

GAMES INDUSTRY

Statement

HON TIM CLIFFORD (East Metropolitan) [9.53 pm]: I rise tonight to support the games industry. I quote —

The global games production industry is worth approximately \$100 billion USD and is growing annually. Western Australia has a small but talented games industry. However, 40 per cent of the games produced in Australia come from Victoria where State funding support is provided for game development.

Does that sound familiar? It should. They are the Premier's words. Even though I am a proud Greens member, I support them wholeheartedly because I support the industry. I am doing this because the games industry deserves support. I know that the McGowan government gave a pre-election promise that it would allocate a certain amount of funding to the games industry and have parameters around it. I also challenged the government in my inaugural speech and said that it was worth its while to expend political capital to get things done. From a few of the groans I have heard in this chamber when games were mentioned, I know that it may be something not so popular; it has been referred to as a "hipster hedge fund" or whatever else people want to call it. Those words were thrown around. It is unfortunate, because this industry is double the size of Hollywood. Think about that. It is double the size of the film industry worldwide, and we could have a bit of that. We could have more than mining in this state. We could have a games industry fund and we could have people in jobs, and other industries flowing from that.

The new industries fund is commendable, but to me it is not enough. I think that we need to carve out a specific fund and we need champions of this industry. We need people to get behind it and to put their name to it; otherwise, we are not going to get that share. Perth and, more broadly, Western Australia being where they are geographically, we hear a lot about the importance of us re-engaging in the Asian markets, taking advantage of China's boom and the tech industry in Japan. South-East Asia is one of the largest markets for games in the world, and its proximity gives us a real competitive advantage that we need to take advantage of because over the last few years literally hundreds of developers have unfortunately left the state to go to places like Victoria and New South Wales. Recently the South Australian government announced a \$2 million games fund, and a lot of developers are considering moving there. A few weeks ago I went over to Victoria to chat to developers directly at PAX AUS and to find out their personal experiences of what it is like for them in WA. It was pretty sad; I spoke to a young guy named Louis who runs a games bar in Fitzroy, who said that there was nothing here for him. He had to move interstate to open up a bar that should have been opened up in Perth. This is something really simple; with a little encouragement, Louis would have stayed here in WA.

Stirfire Studios is local; it has been gridded out and it has managed to pull things together and put out a game that has made it onto the PlayStation network, which includes PS4; I know everyone here plays PS4. Judging by the silence, maybe not! We have one over there! In all seriousness, we need to properly support the development of this industry. As I said earlier, games sales amount to more than the film industry, and I know a lot of members like films. We have in this industry directors, producers, technicians, animators, computer programmers, visual artists, games designers, writers, sound engineers and educational specialists, and the list goes on. All these people play a big role in developing games in this industry, but they also branch out to work in the healthcare industry and education and end up developing things of practical use for people's children or people who might be suffering from Alzheimer's—all these things stream into everyday life. If you have a phone, you have something that is related to that industry and might have been developed by someone who started off by developing a game in their bedroom.

We are punching above our weight for what we have. Of the whole industry, we have 10 per cent of the total games market in Australia, with minimal support, but just imagine what we could do if we had more support. Victoria is leading the way with 47 per cent of the market share. This has come about through real support from Film Victoria looking at what is going on. Victoria also has Games Arcade, with one of the best developers in the country attracting talent from overseas. The people over there told me that when they spoke to their government officials, it was like nothing to them; it was not even second-guessed. It was like going and applying for an everyday grant. They did not have to get into a new industries fund in which they would be competing with start-ups; we have to remember that this is an established industry with billions of dollars worldwide.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Sorry, how did they get started? What was it the government did?

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: In Victoria? It put forward the policies to specify funding for games, like —

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: So it is funding?

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: Yes, there is funding. It also backs the infrastructure. As I said, it has Games Arcade. The government created a space for developers to work within, including people as young as 13 years. I went to the Perth Games Festival the other weekend and listened in on some panels. There were kids as young as 13 talking about the games they were developing and how they hoped to get involved in the industry. Unfortunately, the parents who took them to the festival were in despair because although their children wanted to get educated and have an opportunity to work in the industry, they knew that they possibly would not have an opportunity here

because the support just is not here. It is not outlined and it is not carved into a specific fund; it is sitting somewhere in the new industries fund, and, as I said before, it needs to compete with many other things.

Credit goes out to Perth because it has a lot of resilient people who will continue to lobby the government and the Minister for Innovation and ICT. A lot of work has been put into this. I am lucky to be here. I get to give a voice to these people, because they are dismayed at the lack of direction. I cannot tell members how much time I have spent listening to people's stories. They say, "If only we had a few thousand dollars, we could maybe take a few hours off work to put a bit more time into this." I have spoken to a number of people who work a 40-hour week and then go home and sit up all night programming and coding to develop a product. I was proud to see some of these people use a grant to pay for a ticket to go to Victoria to showcase their game at the PAX AUS Indie Showcase. For every one person who showcased their product there, there were probably 10 who could not afford to do that.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Were any of them from the regions or were they all from Perth?

Hon TIM CLIFFORD: As far as I know, they were from Perth. The beauty of this industry is that it does not matter whether people are in Mt Newman or Perth; it is online, so they can do these things. If the national broadband network was up and running, maybe things would be a bit easier for these people. I am going to keep pushing this issue. It is not the last that members will hear from me. I encourage members to come to Playup Perth next Friday night, where a lot of games will be showcased. A lot of local developers will be showcasing their piece. I hope that the Minister for Innovation and ICT makes his way down there, because I am sure he will be well received.