time ago Mingenew offered blocks of land for sale for \$1. In fact, nine blocks were put on the market in 2020 with prices ranging from as little as \$1 with a condition that development would begin within two years. It looks as though those blocks will have to be handed back. I am looking at a report from the *Midwest Times* from earlier this week that contains the words of shire president Gary Cosgrove; it reads —

... TC Seroja and COVID had played a part in delays, he said the lack of tradespeople willing to come to regional areas had been the biggest stumbling block for the would-be new home-builders in Mingenew, pointing to State Government building grants as the cause of the disruptions.

The article goes on to say —

People rushed to take advantage of the twin benefits—leaving the low-interest marketplace at risk of overheating and, Mr Cosgrove says, having the unintended consequence of leaving the regions high and dry.

As a result of some of that overstimulation in certain markets —

**Ms M.J. Davies:** Unintended but foreseeable.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Unintended but foreseeable—that is a very good way of putting it. It certainly should have been foreseen. It has been very difficult in the midwest in particular to get those communities back on their feet because of the shortage of, and competition for, labour and a lack of coordination to achieve an outcome by providing accommodation and avenues for builders to go there. At the time of the cyclone, I was contacted by a number of builders who said that they wanted to prioritise going to the midwest; they asked how they should go about it. All I could do was point them towards the state and local governments—mainly, to the state government—and say that they have to deal with them to integrate, get established, get their people housed, get works off the ground and help. I doubt, in the end, that too many of them could help because I do not think that there was any real level of coordination to make that occur. We saw an opportunity in which builders wanted to come and help, but due to circumstances and a lack of interest, those builders went and did other things. Also, I have got to say that there was a pretty poor performance by a number of insurance companies that did not come to the party in a timely manner either. It is still a challenging situation in the midwest because of a range of factors, and it needs the attention of government.

As I said, the member for North West Central and I were at the site of the much-vaunted Kalbarri worker accommodation. It was announced that the land was being released on 7 March 2022, over a year ago now, and registrations of interest were being taken for this wonderful block of suitable land, but the land appears to be a bit of a drainage hole that needs a fair bit of remediation work, which will soak up a fair bit of the \$40 million allocated over the entire state. These pipes run in from the road, the caravan park and all around it and come into a thing that I would characterise as a sump, which would be a bit problematic if worker accommodation is to be established on that site. Whoever was clever enough to pick that site perhaps should have walked the site instead of looking at a map and making a judgement that it was appropriate. Nonetheless, it is the only site that has been selected.

On 16 August, an announcement was made that modular housing provider Petra Westkey Modular Housing was named the preferred proponent. It was said that the Perth-based company had been selected and would help support local businesses by providing worker accommodation. I understand that the government said at the time that it would “enter contract negotiations with the proponent”. These were comments attributed to the Minister for Lands, who is sitting here now, so maybe he can give us an update on the situation in Kalbarri when he gets up, no doubt, to attack everything the opposition has said. I am sure the member for North West Central and her constituents would like to know what is being done to assist that community to get back on its feet two years after the cyclone devastated it and much of the midwest communities in its trail. We know that a contract negotiation was underway. Perhaps the minister can update us about whether that contract has been finalised, whether there is a design and whether there is a start date. When will site works commence? When will the worker accommodation be delivered or is he just hoping that time will tick along, people will forget and just move on, and it will fall off the radar? We know that that can happen to projects that sit around for a long time before they are addressed. I will be looking forward to the minister giving us an understanding of that situation.

I will speak more generally around the midwest. I spoke before about the opportunities and also the problems that exist in that area. One of the towns that has experienced real pressure and real problems in providing accommodation for its workers is Dongara. Dongara sits at the epicentre, if you like, of a vast amount of new projects in the Perth basin. Huge gas fields have been discovered and are being developed, so there is a construction boom at the moment, as members could imagine. That is obviously not the basis for long-term population growth, but it will create decades of work for local people in that community. However, there is no long-term rental housing in the town. Where will those workers be housed? Unless someone does something to encourage development in Dongara, it will not be in Dongara. It will not be in the local communities in that area, like it should be. Yet again, it will result in a fly-in fly-out situation, as we have seen develop in many parts of state. That would be a tragedy for a town that has had an affinity with and a history in natural gas going back to the 1970s. It was the very first real supply of reticulated natural gas in Western Australia. The Parmelia gas pipeline was put in place and dedicated to providing gas to the metropolitan area. For 50-odd years Dongara has been a source of gas for the south and it will continue to be a source of gas for the south, but some of the mining projects that are trying to find alternatives to diesel and other dirty fuels will also be making use of that gas supply. The local communities will not be able to grow and make the most of that opportunity if there is not a concerted effort to make land available and encourage investment in those areas. That is why the earlier point I made about the Nationals WA and Liberal Party’s policy on headworks is so important. We need to allow those communities to have the chance to grow and to make use of those opportunities, not stifle their opportunities, as we have seen happen so often in the past. This is happening not just with the development

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of gas plants. There is also talk of things like urea being produced out near Three Springs. That has an important knock-on effect with agriculture because the carbon footprint of that urea will be magnitudes less than the carbon footprint of the urea imported from places like China and Russia. In the future, that will become increasingly important in agriculture as farmers come to understand how their carbon cycle works and how they can help decarbonise our industries going forward.

There are some tremendous opportunities in the midwest around not just Geraldton and Oakajee—Oakajee is also in my electorate just to the north of Geraldton. There is an opportunity there for significant growth in hydrogen but we have seen very little attempt by this government to energise that. It seems to have bypassed that opportunity countless times and it is still prevaricating around the commencement of the road works needed there. It is not helpful at all beyond platitudes, nice statements and having little conferences et cetera. Very little is actually happening to get that project off the ground. Again, we need to make sure that when that happens, land is available in Geraldton and the surrounding areas and hopefully private developers will be assisted to help deliver on the future for that area.

I turn my attention now to another major regional centre that is experiencing growth and opportunities. We know that lithium and other essential minerals are being found in the goldfields and that developments are taking place to ensure another major arm to the mining province out there can move from gold and nickel and into a range of other things including lithium and, down the track—getting back to that interplay with agriculture—potash. This government has had a woeful track record in encouraging the potash industry in Western Australia. It refuses to listen to the needs of that industry. As a result, those projects that could take place are not growing and moving on.

I am looking here at a very good little snapshot of the situation in Kalgoorlie–Boulder titled *Kalgoorlie–Boulder land & housing position paper* published in December 2022 by the Kalgoorlie–Boulder Chamber of Commerce and Industry. These are the people who are living the dream in Kalgoorlie, battling with the skill shortages and the unavailability of land. The executive summary in its first sentence reads —

**Kalgoorlie–Boulder is experiencing a severe land and housing shortage which is having tangible, negative impacts on businesses, residents and the broader liveability of this regional centre ...**

An estimated \$3.7 billion of major projects are underway or in advanced planning in Kalgoorlie–Boulder and a further \$2.7 billion across the Goldfields ...

The degree to which the region and Western Australia can take advantage of this investment and economic opportunity is however constrained by a severe land and housing shortage in Kalgoorlie–Boulder. The residential market is currently characterised by:

- **Extremely low rental availability ...**
- **Low land availability**, with new serviced land limited to an estimated 60 lots over the next 12–24 months;
- **Constrained long term land supply ...**
- **Limited infill development ...**

All those things in Kalgoorlie–Boulder are leading to a lack of opportunity to take up all the economic growth that is on offer at the moment in the goldfields. The paper further states —

The lack of housing availability is contributing to a range of economic and social challenges, such as:

- Business viability ...
- Population retention ...
- Visitor attraction ...
- Social issues, with community and government service needs increasing to unsustainable levels

A survey was done on the members of that organisation with the vast majority, well over 60 per cent, reporting that the accommodation shortage is affecting their workforce. Only a very minor number said that there has been no effect at all. They were asked, “Has your business experienced resignations or rejections of employment offers as a result of the lack of accommodation options?” Again, the majority replied yes. We are seeing tangible effects felt by business in regional areas, and I am sure in metropolitan areas as well. I know that there are plenty of businesses in Perth that struggle to find labour. But in regional areas like Kalgoorlie, it is a long drive to another major centre where a person might find accommodation. If a person living in Perth cannot find work in or near the suburb in which they live, they can hop on the train or drive to another suburb and find something. That opportunity does not exist in many regional areas, except through the FIFO way that does not actually lead to community development.

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This situation is similar in many other towns. As I said, I attended a regional development conference in Bunbury at which the Minister for Regional Development spoke. It was highlighted to me that there are vacancy shortages in the Bunbury area. Cath Hart said that a vacancy rate of 2.5 or 3.5 per cent is a pretty balanced state in which to be, but in the Greater Bunbury area the vacancy rate is 0.4 per cent! In Bunbury, just as in Kalgoorlie, there is a shortage of rental accommodation. Albany has had an 800 per cent increase in what is known as internal migration. People are moving to Albany from the metropolitan area, basically. That in itself means that there will be pressures on the housing stock in that town as well going forward.

We need to take advantage of this unique time when we are seeing people leave the Perth area. In the Nationals and on this side, we always look at trying to develop regional areas. At the moment, we have an opportunity with this internal migration. People are leaving Perth and heading off to communities in country areas. I note that one of the areas most affected is Exmouth, member for North West Central. That is one of the areas with the highest rates. In my electorate, Chittering and Toodyay are other areas that have picked up a lot of that migration moving forward. It is a great pity to me that the midwest communities I spoke of earlier have not been able to benefit in the same way. As we know, there has been a lack of effort to address the situation that affects them at the moment.

We know that there are construction issues in the metropolitan area and difficulty in actually finishing off some of the housing projects. The fact is that we have not been able to attract the same level of interstate workers as we normally would expect to at such a time of busy construction work and that has led to a shortage of skilled labour and workers. One of the concerns coming from that is that with the big rush to build houses, some of the building standards might have fallen away a bit. We know that Western Australia is a state that does not have mandatory building inspections. There is no mandated compliance. The Minister for Commerce, through the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, is responsible for that. We feel that needs to be examined to make sure that the housing being provided during this time of pressure is actually of a good standard.

From my own point of view, I had an experience going back to about 2014. I was working with a constituent of mine who had a house built in Lower Chittering, just outside Perth, by a builder who did not do a very good job at all. In fact, he did a very shoddy job of building the house. The bank that was financing the house paid without making sure that there was an inspection or having any idea that the house was being built properly. That house cost just under half a million dollars to build. After it had been completed, it was found that it would take another half a million dollars to actually fix it. This person then thought, “Oh well, we have home indemnity insurance. We will go to that, and that will cover it.” However, at that stage, home indemnity insurance went to a value of only \$100 000, with less than \$5 000 excess. An individual would get policy cover from QBE Insurance that would say a house was worth \$490 000, so that individual might think that policy would cover them for \$490 000, but it would not; it would cover them for only \$100 000. That constituent’s case was brought to this Parliament a number of times and to the attention of the former Minister for Commerce—the Deputy Premier at one stage—and the then Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Commerce, the member for Wanneroo. Largely as a result of that, we saw the government at least double the value of home indemnity insurance to \$200 000. That was a good step that resulted from that constituent in Lower Chittering having a manifestly inadequate insurance payout for the situation they found themselves in. They are not a builder. They did not know that the house was not fit until after they had moved in and it started to fall apart almost immediately.

There was another constituent of mine, whose situation I have raised in this place before. I am not going to use their name because I think they have moved on in life. They were building a house in the Shire of Gingin, about 80 kilometres north of Perth. At the time, the builder was running short of cash and hit them up for a very large progress payment. They paid far more than they should have done at that stage. Their bank advanced the money. The builder then went broke and, of course, all materials onsite were retrieved by the supplier. They were left with a house that was not even bricked up; it was only half bricked. Their family of four was living in a tin shed in Gingin in 40-degree heat in summer. Again, all they could get was \$100 000, which clearly was not enough. That was another situation in which regulation failed people who needed some protection when things went wrong.

I am just about to run out of time, so I will finish off. I go back to the start of the discussion about the big boom in construction that followed the twin stimuli of the federal and state first home owner grants. That led to housing starting to skyrocket. Off the top of my head, there were about 20 000 building starts, which was a significant increase on what would normally be the case. There was an article titled “Perth housing crisis: Approvals hit 40-year low as families battle to get roof overhead”. What we are seeing in Western Australia is that approvals are coming forward at this time of stress in the housing system, but once we get past that and the current backlog has been cleared, there is not going to be much housing constructed. There will be a 40-year low in housing construction approvals. That is a terrible cycle that we seem to have entered into. We will have too many houses being built for our industry to cope with and then we will have too few houses being built to house the people who will be coming here. That is actually pretty worrying for the government. It is a prediction that the government should take note of. If housing approvals hit a 40-year low at a time when the population is increasing and there is already rental stress, the government should be alarmed. It should act to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place. I finish off now

by condemning the government, but by imploring the government to act to rectify this situation and provide some continued development of housing stock in Western Australia.

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [4.48 pm]: I rise to support the motion —

That the house implores the McGowan Labor government to take a statewide, holistic look at the housing crisis and consider innovative solutions to prevent the housing crisis from worsening.

As the Leader of the Opposition stated, we certainly have a crisis right across the state when it comes to housing. It is impacting a range of different sectors. Today, we heard about the implications for the international education sector. The most important implications are for the people who are struggling to find a place to live. When we have new building approvals at near record low levels, severe skilled labour shortages, a critical housing shortage, rising costs, rising interest rates and the state's biggest home builder announcing that it will not write new contracts, it points to a crisis.

It is interesting that new building approvals, as the Leader of the Opposition stated, were at about 40-year lows; they were at a level similar to what they were when the Premier announced a stimulus in 2020 and raised some very real concerns about the state of the building sector. The government's spin on this is extraordinary, because we now hear from the Premier that it is a sign of a strong economy. We argue that it is also a sign of a Premier who is becoming increasingly out of touch with the challenges that Western Australians are facing on the ground. Housing is a key example of the government failing to respond to and address the key hardships that Western Australians are facing. The clear response from the Premier to date is that it is a sign of a booming economy. Again, it falls well short of understanding the challenges that Western Australians face. We are seeing a lot of people out there who are homeless and bunking in with relatives or living in their cars. We recently met with a mother and her baby in Wanneroo who were living in her car under very challenging circumstances. These are not unique stories to any member in this place and I certainly do not doubt that every electorate office is being challenged by these very real concerns.

The constraint on the sector has the potential to impact affordability and availability of housing in Western Australia for decades to come. It is obviously critical for all Western Australians. Some new census data out today showed more than 2 300 people in Western Australia in August 2021 were sleeping in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out—otherwise known as sleeping rough. For a state as prosperous as WA, it is appalling that we have seen such an increase since 2016. The cohort of people who are sleeping rough has increased by about 114 per cent. This is in significant contrast to the wealth that our Premier boasts about, with the fact over the last couple of years the state has enjoyed an \$11 billion surplus. Apparently the surplus is the envy of other states, but we also have the unenviable title of being the rough sleeper capital of the country, with the highest number of rough sleepers here in Western Australia. Over 1 800 social housing homes are effectively vacant, boarded up and in need of maintenance. We have less social housing stock than we did in 2017. Our figures indicate we have 300 fewer stock. Some updated figures reported in *The West Australian* today indicate it may be 600 fewer stock. While we are here, the minister boasts of 1 000 new homes in this Parliament, but it does not take into account the 1 300 that were sold off when this government first came to office.

On the ground, the Perth rental vacancy rate has dropped to 0.7 per cent and median weekly rent has increased by \$100 a week to \$550. The social housing waitlist has about 34 000 people, with 9 000 on the priority list desperately seeking homes. The Reserve Bank of Australia's 10 straight interest rate hikes are certainly hurting and we understand that the cost of living is a significant issue. Over the last year, Western Australians have sat anxiously waiting every month to hear what the RBA's decision will be and how much more they will need to pay to stay in their home. Only recently, the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia released its annual affordability report, which shows how much interest rate rises are starting to bite in Western Australia. The report shows that families now require more than one-third of their income to make loan repayments, and, sadly, more shock is about to come for those who will come off fixed-term loans later this year.

The cost of living is a very significant issue. It is front of mind for the opposition and that is why we recommended that this government invest \$300 million to support the not-for-profit sector for the challenges that are expressed right across the board. Housing availability and affordability is a driver of the pain that many Western Australians are feeling in their hip pockets. The cost of bills, food, fuel and mortgages continue to rise, but we hear from the government only platitudes and empty promises. Perth renters are specifically suffering. The REIWA data reveals that median rent on Perth houses is now 30 per cent higher than it was two years ago, and median apartment rent is 25 per cent higher. With vacancy rates at 0.5 per cent in Perth and rents staying high, struggling renters are experiencing just another horrid year in this key area under the cost of living. As a result, Perth is now the third most expensive capital city in Australia to rent, behind Sydney and Brisbane. House rents in Perth have risen sharply for the fifth successive quarter with the strongest quarterly growth in two years. Domain's rental report from March 2023 shows that the average weekly rental for a house in Perth rose by 4.8 per cent to \$535 and 12.3 per cent year on year, which is the second-highest increase in the nation's capitals. This marks the longest stretch of continual housing

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rental growth recorded in Perth. We know rental conditions appear to be more competitive for houses, with quarterly growth for houses more than double the pace of units. This reflects the underlying demographic trends with housing preferences and availability of rental supply between property types.

Average rent at record highs and vacancies at all-time lows is seeing Western Australians now more urgently seeking social housing. As I said, there are 34 000 people on the social housing waitlist and 9 000 on the priority list. These figures are very alarming. They are further proof that more Western Australians are doing it tough, and plunging for the first time into housing stress and poverty. We in the Liberal and National Parties are very concerned about not only the level of homelessness and the figure of over 3 200 people sleeping rough, but also the new and expanded cohort of working poor. This government has failed to boost housing stock for our most vulnerable. Instead we have actually gone backwards. The latest figures indicate that there are now at least 300 fewer social housing homes. *The West Australian* reports about 600 fewer, but according to our latest figures, there were about 1 857 vacant social housing properties in January. These properties are sitting vacant because the government is incapable of addressing the maintenance backlog or beginning new projects.

An example is the dilapidated social housing units in North Beach. We asked questions about that last week. An announcement was made for a tender to demolish those 30 units. Although there is a tenant in one of them, we understand that settlement happened last year. It is quite clear that much more needs to be done to urgently ensure that the government's social housing stock is best utilised. These units went out for comment in August 2018, so to see so little progress five years later is really damning of a government that has lost its way. The Minister for Housing claims that the site works are expected to be completed in mid to late 2023, yet that is what was said about the Common Ground project in East Perth. That project was meant to be completed in mid-2023, but we have now learnt that it could take another two years.

Considering that there are more than 33 000 people on the social housing waitlist, including those who are considered to be a priority, the government cannot afford to continue to drag its feet on this issue. We cannot afford further delays to projects like Common Ground and the North Beach housing units. There are reports of working families living in their cars because it is virtually impossible to find affordable rental properties. Meanwhile, the Premier thinks that the housing crisis is a sign of a strong economy. That is an absolute insult to families and individuals who have been on the social housing waitlist for years, waiting to put a roof over their head. The government has had six years to develop and deliver a plan for social housing, but instead it has been left scrambling to build new dwellings and repair old ones in an inflated market.

The issue of housing affordability is obviously a significant one and, arguably, is an economic failure on the part of the government—but not according to the Premier, who believes it is a sign of strength and robustness in the state's economy and has called it a success. Talk about being out of touch! We have seen about 100 building companies collapse over the last 12 months. Tell that to their staff, who are faced with no work and cost-of-living pressures. Tell that to the Western Australian families who are paying both rent and a mortgage on an unfinished home. They are being pushed to the brink of financial ruin. I do not think these people would agree with the Premier.

I have met with many building industry stakeholders, including the Housing Industry Association, the Master Builders Association and some of the smaller builders, and the message is clear: this issue is not going away anytime soon. The congestion of work will take longer than expected to get through, which means that people who are waiting for their dream home to be built have no clarity on when they will actually get their keys. I have also heard that the government plays favourites with whom it takes advice from.

We welcome the government's announcement of a joint working committee to look at industry reform; however, this committee was convened to look only at government building contracts and non-residential contracts. That is not nearly the scope that the building sector sorely needs. Smaller players in the sector are not being represented, and they do not feel that they are being heard. There are real concerns across the industry that the government is not listening to smaller builders, contractors, consumers and allied industries and trades, who feel that they need to be heard. That is why the opposition called on the government to convene an emergency summit of all stakeholders in the WA building sector in a bid to chart a way through the unprecedented challenges it is facing.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms L. METTAM:** This would get everyone around the table and give a voice to those who feel that they have not been heard. I remind the government that desperate Western Australians are waiting years for their homes to be built and that urgent action is needed to tackle this issue.

Another issue I would like to address, which I am sure my colleagues will also address, was raised by the member for Cottesloe earlier today during question time—mandatory inspections. Western Australia remains the only state in the nation that does not require mandatory inspections. That has created an environment that encourages cowboys in the building sector. I make it clear that I am referring to only a certain few in the sector, but I have heard plenty



of anecdotal evidence from Western Australians about the issues they have encountered when building their homes. In 2017, all governments around the country agreed to better regulate the Australian building and construction sector. However, Western Australia is the only jurisdiction that has not introduced a mandatory inspection policy. I ask the government: What has happened with this? Where is the government at? It has not yet been implemented and the opposition is very concerned, as are many consumers in the sector. We are also concerned about the current shortage of skilled workers, which could expose customers even further. It is the opposition's view that any changes to provide better outcomes for consumers could only be a good thing.

An issue that many regional members will know only too well is the number of Airbnb and short-stay holiday listings in regional areas. This is of concern in some metro areas also, but the number of Airbnb and short-stay accommodation listings in the regions is an issue. Although I certainly respect home owners' ability to utilise and benefit from platforms such as Airbnb—particularly our coastal towns and tourist hotspot regions—it has created a challenge for Western Australians who wish to move to these locations for work. Across the state, Airbnb listings outnumber vacant rentals by more than 40 to one. In a swag of regional WA towns, fewer than a dozen houses are available for long-term tenants.

My electorate of Vasse is certainly not immune to that. In August last year, *The West Australian* reported that there were 1 295 combined Airbnb listings within the City of Busselton, which includes Dunsborough. In comparison, only 31 properties were listed online for rent in these towns. It is a challenging issue. Holiday-makers have nearly 700 Airbnbs to choose from in the Shire of Augusta–Margaret River but there are just five properties available for rent in Margaret River and surrounds. The same situation is replicated across WA. Denmark has 185 Airbnbs and three rentals. Albany has 300 Airbnbs compared with 22 rentals. Broome has 161 Airbnbs and 13 rentals. Short-stay holiday homes also currently far outnumber rentals in many Perth councils. I recognise that the government's draft short-term rental accommodation reform policy has been out for consultation. I look forward to its findings and the subsequent government response to what I understand is certainly a very challenging issue.

I will leave my comments there. Quite clearly, there are a range of challenges right across the housing sector. There was news out today about Western Australia being the rough sleeping capital of the country. At a time when we are enjoying significant economic prosperity thanks to the iron ore sector, it points to a significant disconnect between the windfalls that this government has received and what it is actually doing on the ground.

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [5.11 pm]: I also rise to make a short contribution to the motion. I want to point out some concerning issues in the world of housing and support the motion —

That the house implores the McGowan Labor government to take a statewide, holistic look at the housing crisis and consider innovative solutions to prevent the housing crisis from worsening.

On the front page of today's *The West Australian* is a picture of three international students who are paying \$1 000 a week between the three of them for a two-bedroom apartment. They also had to throw in \$17 000 up-front for some sort of bond deposit. That was quite concerning. I will stray on to international education. That story does not send a good message to future students. It does not send a good message to students from around the world who come to Perth. This is a great place; we have four great universities, but students will have nowhere to live. I asked a question about this situation of the Minister for International Education last year. WA has now dropped to being the lowest participation state, with 5.8 per cent of the international education market. Part of that is due to the efforts of the McGowan government when it pulled the rug out in February last year. Now we have this scenario with a lack of accommodation and housing. It is all coming together. It is not a good look for our state or for our international education economy. I find it quite upsetting in a lot of ways.

The member for Vasse asked a question of the Premier today. He was gloating back in 2017 when he reduced the skilled migration list, saying, "Look at me. Look at this. Isn't it great? We won't need to have any overseas workers. We won't have anyone taking away our jobs. I'm going to reduce that list." Sure enough, it again resulted in long-term damage to our economy. When the Premier was asked that question today, he said, "We were trying to repair things that occurred under your government." He made all the excuses under the sun. He will not take any responsibility for his actions. When I was sitting where the member for Nedlands is now, I listened to him proudly talk about how he had reduced the skilled migration list and that it would be great for WA. Sure enough, it had the opposite effect. That was a disappointing aspect. From my perspective, the government needs to learn from these lessons, and, hopefully, from people like the housing minister.

I have already spoken about maintenance and other issues and I will talk about them again today. These lessons are not being learnt. We have people out in the Department of Communities and housing. We have empty houses out there but the government is not swinging into action to address the situation. Now we have real problems, especially in the regional areas, and also with social housing.

I want to refer to an article that appeared in the *Farm Weekly* of 16 March relating to some regional areas. It was referred to by the Leader of the Opposition and mentions Cath Hart. It includes some really interesting statistics, reading —

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Perth’s vacancy rate is currently 0.7 per cent, far away from where it was between 2.5–3.5pc.

...

The number of available properties under \$400 fell to 17.6pc, the lowest level since 2018.

That is \$400 rent. As the article pointed out, regional areas are really feeling the pressure. It states —

“At local, State and Federal levels of government, we need policy settings that encourage rather than discourage people from investing in rental properties,” ...

Some of these stats are quite disturbing. In Albany —

The number of active rental listings stayed the same for the month of December 2022, and January 2023 at 17 properties ...

In Broome, the number of active rental listings stayed at 38 properties listed in the area. Broome has record rental prices of \$850 a week. In Bunbury, the number of active rental listings increased between December and January, up to 56 listings now. The median rental price is \$475. Busselton saw a massive increase in the number of listings, from seven to 10 in January, with the rental price peaking at \$600. Esperance, in my electorate, has barely any properties at all. Four properties were available. I understand there are now none. The median rental price is \$325 a week. Geraldton has hit a low of only 11 properties on the market, with a median rental of \$350 a week. That article outlines the regional situation and gives a good summary of where we are right around the state.

Flowing on from that, another article stated —

“The government is currently undertaking a review of the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 ...” the spokesperson said.

“The review is addressing a broad range of issues impacting tenants and landlords throughout the tenancy cycle.

“The consultation phase for the review has been completed and a decision from government on which elements of the reforms to proceed with will be made soon.”

I say to the minister that I am very interested in this because landlords, people who own properties and so forth have some real concern about the arrangements that will be put in place as part of this tenancy reform. Quite frankly, I can see a lot of people pulling their properties off the market if this reform goes ahead. I am curious about what will happen if and when the government decides to bring on these reforms. I know a lot of people who are quite frightened by the scenario of tenants’ rights overriding those of the landholder. They will be able to do whatever they like—bring in pets and make arrangements to adjust whatever they like inside the property with some sort of free-for-all for tenants. That will just reduce the housing stock again. I am sure those sitting around the cabinet table will be saying, “We’ve got the left wing of our party that is looking to make these arrangements to make life great for tenants, forgetting about the landlords and the owners”, but the other side saying, “Let’s hold five for a minute because we’re already in strife as far as the housing market is concerned, and this is only going to make it worse.” I will be curious to see whether there are any comments from the minister on that. I can imagine that the only solution will be holding fire for the moment because I suspect there is some grief to be had.

I quickly want to move on to my electorate because it has some really promising signs of regional growth, and I am quite concerned that we will not be able to capitalise on them because we do not have the housing. As we know, my concerns about Government Regional Officers’ Housing are always there. There is a scenario with nurses, police and teachers. Several weeks ago in Narrogin one of my constituents told me there was some real concern about the standard of the nurses’ quarters at some of the hospitals in the electorate of Roe. I have also heard this from another person who came to a wheatbelt town in the electorate of the member for Central Wheatbelt. They said they would stay in those conditions for a week but it would be the last time they would be there. That was in Northam. In various towns around my electorate and that of the member for Central Wheatbelt conditions are just not good enough. We might be able to attract someone for a week, they say they will put up with the conditions for a week, but they will not come back. That is another thing that really worries me. The Department of Health needs to look at improving the state of nurses’ quarters—this scenario of someone being put into a single motel room with very little security. It is not acceptable in this day and age.

According to last year’s budget papers, \$5 million was set aside for a critical staff accommodation upgrade program to address the most urgent staff accommodation refurbishment and replacement priorities to support the medical and nursing workforce required in regional and rural areas. I note that there is no funding in the forward estimates. When a health worker signs up for a position and housing and security are the basic requirements for their tenure, that is why they will stay. But apparently there is no room for that in the forward estimates. That is what I am worried about. Where will the future security come from?

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As I said, in my electorate there are a couple of good regional growth opportunities. I look forward to hosting the Minister for Education; Citizenship and Multicultural Interests in Katanning on Saturday at the Harmony Festival. I am sure he will hear some stories about promising things going on there, such as the likes of Ausgold, which has been exploring for several years now. It will have an estimated team of 80-odd mining, maintenance and supervision personnel if things come to fruition, but, once again, housing opportunities are very limited. This is an exciting project. It is obviously not a government issue, but all the houses have been soaked up and there is no spare capacity for the company to purchase any housing. We will have to look at whether it builds housing or goes to another town and how that will work. It is an exciting regional development opportunity.

Another one is the Future Energy Australia, which is Carnarvon Energy and Future Impact Group, biodiesel plant in Narrogin. It has purchased a 65-hectare site and is looking at a biorefinery business that will convert sustainably sourced woody biomass such as construction waste, ecological thinnings and plant-based agricultural waste into renewable diesel. Once again, though, the catch is where the employees will live. Enel Green Power, another large company, is also undertaking a major project in my electorate, with a predicted number of 120 personnel required to install a wind farm project. Stage 2 will be developed by Western Power and that will face the same challenges.

They are some of the issues that our companies are facing when they come to regional towns. I am sure that the minister saw the front page of *The West Australian* featuring my local town of Katanning, where a person could buy a \$120 000 house and rent it for \$500 a week, so a yield of nearly 20 per cent. That is one of the best investments around at the moment. That shows there are no rentals in the town whatsoever. It is quite disturbing when the likes of Katanning, Esperance and Narrogin all have fewer than 10 houses available for rent. WAMMCO International runs the large abattoir in my town that employs 300-odd people. It rents over 50 local houses and units. It has bought the local motel to provide housing for its employees. Perhaps the government could look at incentives for big businesses to build accommodation for workers and down the track these could be potentially converted to other options. I ask the minister and the department to think outside the square.

As I have said many a time to the minister, I am sure that the minister's department tells him it is doing a great job with maintenance and that all houses are taken up. I can assure him that there are quite a lot of houses sitting empty around the place waiting for a tap or something else to be fixed. A classic example is in Newdegate. I am talking about the middle of last year. A family departed from a residence and left their rubbish all over the place, including the yard. I got a phone call from a local resident who lives next door. He said he knew a family with three or four kids who were keen to come into the town. They wanted their kids to go to the local school. Given that the previous family had gone, he asked whether there was any way the residence could be cleaned up so that this new family could come in. I rang that person this morning because I knew we would debate this motion today. Here we are eight or nine months later, the residence is still vacant and rubbish is lying around everywhere. I rang the housing person from the Department of Communities several months ago and they said the matter was being looked into, but the house is still empty.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** This is an example of why people in regional areas get upset. Why can we not deal with these issues and get these houses back on the job, in the market and there for social housing for vulnerable members of the community? Why can those people with three or four kids who could go to the local school in that town not move into that house? Why can it not be cleaned up? I just cannot understand it. As I have said, I have spoken to the department. I brought the matter to its attention. I found my way through myriad phone numbers, being transferred, people hanging up or telling me the problem did not belong to their department and that another department in another town looked after it. I spent about three-quarters of an hour on the phone to finally get to the bottom of things, and here we are several months later and still nothing has happened with that house in Newdegate.

**Mr J.N. Carey:** Why didn't you come to my office like every other member, including the Leader of the Liberal Party? My office is well known for being accessible and for assisting any member of the opposition.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I tell the minister what, I will be more than happy to do that. I thought I would give them time to do their job. Once again, I rang up this morning about what was going on, but now I will go to the minister.

**Mr J.N. Carey:** Give me the street address and the time frames you have called and how long it has been vacant.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Absolutely; I will be more than happy to do that. I appreciate that offer. These are the issues.

In closing, I will talk about our shires. They do a good job. As I said this morning in debate on the Local Government Amendment Bill 2023, shires seem to get roped into a lot of activities that are not their core business. A volunteer group in the Tambellup shire cropping program is contributing more than \$160 000 to a local product supported by their local shire to expand the caravan park and build accommodation for workers. I applaud that community for taking that issue into its own hands. I know the minister has worked with the Nyabing shire, and we have had a positive outcome there. I remember the minister announcing last year that project with the Nyabing shire. Once

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again, is it the responsibility of those shires to have to come forth with these housing solutions? From my perspective, it is not. The minister needs to focus on some of these elements. As far as I am concerned, the government has a \$13 billion surplus from the past three years. It had a surplus of \$6 billion last year and we still have housing issues out there left, right and centre. As the member for Vasse pointed out, we have a real homelessness issue. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, there are any number of issues in relation to the likes of cyclone Seroja. The member for North West Central raised the growth issues in places such as Exmouth. The state has myriad issues and the scenario of needing to house people. I raised international education earlier. The article on the front page of *The West Australian* today does not exactly bode well for our ability to attract more international students because they are going to ask, “Where can I live?” Three students had to pay \$1 000 for a two-bedroom apartment. From my perspective, this government needs to think clearly about its \$6 billion surplus from last year, and about how it can make it easier for the people of Western Australia. It is not good enough. We need to do better.

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe)** [5.32 pm]: I rise to support this excellent motion put forward by the opposition. We had rhetorical questions in this place earlier today: “What’s your side done? What’s your side doing?” The ridiculous proposition that we would be releasing all of our policies now, two years out from an election, is clearly farcical. The Labor Party did not do it and we will not be doing it either. We will be doing that in an organised and staged manner as we go to the election.

What I want to talk about is what our government did —

**Dr A.D. Buti**: Like your energy policy at the last election.

**Dr D.J. HONEY**: Oh, for God’s sake.

**Dr A.D. Buti**: That was really well done, wasn’t it?

**Dr D.J. HONEY**: Do you know what? You are a minister of the Crown. You do not need to parrot on with interjections now.

I want to talk about the record of the previous government that came to office in 2008. This is what it achieved in a similar time to the period members opposite have been in government. Where they have abject failure, we had nothing but a record of outstanding achievement under the Liberal–National coalition government. I will start with the affordable housing strategy—these are numbers the government can only dream of. The strategy met the target of 20 000 homes by June 2015, five years ahead of schedule. Because it was so successful, there was a revised target of 30 000 affordable homes coming up to 2020. In fact, by June 2016, 24 000 affordable housing opportunities had been created. Here is something the Minister for Housing can only dream about. There were 5 200 new social houses to help the most vulnerable people in our community—5 200. The minister has not managed yet to even replace the residences the government sold at the start of its term. There were 670 homes for Aboriginal people in remote communities and over 3 000 homes completed under the national rental affordability scheme, giving low-income people the ability to access affordable rental accommodation in Perth. There were 14 300 Keystart loans for low and moderate-income households, including more than 2 200 shared equity loans.

We created a web portal for advice on affordable housing so that people had a one-stop shop to go to. We continued the Government Regional Officers’ Housing scheme. That scheme was the key and we continued to develop that and increase the stock for GROH. We provided a minimum of 500 new affordable homes by establishing the housing stock redevelopment strategy. That was delivered by 30 June 2016.

Land development activity is something this government could learn about. In 2016–17, the Housing Authority, through its land development activities, intended to produce 1 900 housing lots, including 1 452 lots developed with joint venture partners. The transitional housing program provided public housing for tenants who were actively employed or in training to develop their skills and networks they needed to transition into affordable homes. The government just ignores the regions. It talks about them, but it ignores them. Work in the East Kimberley commenced in Kununurra in September 2012. Forty houses were built in Kununurra and 15 in Halls Creek with the support of royalties for regions. It is an important fund and under our government that was spent on developing communities, not on usual recurrent government subsidies.

Here is something the government can really only dream about. What a disgraceful deterioration under this Labor government. As at the December 2015 reporting period, there was a 99 per cent school attendance rate in Kununurra and a 97 per cent school attendance rate in Halls Creek. Minister for Education, look at those numbers and look at what they are now. We know that was the situation in Halls Creek, because of the information provided by the now parked former truancy officer in the town, someone who has been put on gardening leave because he had the temerity to tell the shire the truth about the low attendance rates at that school. What an absolute disgrace.

**Dr A.D. Buti**: You know you are wrong.

**Dr D.J. HONEY**: I do not know. I know exactly what has happened.

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**Dr A.D. Buti:** No, you don't.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Well, minister, you will have your chance to get up and speak, because he has been punished.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Don't mislead Parliament. He has got a lot of support and he can go back to work tomorrow.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Is he in his job or is he on gardening leave?

**Dr A.D. Buti:** You know nothing. He has been offered to go back to work. You have no idea.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Is he working as a truancy officer? Yes or no?

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** What a joke! What a disgrace! The party that talks about whistleblowers does nothing but punish them.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** You are a wally. You've always been a wally and you remain one.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk):** Order!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Madam Acting Speaker —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** I was trying to call you to order as well, member.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I know. I stopped; he did not.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** All right, let us go on. I gather you are not inviting anymore interjections. Is that what that means?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Thank you very much, Madam Acting Speaker.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** All right; let us proceed.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** What an absolute disgrace. This government is the supposed champion of whistleblowing, but not when it is against it.

The Liberal–National government established short-stay centres to provide Indigenous people visiting regional centres with accommodation. The Derby facility began operating in October 2014, the Broome facility was in the design phase and the Aboriginal short-stay facility had already been operating in Kalgoorlie since 2012. We also passed important legislation in the Land Acquisition Legislation Amendment (Compensation) Bill 2014. This side of politics has a proud record. As I said, the government's paltry performance in this area is in stark contrast to the achievements of the previous Liberal–National government.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member, just to assist Hansard, that was paltry, not poultry; is that right?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** That is correct. I said paltry, but anyway. Thank you very much, Madam Acting Speaker, I am always grateful for your clarification and assistance.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Excellent.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Unfortunately, the member for Central Wheatbelt cannot be in here today, but she asked me to remind members of the poor achievements of this government. We created the first worker accommodation village in Karratha. Again, this was something this government could have learnt about and done in those regional centres where regional workers cannot get accommodation. The lack of accommodation in regional areas is the single greatest handbrake on regional economies from Esperance to Kununurra in the state of Western Australia. It is the single greatest thing holding back development in those communities, and I suspect it is the single greatest handbrake on development in metropolitan Perth. The Minister for Police is boasting about bringing 950 police or more over from the United Kingdom, desperately trying to stem the haemorrhage of police leaving the workforce because of cultural issues. Where are they going to stay? We hear about other workers coming to this state. Where are they going to stay? It is a complete failure of this government. We did something about it because we especially cared about broader regional development, not just development in metropolitan Perth. As I said, we delivered Government Regional Officers' Housing.

In question time today, we got asked, "What did you do?" Under the previous Liberal–National government, it was almost exclusively during that period that the state's population increased by around 500 000 people. The population of Tasmania came here during those two terms of government. All those people had houses. All those kids had schools to go to. All of them had a fully trained teacher in their classroom at the start of the school year. All of the gas and sewerage services et cetera were supplied to those schools. Unlike this government putting partly trained teachers in classrooms, these teachers were fully trained. During the term of that government, every single classroom had a teacher at the start of the school year because that government cared about education in the state. That population came to this state and that is what the government of the time provided for. But this government's appalling performance is all too stark. We had the regional cities or SuperTownns policy. The National Party had

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a policy that supported the services of Young House in Albany and services in other regional centres. Those were the achievements of the Liberal–National government. This government has set us up to fail in the area of housing.

The previous speaker talked about changes to the skilled migration program. To purely satisfy union demands, this Labor government cut the number of categories for regional migration from, I think, 178 to 18 and it took metropolitan Perth out of the regional sponsored migration scheme. What did that do? We warned of this at the time. It did two things. The first was that it took away jobs for students and others who wanted to come into the state—those people who drive growth in the economy. It took away their jobs and it took away key skilled workers. Before I was elected, when I was nominated as a candidate, a senior manager in the building industry said to me, “David, for goodness sake, see what you can do to get this government to reverse its decision because this is going to destroy construction in the state of Western Australia.” That is what this government has contributed towards. We then went into the COVID period and this government again placed severe restrictions on skilled migrants coming into the state, in particular, and ridiculously, doctors and nurses. It reversed that decision at some stage, but imagine that! It is incomprehensible. This government’s millionaire mates can travel from one end of the world to the other with impunity, but the skilled labour that we needed in this state for critical matters was stopped from coming into the state. At the time, other people and I said that if this government did this, we would pay an economic consequence once the COVID pandemic started to subside. I said it in this place and outside this place.

Several members interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Go and look at *Hansard*.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** It’s like he’s the Messiah!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** A person does not have to be the Messiah to work this one out, minister, because it was an obvious consequence of the government’s poorly thought out policies that led to this problem. Do not try to pretend that there are other issues such as COVID or a lack of materials. The simple fact is that this government sold public housing and did not replace it in a timely fashion. It also fundamentally deprived the state of the workforce it needed to build houses. That has been a significant contributor to the crisis we have at the moment.

The Premier made some comments on pump priming; that is the reality. Whenever a government provides excessive amounts of money for people to come into the market, an enormous number of people come in, many of whom should not. Many young people thought interest rates were going to stay at four or five per cent. We know that the long-term average since Federation is 7.5 per cent, and there are at least a couple of people in this room, including me, who paid 17 per cent not so long ago. Those people have been enticed into the market. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, this led to an enormous bow wave that is causing chaos in the industry. We now have the ridiculous situation in which some trades have hardly enough work because there are no new starts, and others are absolutely overwhelmed because we have not seen an evening out of that. The government was directly responsible for that. We also have the government actively competing against the private sector for construction labour. This is a political issue. This is where a mature, responsible government comes to the fore. Once the government announces a project such as the railway line to Armadale with all level crossings and so on, no opposition will oppose that. The political reality is that once a project is announced, if it is opposed by the opposition, the opposition becomes a pariah. The reality is that if this government had provided proper smoothing and prioritising for those projects—it talked about smoothing and delaying other projects before it announced that new project—it would not be competing with the private sector for labour. A number of people in the construction sector have told me that because the Metronet projects are under such pressure from government, they are actively poaching their workers from the housing construction sector. Many of the workers from both those areas are the same workers. They do not have to be especially highly skilled in a particular area; they just have to be competent workers. This government’s program is causing a shortage of workers in the private sector. Is there a political wedge? Can the opposition say, “You shouldn’t be doing X, Y and Z”? No it cannot, but the fact is that a responsible government would have levelled and smoothed at the outset before it made the announcements and commitments that would then suck labour away from building houses. People are sleeping in cars tonight because this government is competing with the private sector for labour. That is the truth. Those are the choices that responsible government has to make.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** This government has not made responsible choices. It is a ridiculous situation that we still have the same amount of public housing that we had when this government came into office six years ago. We are not talking about one, two or three years in; we are talking about six years in. We have a 500-bed quarantine facility out at Bullsbrook that the government was keen on at the start. I understand that it is completely unutilised. Surely ministers can have a mature conversation with the federal government about the proper use of that to help ease the housing crisis and the fact that people are sleeping in their cars.

I will give an example of something that we sensibly did in the Pilbara when we were in government. Land prices were skyrocketing and house prices were escalating, making housing unaffordable. What did we do as a government that was criticised by the opposition at the time? We released land to take the heat out of that market and keep housing affordable for people in the Pilbara. Has this government done that? Does this government have any meaningful program to release housing and so on?

Unfortunately, there is too much material to cover in the time that I have left because I want to leave a few minutes at least for the member for North West Central to make a contribution on this motion. In relation to accommodation, the Onslow worker camp is projected to go ahead for Mineral Resources. An article in *The West Australian* refers to luxury FIFO resorts being built to attract more female workers. The “attract more female workers” was unnecessary; it should read “more workers” because both men and women like quality accommodation. One resort at Onslow will have 750 rooms, with 500 allocated to the larger Ken’s Bore resort and 250 for the Onslow resort. This is high-quality accommodation with a swimming pool and the like. According to the article, construction on the two projects has commenced and they will largely be completed by the end of the year. The private sector has come in to create valuable and useful housing to help with workers’ accommodation shortages. I know that the Minister for Housing is a caring and passionate person and that he cares about this issue, but the simple reality is that if the private sector, in the same constrained market with the same problem of access to workers—in fact, even more so in the north west of the state—and the same constraint on access to materials, can deliver a large number of houses in that area, why can this government not do the same? There is the more general issue of housing—I think the area of rental accommodation has been covered—but the fact is that the private sector appears to be able to achieve a rapid increase in the number of quality houses for people, particularly at the affordable end, but this government is failing to do that.

I will leave my contribution there. This government has comprehensively failed in this area. Its record of achievement is a poor shadow of what was achieved by the former Liberal–National government.

**MS M. BEARD (North West Central)** [5.51 pm]: In the short time that I have, I want to make some observations about the regional accommodation issues in the north, particularly in relation to tourism. Just to go back, one of these issues is mirroring what happened in 2008. We often have a two-speed economy in the north. We have mining and exploration and oil and gas and, on the flip side, we have the coffee makers, the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker. There is a difference in people’s ability to pay rent in those situations; for some, it is not possible. They do not earn the same wages and salaries and some people cannot house themselves unless they bunk in, if they can find accommodation, in overcrowded housing.

When I was in Exmouth on the campaign trail in June or July last year, I walked the streets and I would say that every third or fourth house had one or two tents or a caravan out the front. It was overcrowded. When I walked into one house, I said to the lady, “You’ve got a tent under your pergola.” She said, “Yes, that’s my son’s home for now. He is a FIFO to Paraburdoo. He’s had to give up his rental because they are renting it out to Airbnb.” He was temporarily living in a tent that was anchored to the pavement of her porch until something came along. He did not have anywhere to live. This is not an isolated situation.

In 2008, the same thing happened during the construction phase in the Pilbara. Rents were pushed up; indeed, those who owned homes were asking for extraordinarily high rent. Again, it was a two-speed economy, which is what is happening now. Back then, people were bunking in caravans in caravan parks. The situation gutted the ability of butchers, baristas and businesses, which keep communities functioning and alive, to operate. The Liberal–National government opened up new land in an attempt to normalise the market, which, I believe, it achieved. It created the first workers’ accommodation village and offered subsidised rents to support small businesses. I understand that this model is being replicated across the state. In addition, there was the delivery of Government Regional Officers’ Housing accommodation and housing for not-for-profit community organisations. Work was definitely done under the former Liberal–National government.

At the moment, there are blocks of land in Kalbarri and Exmouth on which nothing has progressed. The issue is that the cost of building is very high. It will be a long bow to draw to think that a proponent who can afford to build will come along and charge what casual workers and backpackers will be able and willing to pay. It seems that there is a stalemate at the moment, particularly because some of the blocks need significant headworks. If members look at the blocks of land in Exmouth or Kalbarri, they will see that they need a lot of work before it would be possible to start construction. Increasing costs will prohibit some of those significant headworks from happening without government assistance. I know that an announcement was made today, but from what I understand, having spoken to people on the ground, the headworks are way over and above that.

Another issue in the regions is Airbnb. Although it is a good thing because it creates more beds, it has squeezed out other people. Families in my electorate have rung my office and said, “We’re going to have to leave. We’ve been in the town for nine years and our kids are at the school.” They are members of the clubs and they hold volunteer positions in the town, but their leases have not been renewed because the houses are being flicked to the Airbnb

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environment, which is also creating pressure for the small businesses that are trying to service the customers they get from those Airbnbs. We have something to consider in that space. Airbnbs have taken a chunk of houses out of regional markets in particular.

Small towns have a low base rate, so their ability to develop housing estates and provide new housing is limited. There is a large visitation rate but a low number of ratepayers. I understand that smaller councils have a limited ability to get involved in property development without significant help.

Another thing that has been brought to my attention is the building grant that was issued. A constituent in Exmouth built a modular home. He was told there would be a two and a half year wait for the build. He went ahead and did the build on the assumption that he would get the \$20 000 grant. There was an announcement that the grant would be extended until 24 June—I could be wrong with the month. He needed to have his slab laid by 31 December but because of the issue with tradespeople, he told the cement supplier, “Don’t stress too much; it’s Christmas. According to the grant, if I get it done in January, I should be fine.” It was done 13 days after and he is now not eligible for the grant. It seems that owner–builders are not eligible for the grant extension. The food for thought is that if there is a way to encourage people to become owner–builders, it would be really useful because these modular homes are quite satisfactory. He is extremely happy with his home, which he is now living in. He has a business in town and in another part of the region as well. As an owner–builder, many people have approached him about becoming owner–builders. Something that we need to explore in the regions is getting some of these people into these spaces.

The knock-on effect this is having in the regions is not new to people. Population retention in the regions has been severely impacted. With a lack of housing, we see the population shrinking and with that goes the number of students at schools and the number of people available for football teams. I went to a carnival on the weekend. One of the clubs was struggling to form a team that could front up on the day. That will become more and more prevalent as we move forward. It is a chicken-and-egg challenge in this space. We cannot attract workers because there is nowhere for them to live. People are living in cars, vans and people’s backyards.

One thing that I would really like to see is people encouraged to do owner–builder builds. We need to look at other ways outside what we have done in the past to try to get accommodation into these towns. These towns, especially up and down the coral coast, will not grow if they do not have anywhere for workers to live. We really need to find ways to make that happen. Kalbarri is still suffering after cyclone Seroja. The backpackers are slowly wandering back in, but they are coming in only to find out they do not have anywhere to live other than a car, if they have managed to buy a car, which is not ideal either.

We need to consider how this will impact upon the long-term reputation of tourism. We are marketing the regions and the state outside WA, which is fabulous because we need to attract people through Perth and to the regional areas. However, if visitors are not having a good experience and things stay closed or operate at 50 per cent or 60 per cent because businesses cannot house workers who are now trying to stream back in, we need to look at that. It is also affecting the ag people. Traditionally, workers will come into Perth and study and work in other businesses. In the north they will work in the ag industry during the day, and work in other industries at night. They work together, so both these industries are struggling.

In summary, there is a massive void in the towns. The sustainability of a lot of these businesses is starting to be impacted, as is the mental health of a lot of people. We have a problem whereby wages now do not meet what it costs people to pay for rents, so we need to help people with subsidised rents. As I said, Kalbarri and Exmouth are two examples. The model that was rolled out in Karratha, which was a subsidised rental arrangement, is what they need at the moment to make sure that they can spearhead what will happen with the growth and development in tourism.

The Kimberley is also an issue and I understand that, but we really need to work on the corridors where people have had no accommodation. We need to try to help people and we need to potentially look at the Airbnbs and see whether there is some kind of way that we can come to a compromise to reduce the number of Airbnbs in the market or to put parameters around it so they are on a level playing field with the commercial side of housing going through planning and being licensed to operate. I think that would make a difference. The small towns with the really low numbers and the need to boost their populations will help this, because there are houses that were being lived in. Another thing is social housing; a lot of houses across my electorate are in serious need of repair and have been sitting empty for what seems to be some time. If there is a way to open that up and expedite some of those remediation works, that will make a huge difference to what is happening on the ground in a lot of those towns, particularly further inland.

I ask the government to consider closely some of those suggestions. We need to find a way before it becomes gridlocked and there is nowhere for people to go at all. It is getting worse and we need to do something about it.

**MR J.N. CAREY (Perth — Minister for Housing)** [6.03 pm]: Obviously, as the Minister for Housing, I will provide the government’s response to this debate. I will work through all the things that the government is doing, but I will also respectfully correct the record. Simply some false statements were made in the house and I will work through correcting those for the public record.



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I have said multiple times that it is disappointing to see the Leader of the Opposition claim that the state government is not cognisant of the housing pressures or the pressures that faced in the rental market. We know it, and I think I have said that multiple times in the chamber. We know it because COVID has created an extraordinary set of circumstances. Prior to COVID was a very different time. In fact, the rental market was great for tenants. Landlords were complaining of negative equity. Then once COVID hit, there were very dire projections about the state of the economy, the housing market and the jobs market. We know that those dire predictions were wrong and instead, because of our COVID management, we have overseen extraordinary economic growth in Western Australia.

We looked at and implemented a range of measures, and I will touch on the Building Bonus grant in a second, but we have found ourselves in extraordinary circumstances as a result of COVID and a number of different factors have come into play. This has been acknowledged by experts and the housing sector, and it is a range of different issues. It is everything from the sustained lockdowns in China and how that affected supply, to the war in Ukraine, which has created disruptions in supply chains. The international border closure, to which everybody agreed at the time, has obviously created significant issues with trying to get skilled labour back to Australia and Western Australia. Of course, we saw the influx of people returning to Western Australia. It is pleasing to note that the Leader of the Opposition acknowledged this in his commentary. He said people returned home, and, as a result, that put pressure on the rental market. As we know, the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed there was a net interstate migration increase of 11 423 between 2020 and 2021. In the final months of 2021, more than 13 000 people moved west, which was WA's largest ever quarterly interstate migration inflow. At the same time, we saw net decreases in New South Wales and Victoria. People left Victoria and New South Wales and we faced extraordinary growth. People were coming to Western Australia and our booming economy. It is a great place to live and a state that has a reputation because of our COVID management, so people choose to live here. We face that incredible pressure. More people still continue to come to Western Australia.

We made the decision to do the Building Bonus grants and at the time, as I have said, there were quite significant fears about the state of the economy and particularly how COVID would —

[Interruption.]

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Thank you for that YouTube clip. Thank you to the Minister for Police. I put that on the record.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Are you the only person who has not seen the YouTube clip?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Yes, clearly. I do not know what the YouTube clip is about, but he had to run out. I want to read these quotes. This article is from Sunday, 7 June 2020. The Urban Development Institute of Australia said —

... the government had acted “decisively and precisely”.

“They have demonstrated a detailed understanding of the mechanics of the market, and the grave situation the housing construction industry was facing in the coming months without government support.”

...

Master Builders Association of WA ... said the government's package would make a big difference.

“This is an absolute game-changer for the building and construction industry in Western Australia,” ...

“We think that this new announcement's going to really turbo-charge the residential housing industry, so it's great news for the industry but also great news for consumers.”

John Gelavis from the Master Builders Association is quoted as saying —

... without government assistance, the outlook for the sector was dire.

He is also quoted as saying —

“This stimulus has come just at the right time.”

These are quotes at the time from key, respected housing industry leaders, who pleaded for and welcomed our housing building bonus grant. I respectfully say that the Leader of the Liberal Party is now attempting to rewrite her own calls at the time. In May 2020, the now Leader of the Liberal Party said that Western Australia was facing a significant jobs crisis and that the McGowan government should do all it could to invest in the WA construction industry and local jobs. She also talked about infrastructure spending and in June 2020 said that infrastructure spending was an obvious and necessary stimulus area, that WA had record unemployment and that what we needed was local jobs, right now.

Now we see the Leader of the Liberal Party ignoring the comments she made at that time and ignoring her calls for the government to create support for the construction sector. She has turned around and said that that support is superheating the construction industry. I think that is a clear demonstration that the opposition just flip-flops around when it is convenient to do so.

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We understand that home builders are facing challenges, so we have undertaken a range of measures. It has already been mentioned, but we doubled the cap on individual payouts through the home indemnity insurance scheme. We have smoothed the pipeline of government projects to free up skilled labour, noting that we are then constantly criticised by the opposition for those deliberate decisions. We have invested in a range of measures to attract skilled workers to WA and we introduced security of payment laws to protect subcontractors. On top of that, we introduced a \$30 million financial relief scheme to assist contractors with the rising cost of state government projects. That was particularly targeted at Department of Communities' projects, which fall under my portfolio. I am advised by the Department of Finance that, as at 28 February, 121 claims were being assessed and 109 had been approved. Those financial relief payments, totalling \$5.4 million, have been approved. The government introduced a building bonus grant that responded to the needs of industry at the time, and we noted the calls from the opposition. We know that we now face a heated construction market because of all the factors I have described. We have also brought in a range of other measures to assist the growing pains of that heated construction market, particularly in respect of cost escalations.

The opposition also focused on training. This government has undertaken an extraordinary number of measures in training. That contrasts sharply with the more than 500 per cent increase in TAFE fees between 2013 and 2017 under the previous Liberal–National government. It is fair to say that we saw the trashing of the TAFE sector. There were skyrocketing fees, funding cuts and plummeting enrolments. History shows that; it is a fact. We brought in a range of measures to boost the numbers of apprentices and of TAFE enrolments to skill Western Australians. We slashed fees by up to 72 per cent for 210 courses. That included 17 construction-related apprenticeships and traineeships and 13 pre-apprenticeships. That is an extraordinary incentive for people to get into those industries.

We have also supported a range of programs to encourage employers to take on more apprentices and trainees, such as the jobs and skills WA employer incentive program; wage subsidy programs to boost apprentice and trainee numbers in construction; and an adult apprentice employer incentive program, providing support for businesses that take on a mature age apprentices. We also get ongoing support from the Construction Training Fund, which provides grants to building and construction employers who employ apprentices and trainees. There is also the recently completed apprenticeships and traineeships re-engagement incentive program, which again is about providing financial assistance to businesses to re-engage apprentices or trainees who may have fallen out of the sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are also making a massive reinvestment in the TAFE scheme and the TAFE capital works program.

That is a substantial amount of investment in our TAFE system. There have also been other, smaller initiatives. One came out this week from the Skills Summit. We held the Skills Summit and every cabinet minister was there around the table at all the regional Skills Summits. We said, "Right, these are all the changes. We're slashing fees. We're doing all these programs, but we still want to listen to the sector about what else we can do." It was identified that the lack of drivers' licences for apprentices in the building and construction industry was creating a hurdle, so what did we do? We created a \$1.26 million program called the Construction Training Fund's driver's licence training support program. I do not know who makes up these names, but thank you! I have all this saliva now pouring out of my mouth, so sorry about that! That was identified as a key barrier, so we brought in that new program to offer standard driver training and key safety training relating to construction contexts, including towing trailers, securing loads, and driving in sand and off-road environments. There is also life skills and vehicle maintenance training. This initiative will help around 120 eligible students and will give young workers the ability to enter jobs in the construction market.

That initiative complements the other program I was talking about, the \$10 million driving access and equity program, which is about assisting disadvantaged drivers in regional and remote areas to get their driver's licence. We created a specific program for construction and building, and then we tackled the broader barriers and roadblocks for people getting a driver's licence. There is also the Job Ready program in infrastructure and bricklaying—short, sharp training to get people into the construction workforce. The initiatives just go on and on. Of course, the Minister for Police also recently went to the UK to launch a big recruitment program to get people to come to Western Australia, given our economy and the lifestyle we offer. That is significant. I have gone through the conditions, training and our key works and measures to really boost skilled labour and programs targeted at construction.

We also recently announced significant planning reforms. We know that we need more infill and higher density; that is a critical part of the equation. People do not realise this but the advice we get is that 60 per cent of apartments that are approved are not built. That is because cost escalations are prohibiting development. What is also prohibiting development is approvals. The length of time it takes to get projects approved is creating a major hurdle. We know that a contributing factor to cost escalations is the time required for approval through the planning process.

I recently went to the housing summit in Kalgoorlie. The Leader of the Nationals WA mentioned Kalgoorlie. I attended a housing workshop in Kalgoorlie with about 30 to 40 stakeholders around the table, and one of the strongest themes coming out of that was the disappointment felt by stakeholders that the local government had not

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approved worker accommodation and housing. Members may remember that the opposition tried to get me on this. It asked a question and selectively quoted the *Business News* about the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia. They failed to say at that time that the Kalgoorlie–Boulder Chamber of Commerce and Industry had been highly critical about a number of decisions made by the council. Even the Mayor of the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder acknowledged at that housing workshop that local government decisions, council decisions, had not facilitated that necessary housing.

We are bringing in planning reform because we know that we need infill and density, particularly in the city, transport corridors and Metronet sites, and we need to facilitate that better.

I note the comments by the Property Council of Australia. The WA division of the Property Council said —

... a decisive series of evidence-led reforms that set the national benchmark for housing productivity.

...

Premier McGowan has raised the bar, let's see if other state government leaders can match him.

They are pretty incredible statements. I am sorry that I am reading from my phone. The last statement, from the CEO of the Property Council of Australia, was —

... noted the housing strategy put in place by the WA Government to address supply shortages over the coming decade was a positive step and would place the State ahead of other major capitals such as Sydney and Melbourne which are failing at zoning and planning levels for new builds.

We have to remember that this is the Property Council of Australia praising a Labor government and saying —

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Well done, socialists.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** They are. Sandra Brewer is a well-known socialist!

The CEO of the Property Council said that we would place the state ahead of other major capitals. I was not quoting from a Labor group; I was actually referring to the Property Council and the changes that we are making in planning to address housing supply issues.

I also want to deal with social housing. First, I want to address the comments made by the member for Cottesloe relating to the previous state government's achievements. The funny thing that the opposition always miss—I respectfully say this—is the fact that there is one difference between what we had in our first four years and Colin Barnett's government. It had the Kevin Rudd stimulus. It was a \$6.6 billion package to create housing.

I will read members a quote from Joe Spagnolo. He wrote a column on 15 May 2000. He said —

The Rudd Government had ridden to the Liberal–National Government's aid with heaps of cash for schools, health facilities and public housing.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** There you go, member for Cottesloe.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** They're your mates. I thought you got all the money you wanted from them, you were telling me.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I say to the member for Cottesloe that it is well recognised that the former Liberal–National government left the housing space. I will give members a small example. The federal housing minister did not contact me once, from memory. There was no ministerial council meeting. I have a good working relationship with all the ministers around the table, whether they are Liberal or Labor. Everyone says there is a renewed sense of drive from this new federal government with its \$10 billion housing fund. The previous Liberal government walked away from remote housing. It said, "We are no longer doing this. See you later. We're walking out the door. Arriver-darchy, goodbye, it's not our responsibility." That is the problem.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Arrivederci.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I just said that wrong, thank you. It was not as bad as the member for Cottesloe's "chi-chuana", so he did not have a go at me, although I did say, "Remember that time." That is just as bad. I take the hits as well. Did I tell him we both made *The Project*?

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** You probably just made *The Project* again.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Well, there we go. I was trying to read the lips of the Minister for Education and mispronounced it.

The point I am making is that the federal government left the space for remote communities. As a state, we have now stepped into that role. That puts that on the record about the big cash that flowed through to state governments across the nation from the Kevin Rudd era as part of the stimulus package to boost housing across Australia. We are accelerating social housing delivery. These things are true. It is a \$2.4 billion program. It is the biggest injection in social housing in the state's history—\$875 million. In the toughest housing market ever in this state's history, from

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July 2021 or since the beginning of this program, we have delivered about 1 100 homes, with almost 1 000 under contract or construction. In the last month alone, just under 100 were delivered. We have also provided grants to the community housing sector, with \$78 million in grants given to deliver 320 homes. We have introduced many reforms in social housing. We have created new panels to do the pre-approval up front so we can get housing contracted faster. We created a statewide modular panel. We have created small and medium business panels so we can streamline procurement. Eighty businesses have got onto that panel. Our modular program will see 200 homes delivered, with over 90 already under contract or construction. Through a timber frame program, we are seeing homes being delivered under six months. I talked today about the spot purchasing program and the numbers that we have delivered.

We also have renewal projects in place. In effect, those renewal projects are the challenge that we face in the social housing system. When we came to government, we inherited a significant ageing stock. There are about 35 000 public houses in the system. We made some very tough decisions in our first term, remembering the context at the time was that it was a renter's market. We decided to close down social housing sites like Brownlie Towers. When we make a decision like that, it is a big decision. I did not hear from anyone, any party, even the opposition, saying that was the wrong decision. It was the right decision and it was recognised as the right decision at the time.

Whenever we do these renewal programs, which are strongly supported by communities, whether it is in Bunbury, where we are spending \$5 million; in Geraldton, where we are spending \$9 million; in Albany, where we are spending \$4 million; or in other renewal programs like Beaconsfield, difficult decisions are made. Part of that renewal program is trying to deconcentrate some of that social housing and improve the overall amenity. These are all strongly supported in the community.

I know that the opposition has tried to make hay about North Beach, which is interesting. I understand that the opposition was trying to go to the media to flog a story, but that, for some reason, it was unsuccessful. Let us be very clear that sometimes these renewal projects are extremely difficult because there are long-term tenants and that is their home. Imagine if the government just swept in and kicked someone out. It does not work like that. We work with them on looking for other solutions and other tenancies. We also have private landlords and private owners at some of those sites. That is exactly what has happened in North Beach. I find it ironic that the previous Liberal government tried and failed to do exactly what we have achieved. It started purchasing private property and got to a point in 2013 when it threw up its hands and said, "We can't do it." That is a fact. The former government started purchasing homes in North Beach from private owners and got to a certain point and then said it was too hard. We have not done that. We have successfully negotiated with the final private owner and the last tenant is moving out this month. We will take that site out to the market to get a good mix of affordable and social housing, which will address the previous antisocial behavioural issues and boost social housing.

There has been some commentary about Government Regional Officers' Housing. Again, I want to put on the record that we are spending around \$200 million on GROH. We always have done and always will do a capital works program and a leasing program. There are a range of different ways, even via local governments, to secure housing. We heard the opposition crowing about GROH. The member for Central Wheatbelt has done that. The GROH program, under the previous Liberal-National government, clocked up a \$180 million debt and, as a result, that cabinet authorised a sales program to try to drive down the debt. I have already been on the record as saying that the greatest loss of GROH properties sold off in any one financial year was under the Liberal-National government.

Opposition members say to me that they are the champions of the wheatbelt, yet the facts do not lie. The greatest selling off of GROH properties in the wheatbelt actually occurred under the Liberal-National government when the member for Central Wheatbelt sat around the table. That is a fact; it is not made up. Another part of all the changes we have brought in is a range of changes to Keystart and the tax side. Keystart is a great program that started under Labor that has enabled more than 118 000 Western Australians to achieve their dream of home ownership. In 2020-21, 3 977 new loans were approved by Keystart. That is the highest level since 2009-10. We have made some changes. We have increased the income eligibility limits to \$105 000 for singles and \$155 000 for couples. We have lifted the property cap to \$560 000. That is in recognition that there has been an increase in the median price of households. We introduced a new pilot program called Urban Connect, which is about creating a tailored product for infill. We also incentivised—I have talked about the need for infill and density—a new off-the-plan rebate for purchasing off the plan, with 100 per cent rebate for homes under \$500 000 and then tapering off to 50 per cent for apartments over \$600 000. All of that has been about reforms to incentivise. Of course, we are also bringing in a 50 per cent land tax concession for build to rent so that we can grow the build-to-rent sector. I have just gone through changes in Keystart and changes in tax, which are about boosting the overall housing supply.

I also want to talk about evictions, because that received media coverage last week. I have to say that the media coverage obviously focused, as it does, on the negative, but there is actually a good story to tell, and it contrasts deeply with the former Liberal-National government. I made it clear that I want to drive down evictions. We want to support people in social housing. I make no apologies for that. We are investing significant amounts in the Thrive program to provide tenancy support. The stats show that our work and our focus is assisting to drive down

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evictions. In particular, bailiff evictions of households with children, have been driven down significantly. I want to put this on the record because I think it is really important. The bailiff evictions for tenancies with children has decreased by 94.7 per cent since the start of the McGowan government. I want to be clear that in 2016–17, the number of bailiff evictions under the previous government was 171. So far, to date, it is nine. That shows us very clearly that there has been a significant change about how we have tried to keep people in households. There is a very clear and stark difference between our government and the previous government. Members might remember Troy Buswell and the sort of language that was coming out at that time. It was almost a sense of pride that that government was trying to drive people out through evictions. I am deeply proud that our government has been making a concerted effort. I note that Betsy Buchanan, who is a homeless advocate and, I would say, sometimes a critic of our government, appeared before the homelessness inquiry last week. One thing that I know—I am paraphrasing; I am not quoting her—is she said that we are not seeing the mass evictions under my ministry that we saw under the previous government. Under the previous government—I want to be very clear—Troy Buswell championed that, and Betsy Buchanan talked about the mass-evictions approach at the inquiry. We are a compassionate government and a kind government. We want to support people in social housing and keep them, whenever we can, in those tenancies.

I also want to talk about vacancies very quickly because we heard from the leader of the Liberals that 1 800 homes have been boarded up. The claim that 1 800 homes have been boarded up is false. Although at any one time there are vacancies in the system, the idea that every home is boarded up, thrown away and is unusable, is just nonsense, because at any one time in our social housing system, there is a churn rate. There are always vacant houses. That is normal. A percentage of those homes are actually in the process of being re-tenanted. That is not acknowledged by the opposition at all. In fact, we saw on the record last year that Hon Steve Martin claimed that the number of vacancies doubled. That was false. He got his figures wrong. I note that he never apologised for that. He said they doubled. That was just completely wrong and he never corrected the record. The reality is that because of the churn rate there are always vacancies. It is also because that is the reality of the social housing system. The opposition makes it sound like a person can take a bit of spackfill and paint, do the job in a day and then roll out and say, “Congratulations. Here’s a house.” Can we get real just for a moment? We have to invest significantly in refurbishing stock to make it ready for the next tenants. Sometimes it is a really tough decision on whether to invest \$250 000 to keep a house in the system, which may only lengthen the life of a property for a certain time, or to unfortunately demolish it and build a home. The opposition did not acknowledge that at all. Apparently, it is just a tap that needs fixing. This is the reality of managing a social housing system with 35 000 stock—at any one time, it will have vacancies. We are spending incredible amounts on refurbishments. We are working hard to bring housing back into the system, but the reality is we face a tight construction market and, at any one time, there is a churn rate. Again, it was never acknowledged by the opposition.

I will talk about land because land was also raised. Land has been totally ignored by the opposition. In fact, I was perplexed by the Leader of the National Party and the member for Cottesloe when they said that the state government had made no investment in land release. It is well documented in this chamber that we created the \$166 million Regional Land Booster program. It has already seen almost 550 lots of residential housing released to the market across 75 regional towns. Of these, 74 lots were in Karratha, 55 were in Broome and 46 were in Kalgoorlie. The Regional Land Booster program is a subsidy recognising the costs around getting regional land up. On top of that, we have allocated additional money to release lots. We gave \$19.1 million to DevelopmentWA to release an additional 35 residential lots in Kalgoorlie and 62 lots in Karratha. None of that was mentioned. There was silence. It was as though the government had done nothing or is not investing in land release.

On top of that, we are actively looking at how we can provide crown land housing. As the minister, I supported a transfer of 15.6 hectares of crown land in Kalgoorlie–Boulder for a major expansion of seniors’ accommodation. We are also working with other local governments to assist them to look at how we can unlock crown land. In terms of crown land, this government has also been looking at lazy land. We have created the Housing Diversity Pipeline program. I have talked about it so many times, but again there was no mention of it by the opposition. That program identifies lazy land that we can take to the market—community housing providers, developers and so forth—and ask: “What can you do for us? We want one in five social housing. If you can do affordable, what can you do for us? Will we give you a ground lease, will we discount land or do you need a funding injection from our social housing fund?” That is a significant program in which we are now working through proposals. That is a demonstration of our very strong approach to identifying lazy land in both metropolitan and regional communities so that we can boost future housing supply.

We also announced an infrastructure fund. This is a new fund on top of the Regional Land Booster program to provide support for headworks for both regional worker accommodation and for encouraging infill, particularly around housing diversity sites and also Metronet stations. The response that I have had from local governments has been incredibly warm and receiving. In Kalgoorlie, there was a lot of interest. The local government was going to work with stakeholders following that workshop to look at opportunities and how they can help pump out land.

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I have just gone through a vast raft of reforms that we are implementing to boost housing supply in Western Australia—the social housing program, tax reform, Keystart reform, land reform, infrastructure and headworks reform and planning reform. This is the substantial amount of work. On top of that, because the Liberal–National federal government left the space, we are also boosting housing, water and infrastructure to remote communities by creating a \$350 million remote communities fund. That is about ensuring that we improve the lives of people living in remote communities—no acknowledgement; no credit. This fund is a direct result of the previous federal Liberal–National government that walked away from this space.

I will also touch upon homelessness. We are making huge investments in homelessness with \$225 million in funding this year. We are funding more than 130 organisations and we are also driving a significant reform program. We have boosted homelessness outreach in the city to seven days a week with two teams in the morning and afternoon. We have creating rough sleeping groups in Perth that have also occurred in Bunbury, Mandurah, Rockingham and Geraldton. They are about better coordination to ensure proper referrals. We have created the 100 social homes program, which will provide housing for rough sleepers to jump off the street directly into housing, supported by a community housing provider. We created Boorloo Bidee Mia, the first culturally appropriate accommodation to particularly assist Aboriginal people who are rough sleepers. It has been an outstanding success in tackling a very difficult issue. I have announced the purchase of the Murray Street lodge, adding to the 143 per cent increase in transitional beds that was in data today. On all those measures, I note the comments made by David Pearson of the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness on the data released today. He said —

“It is worth noting that the Governments leadership on efforts to end rough sleeping are showing signs of progress, because since this census data was collected 19 months ago, the by-name list data is showing reductions since then, as reflect on the **WAAEH data dashboard**.

That is, the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness data dashboard. There is a recognition that the reforms we are undertaking are beginning to have an impact. I note that the opposition has no policy on this. In fact, when I announced these homelessness decisions, its members attacked them. I want to be very clear that Hon Steve Martin attacked my measure for purchasing Murray Street lodge, which is transitional accommodation. We know that at the next election, these opposition members will not be committing to transitional accommodation because they do not support it. That is the logic. They attack it now and say it is no good, so I assume that they will not be making any commitments to homelessness transitional accommodation.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Do you know how many policies they have on their website?

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** No.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** None. Zero.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** Okay. The irony is that Hon Steve Martin says things, but he does not actually add to the debate. I know that there was a very embarrassing interview for him. I understood he was very embarrassed by it because he was put on the spot on ABC radio, I think it was by Nadia Mitsopoulos who actually asked him, “Could you clarify what is your policy?” He said, “I think there should be maintenance.” One would think that after six years in opposition, Hon Steve Martin would have shaped a policy. If the opposition wants to help shape and contribute to the solutions, it should come up with a specific policy. Rather, it has attacked our 100 social homes program and our transitional housing program and it ruthlessly attacked Boorloo Bidee Mia, and that is on the record. I will be interested to learn what its solutions are during the next state election. If they include anything that the government is already doing, I will remind Hon Steve Martin that, two years ago, he was trashing it. I think the opposition will find itself in a very difficult position in trashing a range of measures now and perhaps copying the state government’s initiatives in two years.

I will deal with Common Ground. We know about the embarrassing release—again, I feel sorry for Hon Steve Martin—that Common Ground had been ditched, which was false. We have been very clear that we face a heated construction market, but we want this project; we are committed to this project. Of course, in the meantime I created the 100 homes program for rough sleepers, which, again, the opposition never acknowledged—it attacked it—as an interim measure. We are working with proponents; it will proceed. We are working through that process.

It is very clear that we are making significant investment in the social housing and homelessness space. I particularly want to refer to helping to prevent Aboriginal people from rough sleeping. We are also creating the country connect service, which is about trying to break the cycle of rough sleeping when someone comes down for healthcare services and becomes stuck in a cycle of rough sleeping. We are creating that country connect service. We are also creating new Aboriginal short-stay accommodation, including in Perth, so that we can again help break that cycle.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** A great location.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** It is a great location in Cannington. What is really pleasing is that that will also try to help break the cycle of homelessness because we are providing that supportive accommodation.

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In rounding up—I will leave the member for Cockburn five minutes for his contribution—I want to say this: the opposition simply omits all the reforms that the government is doing in housing, housing supply, land supply and homelessness, and it is clearly deliberate. Substantial investment is happening right now. We have accelerated the delivery of social housing and we have added 1 100 new homes to the system; these are facts. We know that the market is heated and that there are significant challenges in the housing and rental markets, but we are aggressively pursuing a range of reforms to boost the housing supply in Western Australia.

**MR D.A.E. SCAIFE (Cockburn)** [6.52 pm]: I obviously rise to speak against the motion. It is quite clear from the contribution that the Minister for Housing just made that he is across his brief and is working furiously in lockstep with the government to deliver more housing options and greater housing supply in Western Australia. I was a bit surprised when I read the motion because it refers to taking a statewide, holistic look at the housing crisis and considering innovative solutions to prevent the housing crisis from worsening. I thought to myself, “That word “innovative” rings a bell. Where have I heard that sort of messaging before?” I realised that if the opposition wants an answer to this question, it does not need private members’ business; it just needs to do a *Hansard* search. I did a *Hansard* search on the number of times that the minister has already talked about innovative housing solutions in this chamber in this term of Parliament and I found at least five examples. I refer to a response to a Dorothy Dixier from the member for Bicton in which the Minister for Housing said —

Therefore, I was very pleased this morning to announce a package of \$24.2 million so that we can leverage the best we can and, in particular, in alignment with the 10-year homelessness strategy, focus on rough sleepers.

He continues —

This is innovation.

There is then another Dorothy Dixier from the member for Mount Lawley to the Minister for Housing. The Minister for Housing said —

The latest initiative, which has received some media attention, is Boorloo Bidee Mia, which is unique, innovative and new.

There is then another Dorothy Dixier from the member for Belmont to the Minister for Homelessness, and he talked again about Boorloo Bidee Mia —

I am very pleased to report that it is at near capacity, with 64 of the 66 rooms now filled with people who were rough sleeping who have been referred there. It is part of a bigger picture and bigger investment.

Then he says that is an example of a special and innovative service. There is then a brief ministerial statement to the house from the Minister for Housing on 12 May 2022 in which he refers to the housing diversity pipeline and says —

The focus of the pipeline is to drive investment in more social and affordable housing in transport corridors and infill sites, such as Metronet ...

He earlier said —

Through the pipeline, we are bringing lazy government land to market and seeking innovative housing ideas such as ground leasing and build-to-rent schemes ...

It goes on. There is another couple of examples as well. I have to say to the opposition: when in private members’ business its motion reflects the government’s own messaging back at it, it is in trouble. If its best material is to pick up the word “innovative”, which is a word that did not need to be in the motion, and talk about innovative solutions, when the Minister for Housing —

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** I have only five minutes left and I am not taking interjections from the Leader of the Opposition. The fact is that he appropriates the work of the government. He is so lazy that he appropriates the work of the government for the purposes of private members’ business. It is completely outrageous! You know what? Let us talk about what the alternative is.

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** If I have already got under the Leader of the Opposition’s skin now, it is only going to get worse.

The Minister for Housing today pointed out to the Leader of the Liberal Party that her party does not have any policies. The Minister for Mines and Petroleum is right; if we go to the Liberal Party website, we see that there are no policies. Do not worry; I went to its website a year ago and I printed off the policy from the last election because

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I wanted to see what it was and I have kept this hidden in my drawer in my office to roll it out on an occasion like this. This is the Liberal Party's policy for housing at the last election. If we take out the giant photo of former leader Zak Kirkup, it is barely even a page. This is for something the Liberal Party says is a crisis and that the government is not addressing. This is all the Liberal Party took to the last election when it was seeking to form government. Forgive me, it was not seeking to form government at the last election; it acknowledged it was going to lose and it gave up, famously. Its proposal was a page—not even back and front. It adds up to just one page. It is a policy-free zone.

The Leader of the Opposition does not need to worry; I have one for him because I found the Nationals WA's housing policy from the last election. I did this a while back as well. It is half a page. The policy that was on the Nationals' website in the lead-up to the last election is just a bunch of platitudes about an affordable housing initiative—no numbers, no funding, no commitments, nothing about how the National Party will achieve any sort of targets. It does not need to say that because there are no targets in it anyway. If it does not set targets, it does not have to explain how it is going to achieve them.

It is all well and good for members opposite to pipe up and have their say. They have had their say. We have had to sit through their bleating for the last couple of hours. The fact is that neither the Nationals WA nor the Liberal Party do the hard work. They have not done the hard work. The proof is there. I am not making these up. These are literally the policies from their websites. This is all they have had to say. So far in private members' business the opposition has appropriated the language of the government when it is celebrating the many innovative solutions that it is bringing to housing in Western Australia and it has failed to talk about any innovative solution that it is proposing. I was expecting, listening to the debate today, that there would be some proposals. This lofty motion about addressing the housing crisis has been moved in private members' business.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Very optimistic!

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** I admit that I am still idealistic early in my first term, Minister for Education. I just assumed that the Leader of the Opposition would have something to say. He does not have anything to say, he has not had anything to say for the last six years, and it is clear that he will not have anything to say for the next two years, either, but the people of Western Australia will be the judges of that at the next election.

The other thing I will say is if members opposite are so concerned about housing in Western Australia, maybe they should talk to their federal colleagues about why they are opposing the federal Labor government's \$10 billion housing package. I have here an article from *The Sydney Morning Herald* from just a month ago, 14 February, which shows that the coalition was warning against the plan. It was opposing the plan. In fact, it was not just opposing it; it was on the same side as the Greens in this case.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.