



# Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION  
2023

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 30 August 2023

# Legislative Assembly

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THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts) took the chair at 12 noon, acknowledged country and read prayers.

## PAPER TABLED

A paper was tabled and ordered to lie upon the table of the house.

### *MAIN ROADS WESTERN AUSTRALIA 2022 ANNUAL REPORT*

*Correction — Statement by Speaker*

THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts) [12.01 pm]: I have received a letter dated 28 August 2023 from the Minister for Transport requesting that an erratum be added to *Main Roads Western Australia 2022 annual report* tabled on 21 September 2022. The erratum corrects typographical errors on page 68 of the report to 2021 figures for clearing native vegetation. Under the provisions of standing order 156, I authorise the correction to be attached as an erratum to the tabled paper.

[See paper [2201](#).]

## GRIFFIN COAL

*Statement by Minister for State and Industry Development, Jobs and Trade*

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for State and Industry Development, Jobs and Trade) [12.02 pm]: I wish to provide the house with an update on the state government's provision of support to stabilise Griffin Coal operations to ensure the energy system security of Western Australia and provide certainty for the Collie workforce and community. As I have previously advised the house, although the government is committed to transparency and will provide updates when possible to ensure that the public remains informed, this matter is commercially sensitive. The government has now executed a further funding assistance agreement, termed the "process agreement", with the receivers and managers of Griffin Coal. Under this agreement, the government has discretion over how much support to offer for the period of the state agreement extension to June 2024.

Since my last update, I can confirm that the government has provided \$4.1 million to stabilise Griffin Coal's operations under the process agreement, in addition to the \$23.2 million provided for the period January to June 2023. As previously advised, KPMG has been engaged to provide advice to government on funding matters and mining operations. The government's priority remains energy security and certainty for the Collie community and workforce.

I have also previously advised the house that Treasury has appointed Ad Astra Corporate Advisory to assist the government with the discussions with commercial parties with a view to facilitating a commercial agreement with Griffin Coal's customers, based on paying a price for coal that supports the stable operation of the mine. Those discussions remain ongoing.

## ELECTRICITY — OUTAGES — REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

*Statement by Minister for Energy*

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Energy) [12.04 pm]: I rise today to provide an update on Western Power's implementation of the recommendations in the *Independent review of Christmas 2021 power outages* report. As members will recall, a series of power outages occurred across Western Power's network from 24 to 28 December 2021. Immediately following the outages, I commissioned an independent review to be led by respected energy expert Michelle Shepherd. The review found that many of the outages were due to customer and network overloads driven by unusually high electricity demand in residential areas. This had emerged in the context of exceptional heatwave conditions and more Western Australians staying home for the festive season due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When I tabled the *Independent review of Christmas 2021 power outages* report on 23 March 2022, I announced that Western Power would implement all six recommendations.

I am pleased to report that this work is now substantially complete. A key achievement is Western Power's improved forecasting practices, which have been modernised to take account of higher levels of rooftop solar, and to draw on data from advanced metering infrastructure. This improved forecasting enables better network management during extreme hot weather. Western Power strengthened its network infrastructure, with upgrades to 70 distribution transformers and substations in Mandurah, Waikiki, Yanchepp and Byford.

Another key recommendation was for Western Power to review its management of bushfire risk. Western Power worked with an expert independent consultant to review its management of bushfire risk. I thank the many stakeholders who collaborated with Western Power to support this work, including Energy Policy WA, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Western Australian Local Government Association.

Western Power used this review to implement a new and improved bushfire response. The new system draws on the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System to provide Western Power technicians with a more nuanced view of fire risk that comes with re-energising. Under this new regime, Western Power was able to restore power sooner following an outage, without endangering its crews and the community to the risk of bushfire. Western Power received positive feedback from customers and stakeholders on its improved communications. In particular, the community appreciated Western Power's enhanced SMS messaging and expanded website. The WA government also launched an extensive "Summer Readiness" advertising campaign to raise awareness on peak energy use over summer. Weather conditions were also far milder than the extreme heatwave conditions of Christmas 2021. As a result, customers experienced fewer network outages, fewer repeat outages and faster restoration times. Comparing 24 to 28 December 2022 to the same period in 2021, there was a 94 per cent decrease in fault call volumes to Western Power. Western Power continues to look at ways to deliver safe and reliable power to the community.

I commend Western Power for this work, which has materially improved power reliability for households and businesses. I now table Western Power's *Shepherd closeout report for Parliament*.

[See paper [2202](#).]

## YOUTH ACTION PLAN

*Statement by Minister for Youth*

**MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Youth)** [12.07 pm]: I am pleased to inform the house that on Monday this week, the state government announced that it would be developing a new youth action plan to support young Western Australians aged between 10 and 25 years old. This action plan will follow *Beyond 2020: WA youth action plan 2020–22*, which concluded at the end of 2022. The former plan outlined 27 actions across 18 government agencies, of which 22 actions were successfully closed out, with the remaining five linked to capital works projects that are still being delivered. This is a fantastic achievement.

The Cook Labor government is committed to ensuring that young people are supported to achieve their goals. Young people make up nearly 20 per cent of our population, with approximately one-fifth of young people living in regional or remote areas of the state. That is why it is important for young people and youth organisations to have their say on what they think should be included in the plan. The Cook Labor government cares about young people and their future, and we are a government that listens. We are placing young people at the forefront of discussions, and encouraging them to have their say and get involved. One of the easiest ways to make a submission is to jump onto the Department of Communities' website and complete the survey, or make a written submission. Young people and sector stakeholders are also encouraged to subscribe to the Young People Connect WA database, where we will be posting about upcoming forums that will be run statewide. I am keen to hear from a diverse range of young people on what they would like to see go into this plan, so can members please encourage their young constituents to consider making a submission.

Lastly, we need to name the new youth action plan, so if members know a young person who has a way with words, encourage them to send their idea through to [youngpeople@communities.wa.gov.au](mailto:youngpeople@communities.wa.gov.au), and they could win \$500.

[Interruption.]

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** Perhaps they could teach some of us to manage our mobile equipment, Attorney General!

## STATE TRAINING PLAN 2023–24

*Statement by Minister for Training*

**MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Training)** [12.09 pm]: I rise to inform the house that in July the State Training Board released its *State training plan 2023–24* to guide the state government's investment in vocational education and training over the next two years. The plan identifies four priorities to guide a well-funded, responsive and innovative training sector that supports the strategic development of local industry and the economy. Priorities include advocating for WA skills needs in national skills reform, preparing a skilled workforce for energy transformation and decarbonisation targets, managing a sustainable pipeline of apprentices and trainees, and building regional workforce skills and capacity.

The plan also focuses on continuing initiatives, including skills development for the tourism and hospitality industries, social assistance, allied health and agriculture sectors, as well as raising the profile of vocational education and training amongst young people. I thank the State Training Board for its *State training plan 2023–24*, which complements key state government priorities.

The plan's continued focus on diversification of the WA economy is welcomed. With WA industries adopting new technologies and flexible work arrangements, it is critical that the WA training sector is set up to equip all Western Australians, including those from regional, diverse and underrepresented backgrounds, with the skills needed to take on job opportunities. The plan will help position the WA training sector to support new and emerging sectors like defence industries and renewable energy to access the skilled workers they need. Priorities identified in the new plan will ensure that this government's continuing and unprecedented investment in training will continue to support current needs and prepare WA's workforce for the industries and opportunities of the future.

**GREAT SOUTHERN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION — BRUCE MANNING — RETIREMENT***Statement by Minister for Regional Development*

**MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Regional Development)** [12.11 pm]: I would like to inform the house of the departure of long-serving Great Southern Development Commission chair, Bruce Manning. Our regional development commissions play such a crucial role in connecting business with government, and there are few who have contributed more to the economic development of the great southern than Bruce. He has been a passionate advocate for the region during his 23 years leading the GSDC as CEO and, subsequently, chair, and his unwavering dedication and exceptional service have made a lasting impact on the region. Most notably, he oversaw the delivery of the \$130 million Albany waterfront development and the Albany Entertainment Centre, and the creation of the Munda Biddi Trail and the Bibbulmun Track. Bruce was also instrumental in the attraction and the expansion of the tertiary education presence within the region with the delivery of the University of Western Australia science building.

His unwavering support for local businesses, agricultural advancements, tourism and infrastructure projects has played a pivotal role in enhancing the region's economic potential and the quality of life of its residents. On behalf of the Western Australian government and the people of the great southern, I extend my deepest gratitude for his outstanding service to the region. Bruce's tenure as both chief executive officer and chair of the Great Southern Development Commission spanned more than two decades—a remarkable achievement. Bruce's departure from the commission will undoubtedly be felt deeply.

However, I am feeling positive about the future. I am pleased to announce the appointment of Ricky Burgess as our new GSDC chair, effective from 1 September 2023. Ricky has served as chief executive officer of Albany Community Care since 2019, leading a team delivering critical services for the region. She brings with her senior leadership experience across the public sector in Western Australia, previously having worked as CEO of the Western Australian Local Government Association and Perth Zoo, and as director general of the former department of culture and the arts. I have no doubt that the Great Southern Development Commission will continue to make those valuable connections under her leadership.

**OCEANIC PINK SNAPPER STOCKS — GASCOYNE***Statement by Minister for Fisheries*

**MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Fisheries)** [12.14 pm]: Oceanic pink snapper stocks in the Gascoyne region, outside Shark Bay inner gulf, are on the road to recovery with management measures to boost stocks of the popular fish having proved successful. The Gascoyne demersal scalefish resource is five years into a 20-year recovery plan, after a 2017 scientific stock assessment found that oceanic pink snapper was at severe risk and that action was needed to ensure future sustainability. A recovery plan was developed by a working group comprising Recfishwest, Marine Tourism WA, the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to set out clear objectives, milestones and time frames to recover the resource by 2037.

The recent stock assessment provides a health check on the recovery and shows that oceanic pink snapper is on track to meet recovery milestones under current management measures. This success story is a very encouraging result after five years of recovery measures, and it demonstrates the importance of taking action to rebuild our fisheries to sustainable levels. We recently took action under the recovery plan for the west coast demersal scalefish resource from Augusta to Kalbarri and we are confident that these management changes will also see this fishery on the road to recovery. All commercial, charter and recreational fishers have a stake in supporting the recovery of these highly valued species and it is critical that we continue to work together to make sure we have plenty of fish for the future.

**WASTESORTED INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS***Statement by Minister for Environment*

**MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldivis — Minister for Environment)** [12.15 pm]: Well done, Minister for Fisheries! I am pleased to advise that new funding to boost Western Australia's recycling and processing infrastructure has just been released. There is \$1 million available through the latest round of WasteSorted infrastructure grants to fund selected recycling infrastructure projects, with up to \$250 000 available for each project. The state government has already provided more than \$7.5 million to reduce waste through the WasteSorted infrastructure and community education grants since 2017. This announcement adds a further \$1 million to that total.

The program prioritises infrastructure projects that recycle and process the focus materials set out in Western Australia's waste strategy, with a particular emphasis on food organics and garden organics, as well as textiles, for this funding round. I am pleased to report that previous WasteSorted infrastructure grants have helped to fund new capacity for plastics recycling, construction and demolition materials recycling, FOGO processing and other projects, including the recycling of paper and glass. The funding will help recycling infrastructure operators to support Western Australia's ability to process and recycle its valuable waste, and the grant is administered through the Waste Authority.

The state government is continuing to invest in increasing WA's recycling infrastructure and ultimately improve environmental management. This is just one of several grant funding programs that the state government is progressing to enable Western Australia to waste less and recycle more, including the recycling modernisation fund, the Food Waste for Healthy Soils programs being run in conjunction with the Australian government, and the Better Bins Plus: Go FOGO grants for local government three-bin FOGO collections, which adds up to tens of millions of dollars invested into waste management and recycling. The state government is committed to making landfill the last resort and to delivering the objectives set out in the state's waste strategy. This WasteSorted infrastructure grants program is another important step towards creating a low-waste, sustainable Western Australia.

### EARLY YEARS PARTNERSHIP

*Statement by Minister for Early Childhood Education*

**MS S.E. WINTON (Wanneroo — Minister for Early Childhood Education)** [12.18 pm]: I rise today to update the house on the Early Years Partnership, a unique 10-year partnership to give Western Australian children the best start in life. This collaboration between the state government, the Minderoo Foundation and the Telethon Kids Institute works differently with communities to improve the development, health and learning of children from conception to four years, to create lasting change. Last week it reached a major milestone with the release of the final two of four community plans.

Four communities that are part of this partnership are Armadale West; central great southern, comprising the Shires of Katanning, Kojonup, Gnowangerup and Broomehill-Tambellup; Derby, including the Mowanjum and Pandanus Park communities; and, of course, Bidyadanga Aboriginal Community. Each EYP community has developed a community plan, which identifies key priorities to improve children's wellbeing and school readiness within that community and includes local evidence-based solutions. Each plan was co-designed with community members, community leaders, local families and services with the support of the Department of Communities, the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Minderoo Foundation and the Telethon Kids Institute.

We know that communities face their own unique challenges, and the community is best placed to identify what it needs. Last week, I had the great honour to travel to the Kimberley to launch both the *Wirriya dunyji ooba babanil ingun (Happy strong small children) Early years community plan* for children in Derby and the nearby communities of Mowanjum and Pandanus Park and the *Yija Tili (True Sparks) Early years community plan* for children in Bidyadanga. It was wonderful to be joined by the member for Kimberley, Jay Weatherill from the Minderoo Foundation and members of the local communities, including the Ngunga Group Women's Aboriginal Corporation, the Mowanjum community, the Pandanus Park community and Bidyadanga Aboriginal Corporation, La Grange Inc, as we celebrated this very important milestone.

The early years of a child's life are critical for positive life outcomes. During this time, children build the foundation for lifelong learning, health and wellbeing. Through the Early Years Partnership, we are committed to listening and working collaboratively with communities to create change for children. We are increasing awareness of the importance of early development, strengthening community collaboration and governance, providing better data and evidence to identify the main enablers and barriers to children thriving in their communities and mobilising resources to amplify or address those enablers and barriers.

The Cook government is proud of the Early Years Partnership and its new ways of working to achieve great results for children, families and the wider community.

### CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION AMENDMENT (PROTECTION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT ANIMALS) BILL 2023

*Introduction and First Reading*

Bill introduced, on motion by **Mr P. Papalia (Minister for Police)**, and read a first time.

Explanatory memorandum presented by the minister.

*Second Reading*

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Police)** [12.21 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Criminal Investigation Amendment (Protection of Law Enforcement Animals) Bill 2023 will introduce into the Criminal Investigation Act 2006—the CIA—new offence, penalty and court-ordered restitution provisions for assaulting, injuring or killing a law enforcement animal. The bill fulfils a government commitment to address a recommendation in the *WA Police Union: 2017 pre-election submission* to introduce harsher penalties for offenders found guilty of assaulting a police animal. Recommendations made in the June 2018 report of the statutory review of the CIA also proposed legislative reform in this area.

Pursuant to section 17 of the CIA, a police officer or other public officer exercising powers under the CIA may use an animal to assist, provided that the animal has been trained for the purposes for which it is used and use of

the animal is reasonably necessary in the circumstances. The power to use animals under the CIA is wideranging, as the CIA includes preventive and investigative powers as well as providing for other matters, including the use of force and maintaining public order. The use of animals by police officers is also expressly contemplated in the Misuse of Drugs Act 1981 and the Terrorism (Extraordinary Powers) Act 2005.

The Western Australia Police Force train and use dogs and horses for a number of purposes. Dogs are primarily used for tracking and locating suspects and detecting drugs in places and on persons. Horses are used for targeted high-visibility patrols in areas with big crowds and entertainment precincts such as Northbridge and Fremantle, and for occasions such as New Year's Eve. Police horses are also used for responding to land search-and-rescue incidents, out-of-control gatherings and other public order incidents, including protests and demonstrations.

People may use violence against law enforcement animals in an attempt to avoid arrest or to prevent police from carrying out their lawful duties. For example, in September 2019, a violent offender punched a police dog in the head in an attempt to avoid arrest. In Queensland, in February 2020, a police dog assisting in the arrest of two offenders was stabbed in the chest. In Victoria, in June 2022, an offender was sentenced for using a flagpole to hit a police horse at an October 2020 protest against COVID-19 lockdowns.

Separately, information obtained by the WA Police Force indicates that members of outlaw motorcycle gangs in other jurisdictions are looking to specifically target police dogs. According to WA Police Force statistics, there have been 32 recorded assault incidents involving law enforcement animals since January 2015. Although not reflected in the number of recorded incidents, police dogs are often assaulted in the course of assisting officers to apprehend offenders.

There is currently no specific sanction for a person who assaults, injures or generally uses violence against an animal used by a police officer in the lawful exercise of their duties. In the past, police have charged offenders under the Criminal Code for obstruction of a public officer or disorderly behaviour in public. Fines in those cases have tended to range from \$200 to \$1 500. The only other available recourse would be for an offender to be charged with cruelty to animals pursuant to section 19 of the Animal Welfare Act 2002, which carries a maximum penalty of a fine of \$50 000 and imprisonment for five years. The Prisons Act 1981 and the Young Offenders Regulations 1995 provide that if a person assaults a prison dog carrying out its duties, that person is deemed to have assaulted the officer handling the animal. However, these provisions do not extend to police and other law enforcement animals.

Other jurisdictions—namely, New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland, Tasmania and South Australia—have legislated for specific offences relating to killing or seriously injuring animals used in law enforcement. Most of these jurisdictions also provide for the ability of a court to order an offender to pay compensation for the injury or killing of a law enforcement animal.

The Criminal Investigation Amendment (Protection of Law Enforcement Animals) Bill 2023 will introduce new offences in Western Australia for assaulting, injuring or killing a law enforcement animal. The offences will cover animals used by police officers in the execution of their powers, duties or responsibilities, whether they arise from the CIA, other statutes or the common law. The offences will also cover animals used by other public officers who have powers under the CIA in the execution of their powers, duties or responsibilities.

There are two limbs to the new offences. The first limb concerns assaulting, injuring or killing an animal that is being used by an officer. The second limb concerns assaulting, injuring or killing an animal on account of it being an animal that is used, or trained or maintained for use by officers. The second limb would, for example, apply when there is a targeted attack on an animal simply because it is a law enforcement animal, regardless of whether the animal is being used by an officer at the time. The second limb will cover targeted attacks on animals that are trained or maintained for use by officers, including animals that have not yet been deployed because they have not yet completed their training. Assaulting a law enforcement animal will be an offence against authority akin to assaulting a public officer. The penalties for the new offences will therefore be in line with the penalties in section 318 of the Criminal Code for assaulting a public officer, without the application of the mandatory sentencing provisions in that section.

Under each limb of the new offence provisions, killing an animal will be punishable by 10 years' imprisonment. Assaulting or injuring an animal in "circumstances of aggravation" will also be punishable by 10 years' imprisonment. The circumstances of aggravation will be consistent with the Criminal Code provisions for assaulting a public officer and include being armed with a weapon and being in company with another person during the commission of the offence. Assaulting or injuring an animal, other than in circumstances of aggravation, will carry a maximum penalty of seven years' imprisonment, with a summary conviction penalty of three years' imprisonment and a fine of \$36 000.

The offences will not apply if a person has a "reasonable excuse" for assaulting, injuring or killing a law enforcement animal. Examples of reasonable excuses, such as actions by veterinarians and animal trainers, are set out in the bill. One example of reasonable excuse that is expressly provided for in the bill is where an accused was acting in self-defence. The self-defence provisions are modelled on the defence of self-defence in section 20 of the

Animal Welfare Act 2002. The provisions would allow a person to claim they were acting in self-defence to protect themselves against an animal that was being used by an officer if the use of the animal was unreasonable in the circumstances—for example, when the use of the animal was not in accordance with WA Police Force policy, procedure and training.

The bill also provides for compensation orders to be made against a person who is convicted of assaulting, injuring or killing a law enforcement animal. Animals used by officers are of significant value to the state because of the work they perform as well as the resources invested in their training. If an animal is injured, the state may incur significant costs in relation to the treatment, care, rehabilitation and re-training of the animal. If an animal is killed or unable to be deployed for use, the state may incur costs in relation to the replacement of the animal with another suitably trained animal. The bill provides an avenue for the WA Police Force, or other agencies using animals under the Criminal Investigation Act, to recover those costs from the offender. The bill will strengthen the protection of animals that assist officers to perform their duties.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr P.J. Rundle**.

### **ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY AMENDMENT (DISTRIBUTED ENERGY RESOURCES) BILL 2023**

#### *Introduction and First Reading*

Bill introduced, on motion by **Mr W.J. Johnston (Minister for Energy)**, and read a first time.

Explanatory memorandum presented by the minister.

#### *Second Reading*

**MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Energy)** [12.30 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Electricity Industry Amendment (Distributed Energy Resources) Bill 2023 before us today amends the Electricity Industry Act 2004 to provide a regulatory framework for the electricity sector that is flexible, responsive and future-focused to keep pace with the momentum of the energy transformation in Western Australia.

As members are aware, the electricity sector in Western Australia is unique, and as such we are faced with unique challenges in managing it. This sector has seen unprecedented change in the last two decades, but legislation that is now almost 20 years old could not have anticipated the rate of transformation currently unfolding as we bring Western Australia's clean energy future to fruition. Understandably, the legislative framework has not kept pace and is no longer fit to address challenges and realise opportunities that present today.

The bill before us today will improve the legislative and governance arrangements for the electricity sector in three ways. First, the amendments will deliver a unifying theme for the Electricity Industry Act 2004 through an overarching state electricity objective. The state electricity objective will replace the multiple, sometimes conflicting, objectives that exist across the regulatory framework for electricity in Western Australia. Electrification is a key component of our state's decarbonisation journey and will be crucial to ensure we can meet our targets of net zero by 2050. The state electricity objective will introduce an environmental consideration that will allow greenhouse gas emissions, for example, to be factored into decision-making alongside price, security, reliability and quality of supply, and, of course, safety. This new objective will guide decision-makers to deliver outcomes that serve the long-term interests for electricity consumers in Western Australia. Due to the prominence of the state electricity objective in the bill and its significance in guiding decision-making, Energy Policy WA engaged with stakeholders ahead of the remainder of the amendments. Consultation revealed support for the state electricity objective's intent and stakeholders agreed that factoring the environment into decision-making is necessary in order to realise Western Australia's low carbon future.

Second, the bill aims to greatly reduce the complexity, uncertainty and inefficiency that has resulted from an outdated regulatory framework. Currently, the governing arrangements for the south west interconnected system are dealt with under a range of various and sometimes conflicting subordinate legal instruments. The bill before us today introduces heads of power to incorporate these disparate instruments into one consolidated, fit-for-purpose set of rules that governs the power system referred to as the electricity system and market rules. The bill provides amendments to enable the content of these various instruments to be reviewed and over time combined into the electricity system and market rules. This will occur through a deliberate, staged approach. Ongoing consultation with stakeholders has confirmed their interest and commitment to being part of this process, led by myself as Minister for Energy alongside the Coordinator of Energy and Energy Policy WA. Management of emergency measures that promote the stability and security of an isolated power system that is challenging to balance are currently spread across these various instruments, making timely and efficient decision-making by responsible bodies and effective management of those situations more difficult. The amendments in this bill aim to reduce that burden by ensuring that one contemporary and unambiguous set of rules governs the electricity system.

Thirdly, the bill seeks to improve and modernise arrangements enshrined in almost 20-year old legislation to facilitate the uptake of new, clean, power system technologies, such as those relating to the integration of rooftop solar and energy storage. These technologies are referred to as distributed energy resources, and form part of the title of the bill before us today.

Western Australia has been a world leader in the uptake of distributed energy resources such as rooftop solar. As the uptake of solar, storage and electric vehicles accelerates in Western Australia, the pressure on the security and reliability of our power system caused by accommodating unmanaged distributed energy resources increases. Visibility of the amount of distributed energy resources on the grid is crucial to inform system planning and maintain a reliable power system. This bill incorporates not only amendments to introduce heads of power to allow greater visibility of the location and operation of distributed energy resources, but also to enable the management of uncontrolled distributed energy resources in situations that challenge power system security and reliability. These amendments will allow distributed energy resources technologies to be used to advantage both the power system and electricity consumers, enabling their continued uptake.

Understandably, the consolidation of instruments into the newly expanded electricity system and market rules will take time, and for that reason this bill is presented in two stages. The stage 1 amendments will introduce the state electricity objective; define new terms and concepts, especially in relation to distributed energy resources; and empower the new electricity system and market rules to deal with all of the relevant matters currently contained in subsidiary legislation. The stage 2 amendments will commence in a number of years, after the content from those subordinate instruments has been reviewed and incorporated into the newly expanded electricity system and market rules, repealing references to the outdated instruments. There are provisions in the bill, which are introduced with the stage 1 amendments, that set out how this transition will occur.

Energy Policy WA has consulted extensively with stakeholders on the remainder of amendments contained in this bill and the purpose of the proposed reforms. Interested stakeholder engagement has enabled refinement of the bill that will improve its application. Energy Policy WA will continue to engage as the reforms progress and as the electricity system and market rules develop over the coming years to encompass all matters that govern electricity in Western Australia.

Together, these three main aims of the reforms, delivered through the bill's amendments, aim to achieve one primary goal: to build greater resilience of the energy sector by developing a framework that works to deliver outcomes that protect and advance the interests of energy consumers in Western Australia.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr P.J. Rundle**.

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING AMENDMENT BILL 2023

### *Introduction and First Reading*

Bill introduced, on motion by **Ms S.F. McGurk (Minister for Training)**, and read a first time.

Explanatory memorandum presented by the minister.

### *Second Reading*

**MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Training)** [12.40 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Vocational Education and Training Amendment Bill 2023 seeks to amend the Vocational Education and Training Act 1996. The VET act and associated regulations provide the framework for the administration and regulation of the state's training system and matters arising from decisions made by state government institutions that are part of the training system. The proposed amendments will provide for an effective appeal mechanism for people affected by decisions made by the Training Accreditation Council and provide for the proper delegation of the Department of Training and Workforce Development's chief executive's functions under part 7 of the VET act and associated regulations made for the purposes of part 7 of the act. These amendments were also supported by recommendations from the last statutory review of the VET act. A report from the review was tabled in Parliament in March 2019.

The first proposed amendment relates to the scope of appeals against decisions of the council, as outlined in section 58G(2) of the VET act. The council considers the national Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 when making decisions about the registration of providers. A judgement made by the Western Australian Supreme Court of Appeal in 2021 ruled that the word "standards" is not in scope of the existing section 58G(2). This has meant that the vast majority of the council's decisions are not appealable, which essentially denies a person's right to appeal and does not align with the principle of natural justice. Clause 4 of the bill will amend the wording of section 58G(2) to enable a person to be able to appeal against a decision of the council if the council made an error in applying, or failed to apply, guidelines issued by the minister under section 13, or criteria, including standards and guidelines, that the council is required to apply.



Clause 5 of the bill will make a consequential amendment to section 58(c). This amendment is a result of the new wording proposed for section 58G(2). Section 58(c) is currently limited to council decisions made as a result of processing an application made to the council. The amended section 58(c) will extend the application of this section to decisions made by the council on its own initiative. The amended section 58(c) will also provide for criteria to be prescribed in relation to what the council must “apply” when making a decision. This is in addition to the existing provision of prescribing criteria that the council may or must “take into account”.

Clause 7 of the bill outlines the transitional provision for appeals that have not been determined at the time of the commencement of the amendment act. Amended sections 58G(2) and 58(c) will apply to an appeal that commenced on or after the commencement day of the amendment act, or an appeal that commenced before the commencement day but was not determined before that day.

The second proposed amendment relates to the proper delegation of functions of the chief executive of the Department of Training and Workforce Development in relation to the registration and administration of training contracts under part 7 of the VET act. These functions are largely administrative in nature and performed in high volume. For this reason, it is not practical for the chief executive to personally carry out these administrative functions, and they are typically delegated to DTWD officers. Regulation 35 of the Vocational Education and Training (General) Regulations 2009 currently provides for the chief executive to delegate functions. However, there is no provision in the VET act to support such delegations. Clause 6 of the bill proposes to insert section 60J at the beginning of part 7, division 4 of the VET act to provide for delegation of the chief executive’s functions under part 7 of the VET act or regulations made for the purposes of this part. Proposed section 60J will come into effect after regulation 35 is removed from the VET regulations through a regulatory amendment process after the passing of the amendment bill.

These amendments are needed to enable a person’s right to appeal and provide for the effective administration of the apprenticeship system. The associated explanatory memorandum contains further details on the amendments.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr P.J. Rundle**.

### **RAIL SAFETY NATIONAL LAW APPLICATION BILL 2023**

#### *Second Reading*

Resumed from 22 June.

**MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean)** [12.45 pm]: I rise to make a contribution on the Rail Safety National Law Application Bill 2023, which will put in place a rail safety regime in Western Australia that is consistent with the regime that exists in other states. This is obviously desirable for any industry, because having consistent safety standards across the country ensures that safety is implemented in a consistent and well understood way.

Historically, every state and territory regulated railways independently, which resulted in a lot of confusion and inefficiency. One of the complications of being a Federation is achieving consistency across states, but after years of discussion, the states agreed in 2011 to establish a national system of rail safety regulation and investigation. To implement this, it was determined that the South Australian Parliament would play a lead role and that the legislation passed in that jurisdiction would become the benchmark for all other states to follow. It was intended that the states would pass legislation that not just duplicated South Australia’s legislation but also automatically applied the South Australian legislation to the relevant state. The benefit of that was that any amendments made to the lead legislation would automatically apply throughout the country. Unfortunately, and for reasons that I do not understand, the Barnett government did not go down that path. Other states did, but the Barnett government did not. The Barnett government made a decision to simply mirror the South Australian legislation and passed duplicate legislation in Western Australia. However, that meant that when changes were made nationally, they did not automatically apply in Western Australia. The practical result of that is that eight legislative amendment packages passed by the South Australian Parliament since 2015 are yet to be adopted in Western Australia. This bill will move Western Australia to a regime in which any changes to the legislation in South Australia will automatically apply in Western Australia and will not require separate legislation. That will deliver the consistency of regulation and investigation that members on this side of the Parliament believe is desirable.

Some people might say that we are handing over the sovereignty of the state of Western Australian to the South Australian Parliament. What if something happens in the South Australian Parliament that we do not want? If we simply adopt its legislation, it could possibly be to our detriment. There is a safeguard to ensure that we still have an opportunity to not apply changes made in South Australia if we wish. That will be done by requiring that legislative changes made in South Australia are laid on the table in WA Parliament and that either house of the state Parliament could, if they wish, disallow those amendments. In effect, we will get the best of both worlds. We will get consistency of investigation and regulation, but we will have the opportunity, if there is a significant reason to do so, to step outside the national regime. I think that is unlikely to happen, but it is certainly a far more desirable regime than what is currently in place, whereby, as I already indicated, since 2015, eight legislative amendment packages have been passed that apply nationally, but do not apply in WA. That is very undesirable.

This bill will also implement some local provisions for alcohol and drug testing. It was agreed that drug and alcohol testing would be conducted in accordance with local practices as part of the Rail Safety National Law. The practices of authorised officers, such as police, in each state should be consistently applied. This legislation will simply put in place procedures in this industry that I understand align with drug and alcohol provisions under the Road Traffic Act 1974, which is used by the Western Australia Police Force. Again, that is another very sensible revision provision contained within this legislation.

That is the guts of this legislation—doing what we can to make the rail system as safe as possible. I think no-one in this house would stand up and say that they are not in favour of more safety in workplaces, but it is easy to make that sort of statement. It is often when we get down to the nitty-gritty that people disagree.

One of the issues I will raise in conjunction with this legislation is the overwhelming research that shows that union workplaces, workplaces with significant union representation, are safer than non-union workplaces. All the research shows that is the case, yet there are many workplaces where employers—who are represented in this house by the Liberal Party and the Nationals WA—actively work to ensure that union representation is not present in their workplace. In my former career before I came into this place, many employers and workplaces spent tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars to keep union representation out of their workplaces. One of the consequences of that, and all the research shows, is that those workplaces are less safe.

Members opposite might say that that is not true, as they do. They ignore the research, but it is actually the case. For a workplace to be safe, what does it need? I suggest there are three basic things that workplaces need to be safe. This applies across all workplaces. First of all, we need good legislation that requires workplaces to be safe and that allows employees to participate in the regime that makes that workplace safe. That includes things such as the ability to have safety committees and safety representatives and those sorts of things. We have to have the law right, and this legislation is about having the law right in the rail industry. However, just having the law right is not enough; it is only the first thing. Secondly, it needs secure employment. If workers are in insecure employment, they will not exercise their rights under even the best workplace safety legislation. If a workplace consists of casuals, and there is an ability under the legislation for someone to put their hand up as a safety representative, for example, workers will be reluctant to put their hands up as a safety rep if they know that if they raise a safety issue and their employer does not like the disruption that that causes, as a casual they can be told to not come on Monday. Almost nothing can be done about it. Whatever the legislation says, it is really difficult to prove that that is why a casual has been let go. Insecure work breeds a culture in which people are reluctant to enforce the rights they have under even the best safety legislation. A workplace needs those two things to be a safe workplace. The first is a good legal framework and the second is secure employment. The third thing it needs is union representation.

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** I was waiting for it.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** The member for Roe is shaking his head. “I was waiting for it”, he says. One of the things, member for Roe, is that unions spend a lot of their time helping workers make their workplaces safe. The member sits there and shakes his head, but he represents a chunk of regional WA where the agricultural industry is one of the most important industries. The agricultural industry is one of the most unsafe industries in Australia. Farmers, their employees and their families die in that industry at rates far and above many other industries. I do not know what to say to the member for Roe. If he is happy to let his constituents die because agriculture is unsafe and he does not want that industry to have union representation, it is a pretty sad indictment of the member. If more employees in the agriculture sector were represented by a union, there would be fewer injuries and deaths. They are absolutely the member’s constituents.

Workplaces have to have good legislation, secure employment and people with the right to be represented by a union. Even if there are safety committees available, people will still be reluctant to put their hand up and raise safety issues if they fear losing their employment. It is as clear as the sun rising in the morning and setting in the evening. It is how it works. I would just say to people, and to the member for Roe in particular, that the legislation that we are passing today to enable there to be uniform safety legislation in the railway industry is only part of the regime that needs to be in place if this industry is going to be safe. Secure employment, as I said, is extraordinarily important.

I was listening to the ABC yesterday and Andrew McKellar, the CEO of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was being interviewed about the federal government’s same job, same pay legislation. We will wait and see what the detail of that legislation is when it is released, but the principle that it will encompass is that regardless of whether someone is employed directly or through a contractor, they must be paid the same pay for doing the same work. That is a way of discouraging insecure work arrangements such as the use of labour hire firms in industries purely to save money.

The interview with Andrew McKellar was really quite interesting. I think it was Nadia Mitsopoulos who interviewed him. She put to him that insecure work is an issue and he said that it is not the case that casual employment is less secure than permanent work. I heard him say it and I thought it was ridiculous, because, by definition, a casual can be let go with an hour’s notice and a permanent has a whole range of protections. His argument to substantiate his claim that casual employees were more secure than permanent employees was that, in his experience when he had

seen companies make adjustments to their staffing levels, often the permanents were let go first. I thought: does it not tell a tale that the CEO of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is saying that, in his experience, companies often get rid of their permanents and keep their casuals when they want to reduce the number of staff? What a sorry state we have in this country when employers are getting rid of permanents in favour of keeping their casuals. The issue of secure work to enable people to enforce their employment rights, including their right to a safe workplace, is an absolutely serious one and it needs to be taken seriously.

I would also like to say in the context of this legislation—I am not sure whether I am the first to say it in this house—that on 14 October, I will be voting yes in the referendum to amend the Constitution to put in place a Voice to Parliament. It is an absolutely sad indictment that both the Leader of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Opposition, who happens to be the Leader of the Nationals WA, have backflipped on this issue. When this issue originally came on the public agenda, they both indicated their support because they thought it was the right thing to do. Members in this place have to show some principles. Clearly, the Leader of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Opposition have backflipped on the Voice—I saw the Leader of the Liberal Party shake her head—because they now see some cheap electoral advantage in reversing their position on the issue.

**Mr P.J. Rundle** interjected.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** It is a sad situation. I have said before in this place that the member for Central Wheatbelt and I do not often agree on many things, but I want to commend her for her principled position in maintaining her commitment to voting for the Voice. It puts the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party to shame —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean, please stick to the bill that you are talking to.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** I thank you for your guidance. I think having a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament will enable Indigenous Australians to participate in the life of this country —

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean.

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** — including enabling them to enforce their right to safety in the workplace. Safety in the workplace requires people to be confident in expressing and raising their voice. As I have said, in order to have a safe workplace, three things are needed: a good legal framework, which this bill will put in place; secure employment; and union representation. In my view, a constitutionally enshrined Indigenous Voice to Parliament will also assist in that culture. I will conclude my contribution there.

**MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Thornlie)** [1.06 pm]: I rise to speak on the Rail Safety National Law Application Bill 2023 and offer my full support for this legislation. Other speakers have addressed the background to this bill through a commitment made by the Barnett government to use the process of mirroring legislation, whereas, in fact, the approach of applied law would be a far more effective way of ensuring the harmony, absolute accuracy and reliable updating of our state law to be in sync with the national law.

I will return to that point in a moment, but I first want to address the issue of rail safety from a historical perspective. I am thinking of the role that railways have played in the state of Western Australia. Rail networks throughout the south west of the state in the forest regions have been particularly elaborate. The layout of various train lines that have serviced the forestry industry over the years is absolutely remarkable. I can only ponder the machinery that was available to those workers. I am talking about lines that were constructed in the mid-1800s and well into the twentieth century. Those train lines, which were constructed for the purpose of moving timber, were often done with the most rudimentary machinery and, I would have to say, in the most dangerous conditions. That is why it is important that we have this historical perspective on the evolution of rail safety in Australia and, indeed, around the world.

As an aside, it is important to remind members of this because I know that a lot of us will be attending various celebrations over the next few years when new train lines and train stations are opened. It is important to know that these events can provide their own moments of danger and tragedy. The Manchester–Liverpool line was opened in, I think, 1830 to great fanfare. Of course, the local member for Liverpool was in attendance. It was an interesting time. We have to bear in mind that back then, Liverpool was just getting out of being a slave-trading town. Traditionally, it had a strong degree of support for, first of all, slave-trading and, then, slavery. We have to keep a distinction there. That is something that members need to bear in mind. There is a big difference between the trafficking of slaves, which was phased out in the early 1800s, and slavery, which was still supported well into the 1820s.

The Prime Minister of the day was there on the day of the opening of the Liverpool–Manchester train line. There had been a falling out between the local member for Liverpool and the Prime Minister, although they were members of the same party. Of course, there was a VIP wagon and a passing train. George Stephenson, the great railway engineer, had recently developed a locomotive, which I believe was called the *Rocket*, and it was on display. Members can imagine the excitement and all the steam and smoke. The air might not have been particularly clear, but in all the excitement, the member for Liverpool tried to cross the lines to say hello to the Prime Minister and make amends for a disagreement—I think it was over the Corn Law—but was killed. I think that is a salutary reminder to members

here that even on those occasions when there is much celebration—we can imagine how it will be when we open up new train lines and make sure that the public are engaged and coming along to celebrate historic occasions and seeing things for the first time—there is always an element of danger around railways. We do not want to see anything as tragic as that death of a former member of the Palace of Westminster reproduced at the opening of our train lines here.

I will dwell a bit more on the incredible work done by those people who built the rail lines through the forests of the south west, and the danger they put themselves in. Members may be familiar with the train line easement that still exists. It is the one that runs from the Bellevue RSL area to Darlington, through Glen Forrest and Stoneville and further along. It no longer exists as a train line, but is now a beautiful easement used by walkers, dog walkers, joggers and people on bikes. It is a very well-used resource and asset. I know much of it is in the electorate of the member for Kalamunda. He is particularly proud of it. It is so popular that I think there is an issue about how it is managed and how the—not the competing uses, but the varying nature of use is done in a complementary fashion. There is an element of safety in that as well.

People put blood, sweat and tears into the construction of those lines. I think it would have happened in the lifetime of some of the people who worked on lines, especially the ones in the jarrah–marri and karri forests. There would have been a time when they would have done all of the complicated construction work. They would have built the bridges over various rivers and gullies using very basic sawing material, having to do quite complicated engineering with timber that was barely milled. They would use felled trees in creative ways to establish strong engineering features, some that still exist. I will give particular mention to one in a moment.

These people would put themselves in danger at a time when there was nothing like this rail safety law in place, yet they would pursue their work diligently. They would be carrying incredible weights; they would be sleeping in very difficult conditions, often in very isolated places. I enjoy being out in the bush, and feel quite comfortable there, but I think I would be always wondering where my next meal was going to come from if I was there for an extended period of time. I am sure there was a huge logistical exercise in making sure people in isolated forest country were well fed and well watered. There would be streams and things like that, but it would have been a major task to enable people to undertake their work and deliver it safely. Those people who were working on those train lines, say, in the 1920s—they might have been around 20 years of age; we will keep it there for the simplicity of the maths—would have borne witness to the ripping out of those train lines. In some of the forestry lines it was quite intentional that once the timber resource was exhausted the tracks would be moved on. I think for some it may have been hurtful to see that the work they had put in to establish the train lines was to no avail once decisions had been made about the future of how timber and other goods would be transported.

In 2023, many of those old easements still exist. A lot of the work was not just in constructing the bridges or laying the tracks, it was in putting through the easements, the cuttings, the sidings and the tunnelling. People will be familiar with the Greenmount tunnel. I think some workers were killed in the process of building that tunnel. It is still an eerie place to wander through and is quite disorienting. Walkers can see only a little bit of light at the end of the tunnel. It sounds like an expression that we use, but it is a case in which it is not a metaphorical expression at all. It is a reality. Walkers see the light at the end of the tunnel and try to walk towards it but, occasionally, they veer off and feel the sides of the tunnel. It is quite a narrow place. I know there were some railway workers who were killed when a train was stalled in there and they were asphyxiated by the smoke. There were no exhaust systems in place. It was reliant on the quick and smooth passage of trains that would enable people to get through safely.

We can see how rail safety has evolved over the years. There have been derailments on that line. There was a terrible derailment just east of the Greenmount tunnel—I think in the 1920s—with deaths and tragedy. If we do not get it right when it comes to rail safety, there will be all sorts of problems. In more recent times, I think in the 1990s, there were deaths on the line when a freight train ran into a grain train. There have been various other episodes like that.

The legacy of the rail network really is something to behold. I would like to mention the Mason and Bird company, which was in operation in the 1870s. Mason & Bird is now the name of a particularly good cafe in Kalamunda. I think a lot of people would be unaware of its connection to the rail network back then. Mason and Bird were timber fellers. They had a licence to fell timber on 100 000 hectares in the Bickley Brook area. Famously, they were able to construct a rail line well into the Perth hills and Bickley Brook. Where the existing Victoria dam is located, then down towards the current Bickley Reservoir, there is a remnant of a bridge, which is said to be the oldest wooden rail bridge in Australia. It is an interesting piece of heritage and one well worth visiting. The bridge is a wooden structure, so the rails that are on it are wooden. The system was to load up carts with timber, and then horses would draw those carts down the escarpment, and eventually get to the Canning River at Mason's Landing. Mason's Landing is in the member for Cannington's electorate and a well-known and much-loved landmark in the Cannington electorate. I know the member for Cannington has very generously hosted functions there over the years and there is always good conversation. It is enjoyable to make that connection with the history and think about the significance of that particular spot in our state's history. The Mason and Bird company left that legacy, which helps us appreciate the hardship and the challenges that people faced and what they went through. It is quite remarkable.

We talk about rail safety and think about our magnificent trains: our Public Transport Authority trains, the quality of development and construction of trains here in Western Australia—the new *Australind* and *Prospector* trains as well. I am particularly excited about the new *Australind* trains and the capacity they will have to service the line through to Bunbury. The trains will be able to carry bikes on board as well, which has not been the case before. People will be able to get off at stations such as Cookernup, Harvey or wherever and ride up to the escarpment and enjoy adventure tourism that way. They will be able to do that knowing that the safety standards on our rail network are the very highest in the world.

One feature of the legislation that is a modernisation of rail safety is in the provisions for alcohol and drug testing. A harmonisation of laws that apply to our motorists through the Road Traffic Act will apply to people driving trains. That of course makes perfect sense. We would expect that people who drive trains are totally respectful of the laws around the levels of alcohol and drugs that might be in their bloodstream. I strongly welcome that feature.

The privatisation of our rail network is a legacy from more recent times, and I worry about that sometimes. The parliamentary secretary has carriage of this legislation, and I wonder whether it would be possible to hear a bit about whether there is any risk that privatised rail lines might somehow avoid the strictures of this very important rail safety legislation. On occasion when I ask the operator, Arc Infrastructure, about trains that operate on the line, I find that my questions do not quite get answered. I will give members an example. May I have an extension, please?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk):** Extension granted. This is so fascinating! You have got as long as you want.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** That is very kind of you, Acting Speaker.

The problem that I tested out with Arc Infrastructure was around noisy engines. The noise is quite noticeable on the major and very important freight line that runs through the Thornlie electorate. Arc Infrastructure has a very good reputation. It is a very effective operator of the line, and it knows how to manage it to full effect. The trains run up and down there safely, the timings are good, and the network is used to optimum efficiency. But if a person makes a complaint about a particular locomotive that the company is running because it is causing undue noise in the neighbourhood, Arc Infrastructure is a bit unclear about which train or company it is and what its powers are to approach that operator. I find that unacceptable. I have been on its website and had a look at the customer operations portal. This is the same portal that the owners of the locomotives would go to if they wanted to put some additional rolling stock on the line. Presumably, Arc Infrastructure has some capability to say that an operator cannot put a particular train on because it does not meet certain requirements. That sows a seed of doubt in my mind that we do not have full coverage. Therefore, I hope the parliamentary secretary will reassure me that in terms of all other safety matters, there is no question that if there is the slightest problem, the operator of that network, in this case Arc Infrastructure, would be able to straightway step in and get a train off the line because it was dangerous. I hope that that will be the case. Some of the operators on the line are big companies, so we want Arc Infrastructure to be pretty strong, and I am sure there would be all sorts of legal cases if that sort of thing came up, but it could be necessary. Whether we are talking CBH Group, Mineral Resources or whoever, if they are not running the safest most up-to-date rolling stock, somebody needs come down on them. I hope that is what this legislation will enable us to do, as this is very important stuff.

We have had problems with old clunkers on the line, which have caused a high degree of dissatisfaction in the community and left people wondering how to register a complaint. I said that this issue was a legacy of decisions made in more recent times from previous conservative Liberal–National governments. There was a fellow named “reckless Eric” who had a particular fondness for privatising things, and he wanted people to be using trucks instead. He downgraded the tier 3 rail lines, which we have spoken about at length in this place. It was a terrible legacy—one that we still seem to be living with. In fact, I would love to hear that there is a possibility in years to come for the freight rail network to return to government hands. I do not know how many years companies such as Arc Infrastructure have left in their current contracts, but I would imagine it is a fairly considerable time. I will give it this: Arc Infrastructure does a pretty good job of managing illegal trailbike use in the freight line easement. Again, that is a very serious safety issue. Arc Infrastructure does not want to see people going running or using trail bikes in the easement. It seems to fence things off pretty effectively and comes down hard on any offenders, which is good and positive. Indeed, I wish it were possible for local governments and our police service to be as effective at stopping illegal trail bike use. In the past, we have had problems with trail bikes in the freight line easement, but Arc Infrastructure seems to have got on top of that. I hope that situation will continue, and that when I return to the office on Friday, I will not be told of illegal trail bike use in the rail easement. We never know; it is always a possibility.

In preparing for this speech, the member for Maylands said that I love talking about trains, and indeed I do. I looked up the extensive nature of the train lines in the forests, and I drew heavily on *Rails through the Bush: Timber and firewood tramways and railway contractors of Western Australia* by Adrian Gunzburg and Jeff Austin. I can really commend it to members. It is a beautiful coffee table–type book and has lots of photos of locomotives,

great bridges and people at pubs. It is a great piece of Western Australian history. It is interesting in a contemporary sense that one of the most popular people on Instagram, who has well over two million followers, is an English boy who has given himself the name Francis Bourgeois. He is a trainspotter with an amazing Instagram page. Would members believe it? A trainspotter has 2.1 million followers!

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** That sounds like a bourgeois occupation, member!

**Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE:** He probably has an accent that suggests that he is not of a working-class background, but he is a great rail enthusiast. He is passionate about the British Rail Class 37 diesel locomotives. As he says, when they thrash, it is a beautiful noise. It is worth going to his Instagram page just to see Francis getting excited by a thrashing class 37 locomotive.

Trains, rail systems and rail networks are a big part of modern societies. They are an efficient way of transporting freight and enabling people to get around, so it is worth spending this time in this Parliament to make sure that all the safety provisions that one would expect are fully in place so all users can be sure that they are at no safety risk whatsoever. That includes people who live alongside the rail network—not only people riding in the trains, driving the trains or helping unload and load trains, but also those with properties that adjoin the rail network, like constituents in my electorate. On this front, the Cook government can be very proud because it is doing great work in building walls to mitigate noise from trains that go through the rail corridor in my electorate. The government is also improving the vibration capacity. In fact, the freight line currently has no vibration absorption at all. When the big trains I mentioned from CBH, Mineral Resources or whatever company go by, people feel their houses shake. With the vibration mat system, that problem will be almost eliminated, which will be a great boost to the area.

Some of those trains carry dangerous goods, which is a serious rail safety issue if there is a rail derailment. This was a grave concern when lead was being transported. I believe lead is still transported through the electorate on a fairly frequent basis, but it is bagged in such a way that the community would not be at risk if there ever were a derailment. At the time, a company called Magellan Resources was highly active on that aspect. I think the company has had changes of ownership since then. If such goods transportation is happening, but done in a way that considers all kinds of possibilities, including derailments, to ensure the community is safe, we are prepared to live with it. I think that is the attitude of the Thornlie community: we are happy to live with these sorts of things as long as the very best standards are in place. We assume with this sort of legislation that such things will come through, with protections for people working on, operating and living near the lines.

At this stage of the development of the Thornlie–Cockburn line, some people are starting to get a bit anxious about noise walls; I have been receiving some emails about that. People, especially those who live on the south side of the easement, are worried that they might not get the same quality of noise-mitigation wall as those living on the northern side of the easement. As the local member, I will work with the community to ensure that absolutely every one of my residents enjoys the very best wall for noise mitigation. Residents will benefit from the noise vibration matting system I talked about earlier, the shifting of the freight line a little further north and the quieter, smoother running trains. People will probably support me in my suggestion that companies like Arc Infrastructure need to be as responsive as possible to any complaint about locomotives being put under special strain. Maybe that is the problem: there is a slight gradient and train drivers are having to, as the fellow Francis Bourgeois said, “thrash” the trains. It is not an attractive noise at three o’clock in the morning.

As a government, we have taken other highly commendable safety measures. We have eliminated level crossings, and Nicholson Road now goes over the train line. We have got rid of that level crossing and a pedestrian level crossing between Elliot Place and Cameron Street, which means that diligent train drivers who want to respect the laws no longer need to sound the horn at three o’clock in the morning because they do not pass through a level crossing anymore. These are great measures. I am very pleased to support this legislation, and I look forward to us all enjoying the very best of rail safety standards.

**MS J.L. HANNS (Collie–Preston — Parliamentary Secretary)** [1.34 pm]: I rise very excitedly to contribute to this bill today. I am a proud advocate of rail heritage in Western Australia, and I look forward to speaking about that today. I rise in support of the Rail Safety National Law Application Bill 2023. Obviously, the bill will minimise legislative inconsistencies relating to rail safety and support the timely application of rail safety amendments so rail operations will be regulated consistently and seamlessly across Australia. I will speak to that point in a little more detail shortly.

I will also refer to how the bill will provide greater certainty to rail operators, rail safety workers, the national regulator and the national investigator, which will encourage industry participants to better understand their shared safety responsibilities and accountabilities. These are two very important aspects of the bill that I will speak to today.

The bill’s purpose is consistent and seamless rail operations. I want to contrast that with the history and development of the rail system in Western Australia and Australia more broadly because it is an interesting history—let us put it that way. Just a short time ago, somebody said to me that we could say that Federation failed in reference to the rail system in Australia. Although Federation occurred in 1901 when we became a nation rather than individual colonies, as they were termed in 1901, the rail system unfortunately was not similarly united.

Here are some quick and interesting facts about the rail network. There are 41 000 kilometres of track spanning the continent of Australia. It is an incredible piece of infrastructure across the nation. Australia's first railways were constructed by private companies to facilitate the movement of goods and people across Australia. At the time, our population was quite sparse, and colonial settlement was concentrated in capital cities, notwithstanding the thousands and thousands of years of previous occupation by Indigenous Australians; I want to make sure that people appreciate that I am speaking about the period in the late 1800s. Colonial governments obviously developed their rail networks in areas where population was sparse, but goods and people needed to be transported from state to state.

The problem developed because each state simply chose its own rail gauge system—in other words, the width of the tracks. In the lead-up to Federation in 1901, the colonial statesmen, as they called themselves, outlined a grand plan to link each capital city by rail. Western Australia and the Northern Territory had no rail links to other states at the time. The main impediment to linking state capitals was the incompatibility of the rail gauge systems. The engineering of the standard-gauge system, which many people would be familiar with, was brought here from England and Europe and modelled on what existed there at that point. The standard-gauge system was adopted in New South Wales. The broad-gauge system found its origins in Ireland and was adopted in Victoria and parts of South Australia. The narrow-gauge system was chosen for Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia.

It was the narrow-gauge system, which the member for Thornlie spoke about before, that really started to develop the timber cutting and mining industries in Western Australia. Interestingly, I believe that travelling from Brisbane to Perth in 1917 required changing trains six times on the journey. That really highlights the problems with the national rail system. I think the thing that really brought the rail system to a head, or really started the federal government's investigation of this particular problem, was that during World War II large quantities of personnel and goods needed to be transported throughout the country to assist in the war effort. It was after that event that the national rail system was looked at more broadly. That is a really interesting aspect of the historical development of the rail system in Western Australia in reference to this bill.

I have mentioned several times before that I grew up in Yarloop. The timber industry was the foundation of industry within Yarloop and, obviously, many other communities around Western Australia. I will always remember the timber mill's whistle going off when it was smoko; everyone would down tools and stop. The humming of the saws that we would hear would stop and it would go quiet. My grandparents owned the general store in Yarloop and my nanna would spend all morning cooking pies and pasties, which we sold from the back of my grandfather's Toyota Corolla hatchback.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** I hope you were appropriately restrained.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** There were no seatbelts—not in the back anyway. We were allowed to sit in the back of the car. Those seat buckles were terrible when they got hot in the sun. It was a world of pain when I sat on one of those.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** You still have burn marks, do you?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Have you still got burn marks?

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** No, I don't. I haven't looked recently.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** We digress, minister.

I want to bring my contribution back to rail safety. I remember my grandparents speaking very sadly about the Mornington train tragedy that occurred in 1920. Obviously, the timber mills milled the timber on the escarpments and the timber was transported down to the flatter parts of the land ready to be milled and exported or used. The accident that I refer to, the Mornington train tragedy, occurred on Saturday, 6 November 1920. It remains the rail accident with greatest loss of life in Western Australia. I want to thank the Harvey historical group for the information it provided about this accident on its website. I will read an excerpt from that —

Around 9pm a Millars' Timber & Trading Company train pulled by the *Jubilee* steam locomotive left Mornington Mill loaded with railway sleepers and proceeded down the Darling Scarp to the stacking yards at Wokalup. An engine driver, guard, fireman and a traffic manager made up the crew. As there wasn't a passenger van, nine mill-hands perched themselves on the sleepers to catch a lift to Wokalup, contrary to Company policy.

The train gathered speed descending the scarp and ran out of control on a bend. The *Jubilee* and wagons derailed approximately 4km from Wokalup burying men beneath the debris

That occurred on Saturday, 6 November at around about nine o'clock. At 10 o'clock, one of the survivors raised the alarm at the Wokalup Hotel and word of the accident spread through the community. A train left Mornington mill with 150 men on board to assist in the recovery of the train and the people who were injured and killed. On Sunday, 7 November, the volunteers worked until about two o'clock to assist those who were alive and recovered those who had perished in the accident. At 3.45 pm, the body of the last victim was discovered. The bodies were held at Wokalup station prior to their removal to Bunbury. On the morning of Monday, 8 November, an inquest was held into the deaths of the nine deceased. Those killed were Thomas Wilton, a fireman; John Paulson, the guard; and

mill hands John Leitch, Ellis Lake, James McNamara, William Malacari, Frank Winfield, Edward Delaney and Walter Maggs. That afternoon, on the Monday after the inquest, seven funerals were conducted in Bunbury. The remains of John Paulson, Ellis Lake and Walter Maggs were interred in the Church of England section. Edward Delaney, Frank Winfield, James McNamara and Thomas Wilton were interred in the Roman Catholic section.

I want to give some background about the workers. Although it was 100 years ago, this is the human cost when rail safety standards are not met. James was a returned soldier from World War I. He served as part of the royal—what was it termed? I am trying to say the Australian Army, but it was not Australian back then. The royal British Army?

**Mr R.R. Whitby:** Australian.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Thank you, minister. He was very unlucky—wrong time, wrong place. He happened to be working in that area on the day. He was a casual worker and not permanently attached to the company. Wally Maggs was a resident of Mornington for only a couple of months. Proprietors from the boarding house spoke highly of him. Being a gifted musician, he was very popular with his workmates. His widow arrived from Adelaide on the day that his remains were laid to rest in Bunbury. These are real people with real families and real stories. This is the incredibly important part about getting rail safety right. These workers who do these jobs are very important, whether that was historically in industries like the timber industry, or today when moving passengers, even on our internal rail networks within the Metronet system and Transwa more broadly. Both houses of Parliament actually carried resolutions of sympathy for the relatives of the Mornington victims, given the incredibly sad and tragic circumstances in which those people lost their lives. At John Leitch’s funeral, the pallbearers were members of Parliament and members of the typo union. As I said, it is incredibly important that we get rail safety right. That is a really tragic example of when things go terribly wrong.

I mentioned that I would speak at length on rail heritage. One of my favourite places to visit in Yarloop was the pattern workshops. They were the wood patterns that were used to create parts of the machinery for the locomotives and to build and service the engines. Very sadly, that heritage was lost during the Yarloop and Waroona bushfires in 2016; I had to get my maths right. I have spoken to the Minister for Heritage about this previously. There is a real romanticism around rail heritage. It does not take many people in a room to talk about steam trains before some people get very excited and reminisce about their past.

I want to acknowledge a fantastic organisation called Rail Heritage WA and its subsidiary the South West Rail and Heritage Centre. Rail Heritage WA was the national winner of the Association of Tourist and Heritage Rail Australia’s steam locomotive restoration award for 2023. That was given to it in honour of the restoration work it did on steam locomotive G233, known as the *Leschenault Lady*. I have spoken at length about the *Leschenault Lady* in Parliament previously. I want to reiterate that that train is a huge icon in the south west. People love that train and travel from all over Western Australia to go on carriages that are pulled by the *Leschenault Lady* at the South West Rail and Heritage Centre. The restoration of the *Leschenault Lady* took five years, and I want to again put on the record my appreciation of the people involved in that restoration. The project cost \$60 000 in total, \$20 000 of which was provided by the state government as one of my election commitments in 2021. That last \$20 000 enabled the restoration to be completed and the *Leschenault Lady* to run again on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of rail in WA, so it was an incredibly special day to attend that event. I got to wave the flag as the *Leschenault Lady* rolled on the tracks again for the first time in many years, and I can tell members that it was the best free steam bath I have ever had! As the train whistled past me I was literally soaked in steam, and it was an incredibly special day.

I will say a very quick thank you to all the people involved in that project: Colin Piacentini of Piacentini and Sons, a local business that helped with the restoration; Piavanini Welding in Collie; and Philippa Rogers, who is president of Rail Heritage WA. I also want to acknowledge the thousands and thousands of hours—I think almost 2 000 hours—of volunteer time that went into the restoration effort. Thank you for the huge contribution to rail heritage in Western Australia that all those people made.

[Member’s time extended.]

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Still on the topic of rail heritage and history, I want to very briefly mention the role Midland has played in the history of rail in Western Australia. I refer to a fabulous article that appeared on ABC News online titled, “Midland’s history stretches back thousands of years before the railways put the area on the map”. It is a great read and it talks about Indigenous use of land where rail heritage now exists in Midland. It also talks about the impact of rail and its role in Western Australia’s history.

Obviously, Midland rail workshops was an incredibly wonderful asset in terms of local manufacturing and a huge success story for Western Australia until its demise. I am sure the member for Mirrabooka will speak about that at length, but I want to very quickly make reference to a man who worked at the workshops. It closed, after 90 years, on 4 March 1994. That day was heartbreaking for no-one more than it was for Kevin Mountain, who started working at the workshops at the age of 16 and was 58 when the final whistle blew. He explained to the ABC reporter that that day was a very traumatic day for him, having worked there for so long. He said —

“I had no advice from the management what to do, so I went to work as usual, starting at 6.30am,” ...

“I opened the time office and I had it ready for the men to come in at 7 o’clock.



“I got a phone call about quarter past eight, saying I had to report to the flagpole at nine o’clock, where I was going to lower the flag and which I did, and I lowered flag and that brought the end of the workshops.”

I just want to remind the chamber that that is a legacy of Richard Court’s Liberal government, attacking everyday, hardworking Western Australians involved in manufacturing across nearly 100 years. It is absolutely a shame.

I would like to mention a couple of other rail heritage groups and volunteer groups that do amazing work around this particular passion of mine. I send a shout-out to the Hotham Valley Railway in, I think, the member for Murray–Wellington’s electorate. As a kid, whenever I got the opportunity to go on the Hotham Valley Railway, I took it. Back in those days the steam train was coal-fired, so they burned coal to create the steam to generate the engine. I was always really careful about where I sat because my first ride did not end so well, but for subsequent journeys on the Hotham Valley Railway I had certainly learnt my lesson! If you opened the window at the wrong time and put your head out, you got either your eyes or your hair full of coal dust, and that took quite some time to get rid of! That, for me, was a lasting impression of the Hotham Valley Railway, but the steam, the whistle blowing and the trees whipping past at speed as you travel through the magnificent jarrah forest is certainly something that a lot of people remember very fondly.

Having grown up in Yarloop, another really interesting rail heritage attachment of mine is for the main public transport that my grandparents used. My nanna lived to 100, but she never got her driver’s licence. She said, “I can ride a horse bareback; I don’t need to worry about cars, because whatever I need I can walk to the shops to get.” She was pretty salt-of-the-earth! But we often used the *Australind* rail service to go up to Perth. My nanna owned the general store in Yarloop; she ran the drapery side of it and my grandfather ran the newsagency and banking side. One of my favourite memories of the *Australind* trips with my grandmother is of travelling up to the old Boans warehouse store in Perth and doing shopping for the drapery—picking out the sheets and manchester and items for the dressmaking side of her shop. One of my favourite sections was the button section, but obviously the best part was the cafeteria. I seem to remember there was jelly with a layer of cream or something, and that was my favourite part of the trip to the Boans cafeteria!

I want to talk about the *Australind* because on 19 November this year that service will be temporarily halted in order to carry out Metronet project work on the Armadale line, but at the same time the government will be building new railcars for the *Australind*. That will be a fantastic outcome for our community. The current *Australind* railcars entered revenue service on 16 November 1987. I do not know whether many members know this—certainly, I was surprised—but prior to those railcars entering the service in 1987, the general public was asked to suggest names for the service. I was a teenager at the time, and I do not remember this happening, but I do not doubt my source—Rail Heritage WA. Members will like this; submissions for names for the new train included Darling Range, Aurora, Flying Kangaroo, Koombana Queen, Spirit of the South West, Lady Bunbury, Lady Darling, Bunbury Bullet, Bunbury Explorer, Knight Rider—my personal favourite!—Bunbury–Perth Flyer, Australind Express, Australind Flyer, and Australind II—which is nearly *Australia II*, but not quite. The winning name was John Forrest, but that was kiboshed because when the first railcar travelled along the line, the name “John Forrest” had been hidden with cardboard, which fell off during the journey to reveal the name. People opposed the name, so the name *Australind* was retained in perpetuity. I do not know whether the Minister for Transport is going to run a competition to rename the line or keep it as *Australind*, but that is certainly some interesting history. When that railcar was launched it was lauded as “The train that thinks it’s a plane”, because it was so ahead of its time and travelled so quickly. We talk about rail safety; I think it managed to get up to 150 kilometres an hour while being tested before they ran out of line, so it was safely limited to running at, I think, 105 kilometres an hour. I talked about the fact that rail manufacturing was abolished under the Richard Court Liberal government, but we should not despair, because the Cook Labor government and the Minister for Transport are returning railcar manufacturing to Western Australia. That is not before time, I must say! I really look forward to the *Australind* service being upgraded, the new cars being online and travelling as a passenger on the new service for the first time. I know that the member for Bunbury is very keen on that, as is the member for Murray–Wellington.

I segue into the fact that my kids, surprisingly enough, are also avid lovers of railcars and rail heritage.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 4203.]

**VISITORS — YULUMA PRIMARY SCHOOL  
AVELEY SECONDARY COLLEGE — PENRHOS COLLEGE**

*Statement by Speaker*

**THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts)** [2.00 pm]: Before we begin question time, I would like to make some acknowledgements. Firstly, on behalf of the member for Scarborough, I acknowledge the student leaders and their teacher Mrs “K” from Yuluma Primary School in Innaloo. Welcome. On behalf of the member for Swan Hills, I welcome the student leaders from Avey Secondary College. Welcome. On behalf of the member for South Perth, I acknowledge the year 8 students from Penrhos College. Welcome to you all. I hope you enjoy question time.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**UNIVERSITY COURSES — EARLY OFFERS**

**562. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Education:**

I refer to the minister's correspondence to year 12 students at the start of the school year, in which he urged them not to be distracted by early university offers.

- (1) What is the status of early offers across Western Australian universities for education streams?
- (2) How do these dates of early offers compare with those in other states to avoid predatory offers from eastern states universities?

**Dr A.D. BUTI replied:**

- (1)–(2) That is a very important question; I thank the member for asking it. Yes, I did write to every single year 12 student at the beginning of this year because of the alarming reduction in the number of students who are doing ATAR in Western Australia. ATAR is not the only pathway and I am not saying that it should be the only pathway. I was trying to communicate that students who have the capacity and ability to do ATAR should be doing ATAR generally, although sometimes that might not be the case. What we were finding was that not only discouragement by particular schools but also the fact that universities were offering unconditional early offers was affecting the motivation of people to remain on the ATAR pathway. As a result of that, I set up a post-secondary pathway inquiry led by a number of esteemed educationalists, and they will be reporting to me next year. The inquiry is looking at what the ATAR pathway should be; whether that pathway needs to change; what a non-ATAR pathway should look like and how rigorous it should be; and how those pathways should prepare students for university, TAFE or whatever.

The member asked a very good question about the current status of unconditional offers. I have had meetings with the vice-chancellors in which I made it quite clear that I do not approve of unconditional offers. I am not sure what the member was like, but if I knew, as a 16 or 17-year-old, that I could get into university without worrying about what my exam results would be, I would not have been studying two or three hours a night to ensure that I got a good aggregate score in my TEE or TAE—I cannot remember what it was now—to get into my choice of study. I cannot actually answer the member's question because it is difficult to get this information out of the universities. They are telling me that they are not doing unconditional offers, but I am hearing otherwise from other people. I am still seeking that information. I am meeting with the vice-chancellors on Monday and will reiterate the point that I want them to provide me with clear data and evidence about their situation.

The member raised an important issue about the eastern states, because there is an issue with our students being enticed to go over east. I know that New South Wales and Victoria have made noises that their universities are not engaging in unconditional offers, but the evidence is still a bit sketchy on that. These issues remain in my focus. I will continue to seek information from the universities.

**UNIVERSITY COURSES — EARLY OFFERS**

**563. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Minister for Education:**

I have a supplementary question.

I thank the minister for that response and look forward to receiving that information as well.

Are there any early signs of significant changes to enrolments in teaching courses based on the early offer program?

**Dr A.D. BUTI replied:**

No. Does the member mean enrolments in a Bachelor of Education at university—teacher training?

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** Yes.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Obviously, the University of Western Australia has a different system whereby people have to do a general degree and then the master's program. That raises an interesting issue. There has been a 41 per cent decrease in teaching graduates from our universities in the last five years—a 41 per cent decrease! That roughly coincides with when we moved from the one-year diploma of education to the two-year master's degree. I thought it was a good idea when we moved from the one-year Dip Ed to the two-year master's as it would improve the status of teaching and perhaps prepare student teachers better for teaching, but the evidence is that it is not necessarily producing higher quality teachers and it may be a disincentive for people to do the two-year master's. That is particularly so for people who want a career change. Staying out of the workforce for one year to do a Dip Ed is probably manageable, but two years becomes quite problematic.

In regard to the member's question about whether the unconditional offer process has changed the number of enrolments, I do not have a specific breakdown of that. As I said, it has been difficult to get the data from the universities. I would hazard a guess that it has not, because we have not seen a massive uplift in teaching graduates from our universities.

## COST-OF-LIVING RELIEF

**564. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Premier:**

I begin by acknowledging the students from Southern River College on behalf of the member for Southern River. I refer to cost-of-living support provided to Western Australians by the Cook Labor government.

- (1) Can the Premier update the house on how these support measures are providing much-needed assistance to households in the face of global inflation pressures?
- (2) Can the Premier advise the house how new measures, such as the doubling of KidSport vouchers, will further support the Western Australian community?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

I thank the member for the question and join her in acknowledging the students from Southern River College, the students from Aveley Secondary College and also the second cohort of Penrhos College students who have just entered the public gallery. It is standing room only for question time! I also take the opportunity to acknowledge the presence today of the Deputy Premier's daughter. I very much welcome all students here to the chamber today. Several members interjected.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I was trying to anonymise it as much as I could. I was trying not to embarrass individuals, so I mentioned a lot of schools. I clearly failed. Not to worry; I will have to get punished for that later.

- (1)–(2) When I became Premier, I committed to three important tasks. The first is to make sure that we look after the state's finances, the second is to keep the economy strong and the third is to look after those who are doing it tough. As we all know, we are seeing the impact of inflation and cost-of-living pressures on all citizens right around the world. Western Australia is not immune from that. Locally, interest rate rises by the Reserve Bank have had a huge impact on the cost of living for many Australians. My government is doing what it can to provide support and relief from the cost of living where possible. As members would be aware, all households in Western Australia will receive two electricity credits on their power bills this year. There was the \$200 credit in July, and a second \$200 credit will be provided in December, when people are looking at the costs associated with Christmas and keeping their air conditioners going. I am sure many people appreciate that. I got a letter just today from a publican who thanked us for the \$650 electricity credit to all small businesses. It is a really important contribution for the costs that impact people. On top of that, in terms of the electricity charges rebates, we have also kept fees and charges low, with government controlled household fees and charges up just 2.4 per cent this year. It is the lowest increase in the country and way below the rate of inflation. Just last week, me and the Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister Templeman, who is beaming at the moment —

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Beaming, actually beaming. Yes, indeed—beaming!

**Mr R.H. COOK:** We announced a very important doubling of the KidSport program. This was originally \$150. Today, with these changes, over 110 000 people will be eligible for a \$300 KidSport voucher. This means that families with kids, particularly those who are struggling to afford registration fees and other costs associated with sport, will be able to get a significant boost to make sure that their kids do not miss out. We have extended the range of eligible costs, so it is not just for registration fees. This year we are now going to make it that they can put it towards the cost of uniforms and equipment. In addition, we are also extending eligibility to make sure that kids in care, kids of asylum seekers or refugee families can also be eligible for the \$300 KidSport allowance. This will provide a significant boost to household incomes for these struggling families, and of course we know that these kids are often marginalised. This means that they can get the same opportunities in sport and involvement in their community as other kids. It is an important contribution for their wellbeing.

Our cost-of-living relief is making a difference. The most recent inflation data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that Perth had the lowest inflation in the country. This is incredibly pleasing to see. Potentially, it means that there is light at the end of the inflation tunnel. Although the cost of living is still difficult, no doubt it is positive to see that the measures we are putting in place are making a real difference. It also includes the cost of transportation with our fare-free Sunday sessions introduced by the Minister for Transport, making public transport free across the system on the first Sunday of each month. In addition, our two-zone fare cap is saving commuters, particularly from the member for Dawesville's electorate, literally thousands of dollars a year on their public transport fares. Our regional residents are also assisted with our regional airfare zone cap, which has locked in affordable airfare travel for regional residents to travel around the state. The Minister for Transport recently announced that over 151 000 affordable airfare tickets have already been purchased under the scheme in the first 12 months alone. That is a significant contribution to relieving households of the cost of living, wherever they might live in Western Australia.

Although the current inflationary pressures are global, we understand that the impacts are local. The forecast from Treasury is showing positive signs for WA with relief on the horizon. With our strong economy and

responsible budget measures, my government will ensure that we continue to have the financial capacity to support Western Australians, looking after our finances, keeping our economy strong and making sure that we look after those who are least able to.

POLICE — FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**565. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Police:**

I refer to the tragic family and domestic violence death of Lynn Cannon, which her family says could have been avoided if 000 calls for help had been responded to sooner.

- (1) With regard to the Western Australia Police Force, what possible explanation can there be for why it took police more than an hour to respond?
- (2) Does the minister think it is acceptable that it took more than an hour for such an FDV call to be responded to?
- (3) Does the minister agree that this is one part of a system that failed her on that tragic evening?

**The SPEAKER:** Just before I give the Minister for Police the call, can I just clarify whether any part of what you have asked could be sub judice? Are there matters before the court?

**Ms L. Mettam:** No; this is in relation to the police call.

**The SPEAKER:** If there are matters that are potentially before the court, I ask the minister to keep that in mind. The matters that relate to police response times, clearly the minister can respond to.

**Mr P. PAPALIA replied:**

I thank the member for her question.

- (1)–(3) At the outset, I express my deepest condolences to the family over this tragic incident. Every death of this nature is an absolute tragedy and not something the police ever accept as being reasonable. I have to say at the outset that I am sure that the matter in question will be subject to a coronial inquiry at the very least. If there are matters relating to the nature of what occurred, they will be subject to investigation. I have to tell the member that I have not yet received a thorough briefing on the incident itself, so with regard to timings and the nature of phone calls made and whether they were responded to in the expected time frames, I cannot tell the member. I can tell the member that family and domestic violence incidents are treated with the upmost importance. They are treated absolutely as a serious crime—the highest priority crime. There is no incident in which police would not respond as a matter of course to it being serious, but I just do not know. I have not been briefed on the timings and the nature of the phone calls received and the detail around the police response.

I can say that sadly, in the past, Western Australia's community did not treat domestic violence as a serious crime. That has all changed. Every police officer is trained to recognise family and domestic violence as a serious matter and respond appropriately.

POLICE — FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**566. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Police:**

I have a supplementary question. Does the minister accept that falling Western Australia Police Force numbers since 2021 contribute to 000 response times?

**Mr P. PAPALIA replied:**

We have more police now than ever before in history. There are hundreds more police than when the member was in office. Many hundreds, in fact, well over 400 more police officers than when the member was in office. There are, right now, 1 600 applicants to join the Western Australia Police Force locally, with 1 335 from the United Kingdom and Ireland. There are 300 police officers training at the academy and over the next 12 months, a thousand officers will graduate from the academy.

There are no resource matters that would have resulted in any inadequate or unacceptable response. The member might find, before she goes criticising the Western Australia Police Force, that it is worth reflecting on whether the circumstances involved are yet clear. There are some 60 000 priority callouts and 70 000 requests for welfare checks a year, as I understand it. A request for a welfare check is a different thing than an urgent call for assistance. I do not know the circumstances; I have not yet been given a thorough briefing and neither has the member. Nobody has. I would wait until we get detail about exactly what happened. Clearly, it is a tragic incident and we always want to do more and better. The Premier, the Minister for Community Services and I will attend a summit with advocates over family and domestic violence tomorrow.

METRONET — SOUTHERN SUBURBS RAIL PROJECTS

**567. Mr H.T. JONES to the Minister for Transport:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to creating better public transport connections across Perth suburbs.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the delivery of significant rail projects in Perth's southern suburbs, which includes the Metronet Byford rail extension?

- (2) Can the minister advise the house whether she is aware of any alternative proposals to improve public transport services in Perth?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:**

I thank the member for Darling Range for that question.

- (1)–(2) Of course, there is a lot of excitement in that corridor for the Armadale line extension to Byford. As the member knows, Byford is very much a growing community and it needs world-class public transport. This government will be delivering world-class transport to Byford. The concept images have been released for comment. They look incredible. There will be three platforms to service both the Armadale line and *Australind* passengers; a bus interchange, with seven stands to support connecting services; 400 parking bays; secure shelters for around 100 bicycles; and spaces for meeting and recreation, with lighting, shelter and CCTV.

When completed, it will be a 42-minute trip to the city and, of course, at the cost of a two-zone fare. It will connect Byford to the suburban rail network, connecting the community to more opportunities. We have seen already the investment along Thomas Road and we will continue the investment along the entire corridor. I know that the people in the member for Darling Range's area are very keen to see this project delivered.

We know what opposition members have said about Metronet over the years. They have criticised it, campaigned against it and said that we should not be doing these projects. Those on the other side called the Armadale rail line extension a vanity project. I think the tune from Nationals WA members in particular is going to change a bit, because they are now going after densely populated areas. Over the weekend, we saw them at their state conference in the metropolitan area, not in regional WA.

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** Out your way—the Swan Valley.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** As the member for Roe interjected, it was out my way in the Swan Valley. That is my pivot, so I am glad the member picked that up.

Of course, they were in the Swan Valley. I know that the member for Central Wheatbelt hosted a wine tour and the member for Roe hosted a golfing tour, but the Liberal and National Parties could not agree on who would drive the golf buggy, so they walked instead. I went through the golf course just to see whether there was anything left behind, as I do. Members know that I tend to do that—whether it is the car park or the golf course.

The “metrodebt” stickers have been taken off their cars; they like Metronet now, because they are going after densely populated areas. There will be no more “metrodebt” stickers; they have been taken off their cars. Remember, just a couple of weeks ago, the Leader of the Opposition was wearing a Liberal Party hat.

**Mr R.S. Love:** You made that up!

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There it was—strewn on the floor. It was just discarded on the floor. I picked up the Liberal Party hat and thought, “Jeez, the National Party has discarded the Liberal Party hat.” Now of course we have the conversion—they are loving the big smoke. Members of the National Party are now very much city-bound. They are targeting densely populated areas. This just blew my mind. I saw a comment from the Leader of the Opposition who said, “The people of Western Australia deserve to have a public transport system that rivals the rest of the country's.” We are. It is called Metronet.

There was a special little booth that I came across. It was a National Party merchandise booth. They were getting rid of these hats—I can tell you that! They were discounted. They were getting rid of the “metrodebt” stickers. Here it is—the new “MetroNats” hat! It is the new hat for the National Party. He talks about excellent public transport and the National Party in metropolitan WA. These are for sale at the merchandise store. I am glad I picked one up. I am sure there will be plenty for all of us in this room!

#### HOUSING — MEDIUM DENSITY — R30 TO R40 ZONES

**568. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Housing:**

I refer the minister to an article in the *Claremont Post* dated 19 August 2023 that reported on the government's sudden last-minute change of position on new development rules that were due to apply to R30 to R40 zonings, described as the most commonly used zonings for development.

- (1) Who were the stakeholders whose feedback the minister listened to, as reported in the article?
- (2) What happened to Labor's talk of development that takes account of social needs for amenity, trees, space and heritage?

**Mr J.N. CAREY replied:**

I thank the member for his question.

- (1)–(2) Just to clarify, did the member support my decision?

**Dr D.J. Honey:** I think you've bailed on supporting amenity since you've been in this Parliament.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** From that I assume he does not support my position.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Answer the question.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** No. For the public record, I think it is really important —

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Answer the question. It's my job to ask and your job to answer.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please, members. Minister, the member for Cottesloe has made it quite clear that he does not intend to respond. I ask you to continue with your answer.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** I will say this: I think the implication from that question is that he does not support my decision. I want to be very clear that across Australia we face extraordinary circumstances. Those circumstances in relation to housing mean that we face a very changing situation. We know that there have been dramatic changes in the builders' market. Only recently, CoreLogic Australia provided key statistics that showed that builders in the housing market have seen their margins drop to less than five per cent. I take that seriously. I have watched the market and I have engaged the housing and industry sector, and the advice was very clear to me: proceeding with the medium density codes, given the current financial market that we face, would have an impact on housing supply and the cost of housing supply. I take that very seriously. My job and my resolute focus is to boost housing supply in Western Australia. At every opportunity in this chamber, I demonstrate the long list of reforms that we are doing and are driving to boost housing supply.

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please.

**Mr J.N. CAREY:** It is absolutely critical that we use every lever possible to boost housing supply in Western Australia. Every state is grappling with this. National cabinet has made it a main agenda item. I will consider every policy decision within that very clear focus.

I listen to industry, including the Housing Industry Association, the Urban Development Institute of Australia and the Perth division of the Property Council of Australia, and people who are actually delivering the housing—small and medium builders in the housing market. What is very clear to me is that on this side, we are focused on housing supply; on that side, it is about more red tape for planning. Members opposite have made it very clear that big housing projects will face more red tape. They were the member for Cottesloe's comments in the local paper about abolishing a significant pathway. At the next election, I will be very happy to take to the people of Western Australia a clear agenda that is delivering affordable and social housing, in contrast to an opposition that has no policies on housing except to wind it up in red tape.

#### HOUSING — MEDIUM DENSITY — R30 TO R40 ZONES

##### **569. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Housing:**

I have a supplementary question. Why is it that the minister can hear and immediately act upon developers' concerns, but he has consistently failed to introduce any building standards that protect public amenity?

##### **Mr J.N. CAREY replied:**

There are two interesting elements here. First of all, our state government has brought in greater design codes—Design WA; in fact, I worked on them personally as parliamentary secretary to the minister at the time. The minister brought in sweeping design changes to improve high-density projects. Any member in this Parliament will tell the member for Cottesloe that was the primary concern of the community. It was introduced at a time when the market was not facing the same cost pressures. Does the member know who welcomed my decision on medium density codes? All of the key people delivering housing, and someone else—Hon Neil Thomson, the Liberal spokesperson for planning! I am very perplexed. Here we have the member for Cottesloe criticising me on this decision, and yet his planning spokesperson absolutely welcomed it on the public record. This is an extraordinary situation—I had that in my back pocket, I was not going to use it in the first part of the response. This is a very clear example of this opposition and its inability to have a basic policy position. The member for Cottesloe criticised my decision to assist with affordable housing, yet the planning spokesperson in the other house welcomed it. They are all over the place. They have no clear position on housing supply in Western Australia. It is very clear that the member for Cottesloe is completely out of step with his own colleague who is responsible for planning in the opposition.

#### HEALTH — MATERNITY CARE

##### **570. Ms H.M. BEAZLEY to the Minister for Health:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to expanding maternity care options for women in Western Australia.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how this government is delivering more maternity care options for WA women?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house why providing continuity of care for Western Australian women having babies is so important?

**Ms A. SANDERSON replied:**

I thank the member for Victoria Park for her question. I have to say that I am very excited about this program. Members know that one of my focuses as Minister for Health is extending reproductive care and ensuring that Western Australian women have the same options that women have in other similar jurisdictions. I want to ensure that we still have excellent high-quality care and a broad range of birthing choices. That is something I am very focused on in this portfolio.

- (1)–(2) We know that the northern and southern suburbs both have access to a family birthing centre, but there is currently not an equivalent in the east. When I became minister, I wrote to all the board chairs of health service providers that deliver maternity services and asked that they provide improved access for privately practising endorsed midwives to allow women to have a greater choice of care. Credit to the east—they have gone one step further and have developed an endorsed midwifery model that is fully run in the public system. This means that an endorsed midwife will be a woman's midwife from the first appointment, to birth and all the way through to postnatal care as well. This is a genuine continuity of care model with outstanding evidence. We also know that it helps reduce rates of unnecessary clinical intervention. Western Australia has some of the highest rates of birth intervention and with that comes rates of trauma, stress and postnatal depression. When women are supported and cared for by skilled midwives from the beginning all the way through, they tend to have great post-birth outcomes

I was very glad to join some excited midwives and an excited mother who was about to have her fourth baby. Endorsed midwives are highly skilled practitioners—they require the midwifery qualification plus extra skills. They can prescribe—sorry, I am a little taken aback by what is happening here, Madam Speaker. Some forewarning would have been helpful!

**The SPEAKER:** Sorry, I will just interrupt for a moment. I did announce yesterday that I had given permission to staff to take photos this week. If we want to use photos in our publications such as the annual report or in our social media, the quality of a still from the video is not very high. I did say this week that I was giving staff permission to take some photos around the chamber.

**Ms A. SANDERSON:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the clarification. Apologies for missing that.

They can order ultrasound scans and prescribe and they have a high level of scope of practice. There will also be a midwifery hub, which means that midwives will have live birthing data, access to obstetricians and specialists across the east metro in Armadale and Midland as well. This is going to be a really important part of our maternity fabric in the eastern suburbs. There will also be two birthing pools to give women the option of water births.

This is part of an overall expansion of maternity care and maternity care models that we are focused on delivering for women in Western Australia. There will also be a world-class tertiary, maternity and newborn's hospital at the Murdoch site, the expansion at Osborne Park, the doubling of maternity graduates and the creation of a brand new family birthing centre. We are also delivering midwifery group practice models, which are also midwifery-led models of care, at Armadale, Bridgetown, Broome, Bunbury, Collie, Fiona Stanley Hospital, King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women, Margaret River, Northam and Warren Health Service. I want to thank everyone who has been involved in this. We are recruiting now and I am very excited to see this service up and running next year.

#### WATER RESOURCE LEGISLATION — REFORM

**571. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Water:**

I refer to Western Australia Labor's mishandling of the Aboriginal heritage legislation, seen widely as an attack on property rights.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on WA Labor's proposed changes to law surrounding water resource management, including the Rights in Water and Irrigation Act 1914?
- (2) Can the minister unequivocally promise that WA Labor will refrain from compromising the water rights and entitlements of Western Australian landowners and water licence holders, or should the public brace themselves for another episode of damaging attacks on their rights?

**Ms S.F. McGURK replied:**

I am pleased to have a question on this portfolio area, because I am not sure I have had one since I have been minister. It is probably coming up to nine months or so. It is great to have a question from the other side on the matter of water. If the member is not aware, the responsible management of water is actually a really important part of our state. It is something that this government takes very seriously. It has been great having this portfolio. I have really been enjoying getting to know the stakeholders and getting to understand the many complex issues concerning the portfolio.

- (1)–(2) The member is right. This government has committed to modernising the water legislation. I think I previously outlined—it might have been during budget estimates—how many previous ministers across

numerous governments have committed to consolidate and modernise our legislation. In fact, it goes as far back as 2006 under the now deceased Hon John Kobelke, who released a blueprint for water reform. In 2009, under the Barnett government, the Minister for Water, Graham Jacobs, released a discussion paper about management options for water resources. In 2013, the Minister for Water, Terry Redman, released a position paper about water futures. In 2014, Hon Mia Davies released the analysis of public submissions and statements in response to the position paper. It was a significant moment. One of her responsibilities as the Minister for Water was to release the analysis of public submissions on the position paper. Then, in 2021, we moved to a Labor government. The Minister for Environment, Hon Stephen Dawson, released climate policy and my predecessor Hon Dave Kelly then announced that the drafting of the bill was taking place. Many previous ministers have undertaken to consolidate what I think are six other existing acts, some of them over a century old, to modernise our legislation. I have stated on the record that that is something I am committed to doing as well.

We are working through a number of policy positions on the modernisation and consolidation of the bill, not the least of which is the primacy of the acknowledgement of the impact that climate change has on our water resources. Also, as is befitting of the modernisation of the legislation, is the consideration of traditional owners. There is an understanding that water resources matter to them and that they have a stake in the consideration of how water resources are allocated. That is no surprise. I am on the record as saying that a number of times. That is probably the case for my predecessor as well. If the Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Nationals WA look surprised, I am concerned about that, because we have said in this place a number of times that that was our intention with the water legislation. However, a number of other bills need to be consolidated and we are working through that process. I have undertaken to keep a number of stakeholders posted about the policy issues and the timetable around that bill, and I am happy to repeat that now.

#### WATER RESOURCE LEGISLATION — REFORM

##### **572. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Water:**

I have a supplementary question. Will the minister also keep the house updated on those procedures and commit to publishing a green bill on the legislation, which is something that her colleague in the Aboriginal affairs portfolio failed to do when introducing the Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation?

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

##### **Ms S.F. McGURK replied:**

As I said, many other ministers have committed to consolidating and modernising our water legislation. My ambition is to deliver good water reform while I am the Minister for Water. At the moment, it is not my intention to release a green bill, and that is what I have said to stakeholders. I understand that people want to be consulted and I am committed to consulting the many various stakeholders who have an interest in our water legislation around the wide geographical areas in our state. I have given that commitment when I have spoken with them either individually or as groups. On the question of whether I will release a green bill, at this stage it is not my intention, but it certainly is my intention—I am happy to make it very clear publicly today—to consult very comprehensively with stakeholders about any changes as a result of that consolidated bill.

#### SINGLE-USE PLASTICS — BUNTING BAN

##### **573. Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI to the Minister for Environment:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to phase-out the use of single-use plastics.

Can the minister outline to the house how the ban on promotional film, which includes political bunting used at elections, will reduce unnecessary waste, and can the minister advise the house how this importance change builds on the government's Plan for Plastics, which has saved millions of single-use plastics from landfill?

##### **Mr R.R. WHITBY replied:**

I thank the member and acknowledge her advocacy for protecting the environment. We were at Yellagonga Regional Park the other day enjoying the environment in the member's community. I understand why the member is very protective of it.

Members know that this government leads the nation in transitioning away from single-use plastics that are used once or twice and quickly find their way into landfill, creating terrible problems for the environment, adding to greenhouse gasses and just being a waste of a resource that we should be using. With that in mind, the government has announced today that we will become the first state in the nation to ban what is known as promotional film and which is better known in here as bunting. Members will be very pleased to know that. Early on election mornings, after the alarm clock, members hang off the edge of ladders and try to get the clip on those reels of plastic. We all



used it and we all hated it. Now we will not have to use it and we will not have that waste any more. Political bunting is used for a very short period—usually a day—and then there is no other use for it. It is rarely used between elections because it contains a single message. I hope that my colleagues across the way will join with me in rejoicing at this announcement today that they will no longer have to endure and invest in plastic bunting and can help save the environment and the community from some of the images we have seen on bunting over the years. I know that our opponents often get the best angles of us on the photos they use. It will be a shame to see the end of that, but it will be good for the environment.

As a government, we appreciate that when we ask the community to do the right thing by their use of single-use plastics, we have a responsibility in government to do the same, not just as a government but as political parties. I hope that my friends across the way, particularly the Nationals WA, will get on the phone very quickly and cancel that order for “MetroNat” bunting that they were planning to roll out across the densely populated parts of Perth. They do not need it any more. The “MetroNat” bunting is no longer required. That will be good for all of us.

The thing to remember about our legislation that proposes to bring this into law in March 2024 is that it will not impact on other thin plastic film that is used outdoors. The police minister can be reassured that police tape and other emergency tape that is reeled out for public safety purposes will not be impacted. We will also consult producers and political parties to let them know that this change is coming. This government has again led the nation in the transition away from single-use plastics. We have already saved millions of plastic bags, cups, plates, cutlery, straws and containers from ending up in landfill. We know that there is huge community support for our initiatives and that they are accepted. People want to be part of the solution and they support these changes. The World Wide Fund for Nature Australia recently named this state government as number one for its action against single-use plastics. Once again, the Cook Labor government is leading the way on single-use plastics, and this important announcement will play a very big role in continuing that well-earned reputation.

#### FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDERS — GPS TRACKING

##### **574. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence:**

I refer to the answer provided in the other place yesterday regarding the two-year trial involving the GPS tracking of up to 100 high-risk offenders who have breached a family violence restraining order and committed a further act of family violence. It is understood that the trial ended on 18 August 2022.

With the level of FDV continuing to escalate in Western Australia, how is it that over a year after the program has been completed the government is unable to answer basic questions about the number of offenders involved, whether the program is still being continued, and, most importantly, whether it achieved its goals in adding additional protection for women and children?

##### **Ms S.E. WINTON replied:**

I thank the member for the question. The prevention of family and domestic violence is an important issue in our community. Tragically, women in Western Australia have lost their lives recently. At the outset, I extend my condolences and sympathies to the families of Lynn Cannon, Tiffany Woodley and Georgia Lyall. I also want to extend my sympathies and thoughts to other victims of family and domestic violence because we know, and it was made abundantly clear by Lynn Cannon’s family this morning, that every time we have one of these incidents, it is a huge trigger for people who have experienced family and domestic violence. This government’s commitment to addressing the scourge of family and domestic violence is absolutely clear.

In our six years of government, we have been committed to making sure that this issue is not only front and centre in government initiatives and in record government investment of over \$200 million but also, importantly, raised to the front of every single conversation around our community. We stand by that, and we are proud of that. That conversation has to keep going.

Not only do we have a record of investment to support victim-survivors and primary prevention, but also we have a strong record of legislative reform that seeks to support victims of family and domestic violence. Our record of legislative reforms includes introducing things like shuttle conferencing so victim-survivors do not have to face their abusers; automatically recognising VROs from other Australian states; creating a new offence for non-fatal strangulation; and creating serial violence offenders, an Australian first, for those with multiple FDV offences. Of course, we are undertaking legislative reforms around coercive control.

As the second Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, I am absolutely proud of the commitment that this government makes to this important issue in our community. I will continue that work on behalf of this government.

#### FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENDERS — GPS TRACKING

##### **575. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence:**

I have a supplementary question. If the minister’s commitment to family and domestic violence is so clear, why can she not answer basic questions about a trial that finished last year regarding violent offenders?

**Ms S.E. WINTON replied:**

I note that I have been the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence in this place for eight months.

**Ms L. Mettam:** The question was asked yesterday.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** Today is the first time that the member has stood in this place to ask me a question on this.

**Ms L. Mettam:** We asked yesterday.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** No, today is the first time that the member has asked me a question on family and domestic violence in this place. If I were a sceptic, I would be suspicious that the member is trying to politicise —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** — an issue that requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-community response and a bipartisan approach to deal with it.

#### BUSSELTON MARGARET RIVER AIRPORT

**576. Ms E.J. KELSBIE to the Minister for Regional Development:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's \$11.2 billion infrastructure investment program.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the long-term plans at the Busselton Margaret River Airport?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house why it is important that any investment in infrastructure is based on proper planning considerations?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH replied:**

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question, and I am delighted to have a question about regional development in this place. I do not often get asked them for some reason. I thank the member for the question, and I am very pleased to inform the house that the Cook Labor government will be partnering with the City of Busselton to develop a business case for the future development of the Busselton Margaret River Airport.

**Ms L. Mettam** interjected.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am sure the member will be very interested in this.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please, members! If we want to be able to conclude an MPI motion today, we will really need to progress with question time. Otherwise, we will not even get to a vote.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The \$250 000 business case includes funding contributions from the City of Busselton and other south west local governments that see the value of a business case. It builds on the collaboration that was built some years ago and that I was very pleased to be a part of.

I have agreed to make this contribution on behalf of the government. We are planning for the long-term future of the airport's infrastructure needs because the policies of the Cook government have resulted in strong passenger growth and potential for additional services.

Those policies, members, are very responsible financial management. What did we inherit when we came to government in 2017? We have developed policies to promote the economic development of regional Western Australia and Western Australia, so we are in a great position to look at investments right around the state. It was our government, through Hon Alannah MacTiernan, that helped secure direct flights between Busselton and Melbourne and lock in those new opportunities for investment. The member was full of energy, and it has given south west residents far more flexible options.

The Jetstar service commenced in April 2022, and it has been very successful. The success of that service so far has given us the confidence to proceed with planning for the next stage of the airport's future. Planning will consider factors such as passenger and tourism growth, existing infrastructure, economic impacts and opportunities, and sustainability and funding strategies. The South West Development Commission will continue to be involved in the project, chairing the working group that is made up of the City of Busselton and key stakeholders, and pursuing the direction of the development of the business case. That is on top of the interim arrangements we made last year to help debottleneck some aspects of the airport.

I know that members on this side will absolutely welcome this work, but I choked, members, a few weeks ago when I was drinking my morning coffee at home and I read the *Bunbury Herald*. What did I see? I saw —

Mettam slams new business case for airport

The article reports that she said the delay in acting on the airport was a “stalling tactic”. The plan was developed in 2015 and, basically, we should be getting on with it. What has happened since 2015, members? Let me think. The previous government managed to trash the state’s finances—that is what we inherited. We had to go into budget repair and take major steps to address the problems that we inherited.

**Ms L. Mettam** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The member who is commenting in the background was a member of that government.

What else did we have to do? We had to deal with COVID, and we have gone through COVID. What have we got today? We have totally changed conditions; we have an economy that is the envy of the nation, if not the envy of many people overseas. That is why people want to come to WA, why they want to invest in WA and why the Busselton airport is so important. That is why regional WA is benefiting from \$11.2 billion of investment.

When we have a member who does not understand the importance of looking at contemporary issues to make decisions, I need to go back to the definition of a business case that the federal Department of Finance has put out. I think the Minister for Health has been down this pathway once before, but it bears repeating. The definition states —

A business case sets out the problem or opportunity, considers options, analyses costs, benefits and risks, and ultimately supports an investment decision.

That is what the City of Busselton wants. It does not want to put risk onto its ratepayers. It wants to know the contemporary circumstances. If the member wants me to withdraw the business case and leave the city to make a decision, she should tell me. Does the member want the airport built, and does the member want it built on sound principles? That is the issue.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please. I am going to give the call to the member for North West Central for the last question. Members need to keep in mind that private members’ business starts at four o’clock sharp. If we eat further into the time, it will mean that either you will need to curtail the MPI or the MPI will not come to a vote until possibly tomorrow.

#### PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME

**577. Ms M. BEARD to the Minister for Health:**

I refer to the current petition led by the opposition that calls for real increases to the patient assisted travel scheme.

- (1) Why, at a time of record surpluses, do regional WA patients receive an unfair fuel subsidy of only 16¢, when other states and territories receive more?
- (2) Why is it good enough for New South Wales patients to receive 40¢ a kilometre but not regional WA families?

**Ms A. SANDERSON replied:**

- (1)–(2) It is always interesting to get these questions from the Nationals WA, to be honest. I appreciate that the current member for North West Central was not present and was not a member of this place when the National Party and Liberal Party were in government. I was part of the Standing Committee on Public Administration, which had a Liberal–National majority, a Liberal Party chair and a senior Nationals member in Hon Jackie Boydell.

We travelled around and did an inquiry into the patient assisted travel scheme and found that it was not adequate and did not meet the requirements of regional people. We found that it should be increased and certain processes and arrangements could be improved and so on and so forth. The Liberal government ignored the recommendations. It ignored the recommendations so much so that I remember my Legislative Council colleagues, Liberal and National, stood and were furious with their own government for completely ignoring the recommendations. The only thing the Nationals WA did for PATS was to put its logo on the form. The only thing the National Party ever did for the scheme was to stamp royalties for regions and the Nationals logo on the form. That is all it did in government. This government increased it under the Premier as Minister for Health. This government has made significant increases to PATS for regional people. It is very difficult to stomach a question that is, quite frankly, so hypocritical when it is only this government that has invested in PATS and regional health care above and beyond what opposition members did when they were in government.

#### PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME

**578. Ms M. BEARD to the Minister for Health:**

I have a supplementary question. Despite the historical situation and given the cost of living as it is at the moment, will the minister commit to delivering a doubling at least of the fuel subsidy in the midyear economic and fiscal outlook process?

**Ms A. SANDERSON replied:**

History counts because there is context here and it is important that members understand the context. I acknowledge that the member was not in this place when the former Liberal–National government ignored it. I understand that the cost of living is biting across the state and across the country. There is no question about that. But this government has not only invested in increasing PATS, but also seen record investment; no government has ever invested more in regional health care and infrastructure than this government. The best outcome is getting health care closer to where people live. That is what this government is investing in and that is what we are delivering. We have doubled access to cancer services in regional Western Australia since we have come to government. We have doubled access to cancer services so that people do not have to travel multiple times to Perth. We opened a beautiful radiation oncology facility down in Albany so those patients do not have to travel. We are redeveloping regional health campuses and expanding services in major regional health campuses. There has not been investment in regional health care of this scale ever from any government and we are very proud of our regional investment. We have significantly lifted the PATS rebates since we have been in government.

**The SPEAKER:** Members, that concludes question time.

**ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE — REGULATIONS***Matter of Public Interest*

**THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts)** informed the Assembly that she was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

Ahead of giving the call to the Leader of the Opposition, I make it clear that we have an issue heading into private members' business. There is up to 30 minutes available for each side. If one or both sides takes a lesser amount of time, this can be brought on for a vote ahead of four o'clock.

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [3.03 pm]: I think an arrangement has been made between the manager of opposition business and the Leader of the House, so I am in their hands as to the timing. I move —

That this house calls upon the WA Labor government to release proposed regulations and commit to tabling them ahead of the Aboriginal Heritage Legislation Amendment and Repeal Bill 2023 being brought on for consideration, noting the unrest caused in industry and across WA by the laggard introduction of regulations under the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Just wait two seconds. Members, if we could keep the background noise in the chamber down, that would be appreciated. We really need to hear what the Leader of the Opposition has to say.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker, and I am pleased to have your protection from this rowdy bunch.

As we know, members, chaos was unleashed on the Western Australian community by the Labor government's introduction and implementation of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021. Its utter failure to ensure that everyone understood and was well informed of what was in the act and the regulations helped to contribute to that utter chaos that we saw break out across Western Australia, across the landscape. From the north to the south, from the east to the west, every landowner who owned over 1 100 square metres of land found themselves impacted, many of them completely and utterly surprised that that was ever going to be the situation. By its own promotion, the government had had the legislation in development for five years. It had five years and completely stuffed it up! How could the government possibly come to the end of five years and have legislation that was so utterly unfit for purpose? It is because adequate consultation was not undertaken during the development of that act and the regulations surrounding the act, and there was not a sufficient explanation to the community as to what was in the act.

In fact, over a couple of education sessions in one town one presenter contradicted what another presenter had told the same town. That led to utter confusion throughout the community. We know that when the former minister, Ben Wyatt, began the development of that legislation, back in 2018, he said that there would be a green bill so everybody in Western Australia could have an understanding of what was in that legislation.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** It wasn't me.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** No, I did not say it was you. I did not.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** It wasn't me.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** You were the minister at the time that the bill was implemented.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** No, I was not.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Yes, the implementation began in 2023.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** I wasn't when it was passed. I wasn't when it was passed.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The now minister was debating the bill in the house on behalf of the minister. The minister will have his chance. We have seen that Western Australian Labor has not learnt from that serious error. Today in the house the Minister for Water talked about changes to an act that will fundamentally affect many landowners across Western Australia and those people who use water licences. They will all be affected by changes to the water management legislation, including the Rights in Water and Irrigation Act, which I asked the minister about today. Again, there has been no indication that the minister understands how fundamentally important that is to the community of Western Australia. It is not just a few stakeholders. Talking to a few stakeholder groups is not the answer. The government needs to get that information out to the public so that everybody in the industries, not just a few peak bodies, knows what is coming.

Water legislation will be a repeat of the Aboriginal cultural heritage errors if the government does not learn from its mistakes in the introduction of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021. We know from the advice given today that that is exactly what is going on. It has not learnt anything. It is going to do exactly the same thing with this coming legislation as occurred under the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act and could occur with the changes to the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972, which we will soon be debating, if it does not provide the community with the information that it needs. The community wants to know what is going on.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Sorry, Leader of the Opposition. Members, if you could keep it down, please, or if you want to have a conversation, take it outside the chamber. Thank you.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Thank you—and thank you, member for Roe!

We saw this become a complete and utter mess and it was caused by the fact that the government failed to consult with the wider community and understand its concerns. We are saying that we do not want to see a repeat of that situation when we come to the repeal bill and the changes to the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972. We do not want to see a repeat of that. We want to see a piece of legislation that is fit for purpose and that will protect Aboriginal heritage but, at the same time, will be workable for landowners and land users and will not impinge on their rights to go about their business, earn a living and use their properties as they need to do.

If the government does not understand that now after the most appalling legislation was put through this house, I do not know when it will ever learn. Perhaps it cannot learn. I again go back to the answer from the Minister for Water. It is apparent that she has learnt nothing from the mess the government got itself into with the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act, and seems determined to repeat those mistakes with water reform legislation. We know that the impact of that legislation on Aboriginal groups, property owners, developers, farmers, miners and other land users, such as local governments, was immense. It caused a great deal of concern in communities and sadly, I have to say, caused division. That will have to be addressed and will take years, in some instances, to be resolved. That falls at the feet of this minister; it is at his feet that we lay the blame for that, because he failed to adequately consult with the community and failed to provide the information to the Parliament that was necessary for ensuring that the legislation was fit for purpose.

We hope, on all measures, that that is not repeated in the Aboriginal heritage legislation we will debate, I am told, in September. September is not very far off—only a few weeks away—and we want to see an understanding on the part of the government that the opposition is not going to accept its word anymore. We need to see what regulations are proposed to surround the changes to the 1972 act as the legislation goes through the Parliament; we do not want to see that afterwards, because we do not trust the government to do it properly. We have to actually understand how the legislation and the regulations will integrate to affect the management of Aboriginal heritage in this state going forward. We are not certain that, without the proposed regulations, we can possibly do that.

I know there is a need to get on with this. There is a six-month window to enable the repeal bill to go through from 1 July, meaning that it must be done before the Parliament rises at the end of the year. I also know that industry is concerned, because it has been left in limbo. It actually has no path now because there is nothing happening under the act that is in force, the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021. As I understand it, no section 18s can be commenced under the 1972 act. If the minister can respond to this, I would like his analysis. That leaves industry in a grey zone. It is in limbo and cannot at the moment proceed to make applications anywhere that will result in a decision.

Industry has really been in limbo since before the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act was implemented in July and there was uncertainty about how it would be managed on the ground. In the end we heard from the Premier that there would be an educative approach; a light-touch approach was announced, but there was not much information about what a “light-touch approach” actually meant. Did it mean no prosecutions, or did it mean that only if someone wilfully or deliberately carried out an act they would be prosecuted? That was not really explained, but I daresay it was somewhere in between those two circumstances.

As we know, people are concerned that they may be prosecuted under the 2021 act if they proceed with an undertaking on land. Despite the government’s promise of an educative approach, we really do not know what the result would be because there are provisions in the legislation for prosecutions of people under the 2021 act to proceed if they are brought forward. This is despite the fact that in the two briefings provided to the opposition assurances were

given by the director general that there would be no prosecutions under the 2021 act, yet we see that very provision in the proposed repeal bill. That is worrying and leaves me somewhat perplexed as to what the actual situation is. However, having been given those undertakings, I take it that the minister will be able to provide some undertaking that he supports that view and that that is indeed going to be the case going forward. It needs to be clarified; people need to know where they stand in this time of transition. We were already in a transitional period from the 1972 act to the 2021 act, but now we are transitioning back, so we are re-transitioning and it is a doubly opaque circumstance for people trying to understand how they can go forward. We implore the government to get on and provide that information.

I would also like to point out to the Premier that I have asked for legal advice surrounding the reasons for the backflip. One of the reasons I have asked for that advice is that I suspect some of that advice may be pertinent to the discussion on the 1972 act and I would like to know exactly what has been said. Is it something relating to, for instance, the change of having the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Council replacing the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee under the 1972 act? Is that somehow wrapped up in the advice? We do not know. It would be much easier if the Premier were to simply release that advice. I have related circumstances in which former Premier Gallop did, indeed, table such advice to the house, twice. It is not unprecedented; it can be done, and it would actually provide some reassurance to the community that there is nothing to hide and nothing to be seen here that should concern them.

I also ask: If the regulations are being developed, can the minister or the Premier advise what stage of development they have reached? When did they issue instructions for the drafting of those regulations? When did the process of drafting commence? When do they expect the draft regulations to be available? These are fundamentally important questions to be answered if we are to be able to properly consider the repeal bill if, as we have been told, it is to be brought to this chamber in September. We all want to get on and provide certainty to the Western Australian community, but we are not going to be able to provide that certainty if we are not operating with the full information we need.

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [3.18 pm]: I rise to contribute to the debate on this matter of public interest —

That this house calls upon the WA Labor government to release proposed regulations and commit to tabling them ahead of the Aboriginal Heritage Legislation Amendment and Repeal Bill 2023 being brought on for consideration, noting the unrest caused in industry and across WA by the laggard introduction of regulations under the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021.

As part of this debate it is worth noting some history, the opposition's approach to Aboriginal cultural heritage and the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021. It was enacted in 2021 and was intended to modernise the 1972 act in response to the tragic events surrounding Juukan Gorge. There was no argument from the opposition in relation to the intent of the legislation that was proposed; we have always supported protecting cultural heritage against events such as Juukan Gorge, but we were obviously concerned about the government's approach to this legislation. We saw the arrogance of this government when it ran the laws through Parliament under the guise of urgent legislation and afforded us little opportunity to scrutinise them.

**Ms M.M. Quirk** interjected.

**Ms L. METTAM:** The member has not heard what I have been talking about.

The opposition was briefed two days before we were on our feet debating the bill. Our concerns about the new system that was being imposed on landowners were rejected by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, who said that those concerns were not correct. The opposition had to sit until midnight to get through as much of the debate as possible. It was an insult to not only this place but also, and importantly, the broader community of Western Australia. The government somehow found it appropriate to take that approach with such an important piece of legislation, the intent of which we consistently supported. The bill was rammed through Parliament as the debate was guillotined. The mess we saw earlier this year when the laws and associated regulations were implemented on 1 July was a direct result of the WA Labor government using Parliament as a rubber stamp. We were told to trust the government as everything would be okay and the community would get plenty of notice and information. I said at the time —

... this government has done its due diligence and ... the bill is perfect. If it is not ... the proposed legislation will have far-reaching implications ... All of the unintended outcomes will fall on the shoulders of this government.

We were proven right. If we put the racist slurs and overreach aside, what we saw was the complete botching of the implementation of these laws. The government was not ready, even though it proposed that it was. The regulations, which encroached heavily on property rights and were too bureaucratic, were published in April, giving impacted businesses only 12 weeks to prepare and adapt. That was where a significant part of the problem lay.

In announcing the scrapping of the 2021 act and regulations, the Premier said —

“It has become clear that the act went too far—introducing complicated regulations and ultimately placing the burden on everyday property owners ...

Quite clearly, we welcomed the decision to repeal this act. We have heard from many industry groups that are going through a process of what they call lightning consultation, but they are yet to see the regulations. Given the unprecedented situation in which the government arrogantly introduced legislation after being warned about the public outcry about the regulations, it is extraordinary that we are yet to see the new regulations. Industry has been left in the dark about these regulations. Labor’s strategy regarding the repeal laws was exposed when the minister stood in the chamber, after consistent questioning, and stated on 10 August 2023 —

The length of time that the 2021 legislation remains in existence will obviously depend a lot on how long the opposition wants to debate the bill that comes before the house and goes to the upper house. It will be entirely up to the opposition, but we have made it quite clear that the 2021 act will remain until the new bill, which was introduced yesterday, becomes law and the 2021 act is repealed.

Given that there was so much concern about the overreach of the regulations and so many questions are still being asked by industry about what the new regulations will look like, we implore the government to be transparent and up-front. As I stated, we have consistently supported the intent of this legislation. We were left in the dark about the detail, given just two days’ notice, and then the debate was guillotined. We were also confronted with regulations that represented a significant overreach on private property owners, as the Premier himself said. We are asking the government to please learn the lessons from the unprecedented failure in implementing WA Labor government policy. The regulations were too prescriptive, too invasive and too confusing. The community remains wary of the government’s overreach. The opposition does not seek to be obstructionist when it comes to these laws. We will support commonsense legislation and commonsense changes, but where there is contention, we will obviously question it. That is what the Western Australian public expects of us.

I asked a question in this place yesterday about an interrelated matter—that is, the interim technical guidance that relates to the Environmental Protection Act. There is some concern about duplication and overreach and what impact the new bill will have on the EPA guidelines. Feedback from industry is that it represents unnecessary duplication and overreach. Industry is seeking answers. It was disappointing that the Minister for Environment was unable to provide some clarity when he was asked that question in this place. I hope the minister might be able to respond as part of today’s debate on the matter of public interest about what the proposed bill and regulations will mean for the EPA’s technical guidance. So much for reducing red tape!

In closing, we will not agree to a “just trust us” approach when it comes to this bill. We will be scrutinising it. We expect the debate not to be guillotined this time and that we will be provided with fulsome information about the bill and the regulations.

**Ms S.E. Winton:** He has already said that it will be fully debated.

**Ms L. METTAM:** We are asking for some clarity about the regulations!

**Ms S.E. Winton:** You just said, “I hope it’s not guillotined.”

**Ms L. METTAM:** The minister is not across her brief. She has no right to interrupt. The minister should get her notes together for tomorrow!

Several members interjected.

#### *Point of Order*

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I cannot hear the member for Vasse and Leader of the Liberal Party because of the interjections from members over there, who will have an opportunity to make a contribution. I ask you to ask them to cease interjecting on her.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I will not uphold the point of order. Members of the government, we are on a bit of a time frame here. The more you interject and the more the debate is stopped, the less time you will have to respond. Carry on, Leader of the Liberal Party.

#### *Debate Resumed*

**Ms L. METTAM:** I will leave my comments there. Government members are in no position to interject on this matter, and particularly the Minister for Early Childhood Education, who is not across her brief.

**Ms C.M. Rowe** interjected.

**Ms L. METTAM:** The same goes for the member for Belmont. Her racist slurs have no foundation.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Belmont, thank you. The member for Roe has the call.

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [3.28 pm]: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

**Ms L. Mettam** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Leader of the Liberal Party, you have just had your chance. Carry on, member for Roe.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** If I may commence my contribution.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Please do.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I would like to wrap up the debate. I must say that the developments of recent times have been concerning. I want to point out a few things. I thought the member for Mount Lawley spoke well yesterday in Parliament for most of his contribution. He talked about the concept of the sovereignty of Parliament, the idea of parliamentary privilege and, more importantly to this debate, the role of parliamentary committees. As he also eloquently put it yesterday, we have the power to make law with regard to the peace, order and good government of our jurisdiction. I think that is important for the Premier and the minister to note—good government of our jurisdiction, as pointed out by the member for Mount Lawley. The essence of good government has been sadly lacking in the debacle on the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill. This McGowan–Cook government is an example of a lesson to be learnt about how not to govern the state. The Premier and the minister have picked up the baton from the previous Premier and are bullying their way through. The dire consequences of this legislation are there to be seen as a result of that previous attitude, and we have seen a backflip. We are looking forward to a new lot of regulations that will give the opposition a chance to see what will be going on in order to have a reasonable debate. Unfortunately, the Premier started on the wrong foot with one of his first responses in question time about dogs returning to their own vomit. We have just seen it again with comments on racism. It was funny; after the Premier’s initial contribution in question time, many people came up to me and said, “That was really disappointing. The Premier’s first display on the first day of question time—not impressed.” I think the Premier will live to regret that. It did not set him off on the right foot. As far as I am concerned, he apologised to the people of Western Australia, but he has not apologised to the opposition. This could be an opportunity for the Premier to apologise to the opposition for the way that he referenced us in that first question time.

Nonetheless, I want to briefly talk about the likes of the Standing Committee on Legislation. It was criticised in *The West Australian* recently for the fact that members had been paid for standing on that committee and had not had the opportunity to see any legislation. That is down to this government that will not refer any legislation. It is using its numbers to basically push through anything and everything. The perfect example of that was back in November 2021 when we had less than two days briefing on this legislation. I remember it well. I remember being there asking questions about farm dams and the like, and the minister said to us, “Don’t worry about it. It’ll all be in the regulations. We’ve pushed this through. Don’t worry about it, the regulations will come through.”

*Point of Order*

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Just some historical truth; I was not the minister.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order, minister. Take your seat. Carry on, member.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** We have seen it with this legislation and with electoral reform. The Minister for Electoral Affairs and the previous Premier did not have it on the agenda, yet they pushed things through without giving the proper opportunity for scrutiny.

I was in Esperance at one of the first forums with 600 people and more lining up out the door. I have never seen anything like it in my six years in Parliament. There was genuine fear and hostility. No-one enjoyed it, including the presenters at that forum. It was sad to see the way that this legislation and these regulations were creating that fear. I think I walked out at the end of that forum and said to someone, “This has actually set back reconciliation by 20 years.” I stand by that. The way that happened was a real disappointment. I congratulate the farmers and others who rallied in front of Parliament House to convince the minister and the Premier to backflip on this. I give the minister credit for coming out and speaking to the farmers, and for organising a forum in both Katanning and Merredin. We appreciated that at the time. But the time for transparency has come. We look forward to the government’s response today. We look forward to seeing some regulations in place or at least proposed so that we can debate the bill in full, with some time for preparation, because certainly, that was what we did not see in the previous government.

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale — Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [3.35 pm]:** I will make a number of points to begin. Regarding the Aboriginal Heritage Legislation Amendment and Repeal Bill 2023 that will be debated in due course, I place on the record that the opposition has received two briefings and the bill has now been read into Parliament. I do not think the opposition can make any allegations or accusations that it has not been fully briefed on the bill. I know members opposite are talking about regulations; I will get to that in a minute. They have been fully briefed twice on the bill. I will get on to the substance of the matter of public interest, which is a bit hard to understand because the Leader of the Opposition was going on about the water bill and so forth. I was not really sure what he was going on about. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned that we do not speak to interest groups or representative groups. Is the Leader of the Opposition saying that the Western Australian Farmers Federation and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association do not adequately represent their members?

**Mr R.S. Love:** They do not represent the hundreds of thousands of people who would be affected who you did not talk to. They have a few thousand people who they represent, not the hundreds of thousands of people who the legislation affected.

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** It would not be right to say that we did not speak to other people as we had all these workshops and education forums. I will move on to the substance of the motion, as far as I can understand it.



The Cook government is a government that listens. That is why the Premier and I made the call to bring in the bill that we will debate shortly. We listened. Yes, there was division. It was very sad that there was division out there. There were some genuine concerns, but also other people decided to engage in a scaremongering exercise. As I said, I acknowledge there was some genuine concern. Last Friday, the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage presented to the implementation group. The implementation group is made up of land owners, traditional owners, representative bodies and industry reps. Surely, the Leader of the Opposition would have to see that as being a sensible way to proceed. It is not possible to have a Teams meeting whereby the whole of Western Australia tunes in when developing and consulting about regulations.

At that meeting last week, the implementation group, which was established after the member for Kwinana became Premier, was presented with a proposed time frame to be set out in the regulations to ensure that the administration of the bill will be efficient for both industry and traditional owners. Steps will be taken in prescribing Aboriginal organisations under the definition of native title party in the bill that is before Parliament to ensure that the right groups have access to the right to review. The Leader of the Opposition has supported that and I thank him for it. It has an essential amendment to the 1972 act to prevent another tragedy like Juukan Gorge and it plans to model the procedures for the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Committee on that of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Council. Just to make it clear to the Leader of the Opposition, there is no legal impediment to that. It is in the bill. Matters that will be governed are the transitional regulations. That was presented to the implementation group last Friday.

The department also presented at a high level on plans to develop policy guidance regarding the new information provisions in the bill and the expectation for consultation with traditional owners under section 18; the proposed fee structure; the content of the survey program and funding program to build capacity for Aboriginal organisations to respond; heritage engagement; consultation; service delivery; the needs of government and industry; support; training; and cultural heritage education opportunities, particularly for young people.

The members of the implementation group, which includes peak bodies from the resources industry and the property, farming and local government sectors, as well as Aboriginal organisations, are currently seeking feedback. When we receive that feedback in the coming days, we will feed it into the drafting of the regulations. The drafting of the regulations is taking place now and will include that feedback. We will then consult the implementation group on the draft regulations and, at that time, we will be able to share that with the opposition. Our team will be prepared to provide a briefing on the regulations. It is not common practice to provide a briefing on the regulations, but we will do that and the opposition will get them when they have been drafted after the input from the various groups that make up the implementation panel. We will have them done as soon as we can. Then we will engage in the debate in this Parliament.

Members opposite would have to admit that the amendments that we are seeking to make through the bill—I am not talking about the regulations—are not complicated. There is not a long list of amendments to the 1972 act. That should not be considered to be too difficult. Members will get the regulations that they have concerns about as soon as we complete the drafting after we receive the feedback from those who make up the implementation group.

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Premier)** [3.42 pm]: I think the expression is game, set and match. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs has comprehensively responded to the concerns of those opposite and provided a very concise and appropriate clarification of the issues. The restored 1972 act will have simple and effective amendments made to it as laid out in the bill and there will be a small number of regulations compared with the 2021 legislation. When I was elected, I said that I would do key things, and that is listen and govern on behalf of all Western Australians. That is what I have done in relation to these laws. It was clear that the laws were not going to be able to be communicated and understood in a way that would ensure that they provided an effective means of protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage. Therefore, in the interests of that, I made the decision that we would repeal the legislation.

With the legislation will come important regulations, and they will go to issues such as the time frames to ensure that the act operates efficiently, procedures for the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Committee, prescribed Aboriginal corporations, transitional matters not covered in the bill, and fees. As I said, I promised the people of Western Australia that I would lead a government that uses common sense and listens, and that is what we have done in this particular case.

As the minister said, we have established the implementation group, which is now undertaking extensive consultation with industry representatives—the representatives the Leader of the Opposition talked to. They will continue to be consulted about what they need to step forward and be comfortable with the new changes. In particular, the minister is working extensively with Aboriginal groups to make sure that they understand the important changes that are in place. The implementation group will come back to us fairly shortly with feedback on those core elements. We will share the draft regulations and policies with the implementation group and, at that point, we will share them with the Parliament.

It is a pretty simple process, really. It is obviously disappointing that the opposition does not have other issues that it can campaign on, so it has to continuously recycle its arguments about the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act. I acknowledge the strong language I used in my first engagement on this bill, and that was because I believe reconciliation is very important. I regret the hurt and misunderstanding that has been caused by this. If we are talking

about damage to reconciliation, the member for Roe's stance on the Voice is head and shoulders above everything else. We know that the member opposed Aboriginal land rights back in the 1970s and 1980s. We know that he opposed native title back in the 1990s.

**Mr R.S. Love:** You're straying down the same path that you did when you were criticising us during the debate on Aboriginal cultural heritage.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I did not raise the issue of reconciliation; that was the chap sitting next to the Leader of the Opposition. This is not about our concern about reconciliation. This is about our concern about Aboriginal cultural heritage. I have not critiqued the Leader of the Opposition's version of his concerns about Aboriginal cultural heritage at all. I am simply pointing out to the friend next to him that the decision that he and the member for Vasse have taken to oppose the Voice eclipses all other concepts of damage to Aboriginal reconciliation that this chamber might contemplate. Does the member not agree with that?

If the member for Roe were to walk down the streets of Katanning on 15 October and see a young Aboriginal kid walking along that street, can he imagine how that kid would feel if the referendum were not successful? He is closing the door of opportunity to that young Aboriginal person. That Aboriginal kid today has hope that once and for all this country will step forward together and acknowledge the First Nations people, recognise them in the Constitution and consult them on issues of concern. That kid has hope about a future that they can rely on. That is the door of hope that the member, the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Vasse have slammed shut. Our appeal to the people of Australia is to not shut the door on hope, but provide a future that everyone can believe in—provide a new story for Australia, with the opportunity that has been provided to us on 14 October. That is what I am referring to.

I was not going to discuss these issues, but you raised the issue of reconciliation, my friend. Contemplate for just a moment what you are going to do with the process of reconciliation when you go out there and promote a no vote, when you go out there and say that our First Nations people are not worthy of recognition, when you go out there and say that they should not be acknowledged in the Constitution and when you go out there and say that they should not be consulted. Imagine what that small child on the streets of Katanning will feel like on 15 October once you have done your damage to reconciliation! Think about that.

I made the decision about the Aboriginal cultural heritage laws because I want to govern for all Western Australians and we needed to make those changes on behalf of all the people of Western Australia. The changes that we are seeking to make are simple and effective amendments to the Aboriginal Heritage Act so that we can move forward and get beyond this division. That is the important thing.

The other thing that provides us with an opportunity to move forward together is the Voice. I will say no more.

The Leader of the Opposition asked for our State Solicitor's Office's advice on repealing the act. There is no such advice. The decision to repeal the act was mine, in consultation with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and the government's alone.

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

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The State Solicitor is responsible for advising us on the implementation of government policy, but the decision was ours.

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

**Mr R.H. COOK:** The decision was ours. You can rest easy, my friend.

The opposition can now move forward and examine this legislation in the appropriate time. We will not rush it. Before we debate it, members opposite will be able to see the regulations in place and make a judgement. My fervent hope is that the member will do what he did the last time, which was to vote for the legislation. My fervent hope also is that we can move forward in an effective manner, but let us do it together and in a way that provides Western Australians with an opportunity to be proud of this place. We must make sure that we do it properly.

*Amendment to Motion*

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Consistent with our intentions, the minister has already committed to making sure that we will provide the proposed regulations for the Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation prior to the debate on the bill resuming, I move —

That all words after "house" be deleted and the following be inserted —

commends the WA Labor government for its commitment to release proposed regulations for the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Legislation Amendment and Repeal Bill 2023 prior to the debate on the bill resuming.

Amendment put and passed.

*Motion, as Amended*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is that the motion as amended be agreed to.

Question put and passed.

**RAIL SAFETY NATIONAL LAW APPLICATION BILL 2023***Second Reading*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

**MS J.L. HANNS (Collie–Preston — Parliamentary Secretary)** [3.51 pm]: I will try to take us to four o'clock, but my time may run out before then. I have a couple of things that I would like to add to my contribution on the Rail Safety National Law Application Bill 2023. Prior to question time when I was interrupted, I started to explain that my children are as equally obsessed as me by rail heritage. I also point out that over the school holidays and our Christmas break, I took my daughter on a trip to Europe and we travelled extensively throughout the rail system, including on the Channel Tunnel. I think it was two hours or maybe an hour and a half to travel between England and France. Surprise, surprise; we were very quickly on the other side of the English Channel. It was an incredible experience. I must say that as impressive as the tube and the metro are in their respective countries, I travelled to Parliament today on the purple CAT bus and can say that our own public transport system rivals what I experienced in Europe over the Christmas break.

However, I digress, because I want to speak very briefly about an amazing rail safety advertisement that was run during 2012. I do not know what we call that decade; it was not the noughties and not the 2020s. Was it the 2010s? That decade. This Australian public campaign was made by Metro Trains in Melbourne, Victoria. Anyone who had children at that time will know exactly what I am talking about because my children sent me bonkers with their rendition of the most effective rail safety advertising campaign that I think has existed, certainly in Australia. It was called “Dumb Ways to Die”. It sounds like an oxymoron, but it is not. Stick with me for a minute. The campaign was designed by John Mescall, the executive creative director of McCann. He said at the time that the aim of the campaign was to engage an audience that does not really want to hear any kind of safety message and he thought that they would engage with the campaign. McCann estimated that within two weeks it generated at least \$50 million worth of global media value in addition to more than 700 media stories about the campaign at a fraction of the cost of one television ad. According to Metro Trains, the campaign contributed to a 20 per cent reduction in near-miss accidents compared to the annual average, or 30 per cent for the same time the year before, from 13.29 near misses per million kilometres between November 2011 and January 2012, to 9.17 near misses per million kilometres between November 2012 and January 2013. It was an incredibly impactful campaign. The reason that it is so ingrained in my head is that it is one of those ditties you just cannot get out of your head. As I said, the message was very definitely about road safety but it referred to silly things that people can do to cause themselves harm. I will list some of the ways that the characters in the video and the song were intentionally causing themselves harm: poking a stick at a grizzly bear, eating medicine that is out of date, and using your private parts as piranha bait. These are all dumb ways to die; I absolutely agree. It goes on: keeping a rattlesnake as a pet and “I wonder, what does this red button do?” The hook is rail safety.

**Mr D.A.E. Scaife:** Can you sing it for us?

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Potentially, I could sing. I might need an extension, but, unfortunately, I have had an extension. I could sing it or I could ask the member for Cockburn to sing it. He will take over from me for two and a bit minutes. I apologise, member for Cockburn.

The focus then shifts to acting really appropriately and safely around level crossings when crossing rail tracks. I commend the bill to the house. I tried!

**MR D.A.E. SCAIFE (Cockburn)** [3.56 pm]: It is my pleasure to take us to private members' business by talking on the Rail Safety National Law Application Bill 2023. I congratulate the parliamentary secretary on what I believe is the first bill that she is shepherding through the chamber. Congratulations. It is an auspicious moment in any parliamentarian's career. It might be only a nerdy moment, but I think it should be celebrated and I congratulate her for it.

Before I go on to discuss the bill, I have been told by a couple of members that yesterday the member for Cottesloe said he was disappointed in me after my contribution to the debate. I would like to put on record that the opposition and the member for Cottesloe disappoint me every day of the week. Every day that they get up in this chamber, they disappoint me. I am sure that for the next three hours the reasons that they disappoint me will be on full display. I put it on the record that it may be that I disappointed the member for Cottesloe yesterday, but I want to be clear that he wins because he disappoints me every day.

**Mr D.R. Michael:** It happens at four o'clock every Wednesday.

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** It is every Wednesday, but it is not just then. I wanted to put that on the record since the member for Cottesloe had his say yesterday. I know that he is used to patronising people in this place and that he did that to me yesterday, but right back at you.

**Ms L. Mettam** interjected.

**Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE:** They all disappoint me, including the member for Vasse in particular.

Speaking to this bill, I would like to advocate on behalf of my local community because I think this bill deals with some important issues around rail safety and harmonising Western Australian laws with laws right around the country to ensure that there will not be inconsistencies so that rail operators, rail users and rail workers can be kept safe, regardless of which jurisdiction they find themselves using the rail network in. It is yet another harmonisation piece of uniform legislation being brought in, and I am very happy to support it.

The member for Collie–Preston told us about the great history of the rail network in her electorate. Cockburn also has a great history in relation to the rail network. Members might know that the Fremantle line used to go all the way down to Robb Jetty, where there was an abattoir. It used to terminate in what was originally North Coogee and then it went down to Robb Jetty, and that meant that the abattoir could be serviced by the line. That part of the rail line was abolished many years ago. I look forward to the day when Metronet is extended and perhaps we will see Fremantle connected to Cockburn Central because that would be the completion of the Thornlie–Cockburn line and something I will discuss later on.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

## STATE ECONOMY — WORKFORCE

### *Motion*

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

This house condemns the WA Labor government for its stark failure to adequately address the ongoing skills crisis plaguing our state, its failure to properly prioritise the fundamental needs of our workforce and industries, and its inability to work with the federal Labor government to bolster our skills supply.

The member for Cockburn told us we would be disappointing him very shortly. I can see the member in the Speaker's chair, so he is now in a position to be disappointed for a good hour or so. I think he has the very difficult task of chairing private members' business. Well done.

We know that during the 2017 state election campaign, the former Premier of Western Australia promised that a McGowan Labor government would on day one tear up the current list of occupations that fast-tracks overseas workers to Western Australia. True to that promise, the former Premier slashed the skilled migration list from 178 occupations to 18 occupations. He proudly announced —

The old Skilled Migration Occupation List is no more.

There used to be 178 occupations that could fast-track overseas workers into jobs.

Today, we have a new list. And that list has just 18 occupations.

No longer can overseas workers be fast-tracked into bricklaying, tiling or electrician jobs.

And the ones that are left are occupations like gastroenterologists, rheumatologists ...

And the like —

most of the 18 are highly specialised medical jobs like these.

We've put WA jobs first, like we promised. We're putting WA workers back to work with more local jobs for WA.

...

This was the first action of my Government, and I'm proud to get this done within the first 100 days.

...

I always said that from Day 1 of a Government I lead that we'll put WA jobs first!

He went on to talk about sending a letter to the then Prime Minister, a fellow called Malcolm Turnbull. He wrote to Mr Turnbull saying that he wanted to reduce the number of occupations on the Western Australian skilled migration occupation list. The letter's final paragraph says —

I would like to request that Perth be removed from the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS). My government is currently conducting a review of the West Australian Skilled Migration Occupation list ... and will provide an updated list once the review is complete.

On 17 March 2017, which was very soon after the 2017 election, he wrote to the then Prime Minister. Subsequent to that letter, the list was slashed from 178 occupations to 18 occupations, all of which were highly specialised and unlikely to be filled locally in the ordinary course of events. Clearly, the former Premier had doubts about the future of the Western Australian economy. At that stage, he had read the tea leaves and thought that the iron ore industry and commodity prices were continuing to fall, and he made some damaging decisions, I think, on the back of being spooked by Treasury's pessimistic outlook in the budget papers. As a result, he made decisions about the skilled migration list that are still having ramifications today. If a government tells people that they are not welcome and

it does not want them, and if it takes steps as he did from 17 March 2017, the effects are widespread and long lived. People take the hint and decide they will not bother going there. We know that we have been unable to keep up with the supply of skilled migrants ever since.

We know that COVID did not help. As a reaction to a unique set of circumstances during the pandemic, we were left in a situation in which the borders were very tightly closed. That meant that when people were considering coming in and out of Western Australia, many decided that they would not come back once they had left. For instance, some FIFO workers and people contributing to our industries were coming from Queensland and as far away as New Zealand. When they were able to come back to Western Australia, many never did so because of their concern about the borders.

We supported most of the restrictions to close borders at the height of the pandemic, but we always pleaded with the government so that properly quarantined people had the ability to come in to fill those desperately needed placements. Many members in this chamber frequently wrote on behalf of businesses and industries that required skilled workers to come in to fill the shortfalls. Once the borders reopened, it remained difficult to attract people into Western Australia because of the ongoing concern about what might happen. That continues today.

The federal government slashing the skilled migration list by 70 per cent sends a signal to the rest of the world that Western Australia is not really open for business for them. That was a decision of the federal Labor government. I note that the minister is here and will be able to explain what she thinks of the federal Labor government. I am sure that she will have some colourful things to say.

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** She did a good job of making up for the Prime Minister in the press conference the other day, to be honest.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I do not know whether it was a good job because it did not reverse the decision, but I take the hint that she tried to some extent. She seemed to be unsure about how to leave the podium with the Prime Minister without appearing to be too close to him and his decisions. It was very uncomfortable to watch on Channel Seven, but the footage was very well shared. That Channel Seven news clip has been well shared, and many of the comments I have seen attached to it have referred to the disconnect between federal Labor and Western Australia. Of course, we know that even with a record number of federal Labor MPs, there still does not seem to be any ability for Western Australia to be heard. We can have the cabinet over here, but they do not listen. There are 14 Western Australian Labor members of the federal Parliament, but they do not listen.

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** Set up the embassy.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** They have a press conference with the minister, but they do not listen. That is the take-home message for Western Australians about federal Labor.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife):** Ministers!

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** When we go to the next election, the people of Western Australia will remember how ineffective their federal Labor representatives have been in this period and how embarrassing it is to be lectured by Canberra. The federal Treasurer said there is no need for an embassy because they are all here listening, but they are not doing very much listening. I am afraid that the federal Labor government does not listen any more than the state Labor government listened to people concerned about getting people to come in to fill industries' needs in every occupation one can name in the state. From truck drivers right through to the most highly qualified medical staff, engineers, all sorts of process workers, construction workers, you name it, we have been short. For years we have been pleading with the government to enable these positions to be filled and make meaningful steps to attract these people into our state, and we have been met with deaf ears by this government. Now it is apparent that the Labor government in Canberra does not think we need too many more people, so it will not assist with the import of skilled migrants into the future because, bizarrely, it claims it cannot do its job of processing the visa applications. Labor has been in federal government not for a day, not for a week. It has been in government for well over a year and it is still trying to blame things on the previous government.

It is approaching, if it has not already reached, the halfway point of its term, yet it is still whingeing about the previous government and the job that is in front of it. Newsflash: it might not be doing the job come 2025, because it does not deserve to if it is going to spend its time simply complaining about the previous government and not getting on and doing the work that is required. Obviously, the COVID disruption internationally would have led to some backlogs but that is no excuse now. We have moved beyond COVID now. This government cannot claim COVID as the reason for backlogs in its health system. The federal government cannot claim that COVID is the reason for backlogs in its migration list and it has no other excuse. It is the government. If this is an issue, it should get on and fix it so that Western Australia can get the skilled people in that it needs, not only from the next year, but from the backlog of applications that still need to be processed.

One thing we all know is that it is very difficult for business and anybody trying to enable someone to come in on a visa for work. We will hear from other members about how that plays out in communities, but it is not an easy

thing. We need to make sure that we do not discourage people from making an application in the first place. I was concerned enough about the Labor government in Canberra and its tin ear to Western Australia that I wrote to the Prime Minister some time ago when this was first announced. Of course, I did not really expect to hear back from him because he does not listen. His government does not listen. He does not listen to the minister. I do not suppose he is going to listen to me. I pointed out to him in that letter —

... the proposed cuts to Western Australia's allocation ... will see our 8,140 strong allocation slashed to just more than 2,350. A reduction of 70 percent.

Given our contribution to Australia's productivity, our booming industry and more crucially our acute skills shortage, that announcement came as a complete shock. I wrote —

As the "engine room" of our Nation, which you and your colleagues have acknowledged on many occasions, Western Australia has a clear need for a consistent—if not increased, allocation under the Program. WA needs more skilled workers, not less, and our economic strength relies upon this.

Further on I said —

We have shortages across the health system which see nursing staff take up *triple shifts*. Our lack of Midwives is such that women are traveling hundreds of kilometres to give birth. Houses promised to families in 2019 remain concrete pads —

Or piles of bricks —

because of the severe lack of skilled tradespeople in our construction industry. Businesses are restricting their services or closing their doors, only worsening the demand for skills and impacting the vitality of our communities.

Our productivity and the health of our community hinges on a proportionate allocation of workers under this and other programs. We need skilled migrants, and we need them urgently.

Prime Minister, I implore you to reconsider your decision and instead work with us to find long term solutions which may lessen our reliance upon such programs over time. Don't pull the rug out from under our economy.

But, of course, we know from the interview played on Channel Seven that the Prime Minister has not listened to that. He has not listened to the minister. I have some sympathy for the minister in that, as it must be very difficult when she knows that she is ineffective and unable to initiate change with her colleagues in Canberra. It really must come home to the minister that although in Western Australia she might be a big fish in a relatively small pool, on the national scene she does not have any clout at all. As for establishing an embassy in Canberra, I do not think a piece of real estate in Canberra will make much difference if we do not have people on the ground who know how to make an impact on the federal Labor government.

I think what makes an impact on the government federally, of course, is its desire to maintain government. In that regard, I expect federal Labor would have listened to the former Premier more, expecting that he may have been able to help their election chances more greatly than the current Premier, who does not have anywhere near the profile of the former. Of course, we know that the Western Australian Labor government has had to backflip on some of its decisions because of its increasing unpopularity in the state. It is worried and I would say the Prime Minister is also beginning to disregard them to some extent.

We know that in our community the current skills shortage is pushing businesses and key government sectors to their limit. We know that at all levels of government there are skill shortages, whether it be in the service industries, such as the provision of nurses, which I have spoken about and I will speak about again throughout this discussion, with the member for Vasse and others. They are in not only those very often mentioned industries but also areas such as local government, planning and providing environmental approvals. Our state is grinding slowly to a halt behind the scenes because people cannot get their projects approved. We hear of extraordinarily long time frames for approvals coming out from industry. This government spoke about streamlining, but we know that that has made no difference. I think it introduced the green brigade or the green berets or whatever it calls them to further the approvals for those industries that are seen to be related to the new renewable energy and green economy, but my understanding is that that group of people are not new people. The government has just ripped them out of the Environmental Protection Authority and other agencies.

**Mr R.R. Whitby:** That is not true.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I have heard this on the ground from people working in the minister's department so he should listen less to his directors general and more to the people down the line who tell me that people are being ripped out of other areas because they do not have the people. The government needs to bring some people to the state to do these jobs. For instance, businesses are unable to use their new premises or unable to open a shop or unable to complete a real estate development because Western Power cannot get the connections done. Why can it not get its connections done? It cites that it does not have any staff or the workforce to get it.

I went out to the Dowerin field day this morning and on the way out there I drove through the town of Goomalling. Goldacres Sprayer Centre has a beautiful big shed there and the emporium wrote to me some time ago about what it could do to get the shed connected to the power. It is huge. It is an enormous asset sitting there that they could not use because this government and its oversight of Western Power has allowed a situation in which Western Power did not have enough staff to do the design to simply connect a building to the existing network. I mean, it cannot be all that difficult. The powerlines are running right past it. It is a pity the Minister for Energy is not here. He could explain why that is the case, but I suspect that the inability to attract staff into Western Power to do that design work is somehow related to a lack of direction from government. It should get on and prioritise development in this state and to ensure that projects such as that can be connected and to ensure that the particular skills shortage is not directly impacting upon those businesses that are looking for that work. I am sure the member for Roe would agree that international education is a hugely important sector, and in a way that is also related to skills shortages. Often when people come in they may not always have the skills we all think about, but they certainly provide the labour force our state needs. When students come to Western Australia to study and work part time, they make an enormous contribution to the economy, but we know that Western Australia is not performing well compared with other states in respect of the international education sector. Of course, that also feeds into concerns about the lack of workforce generally. Leaving aside the word “skilled”, there is actually a workforce shortage in every field. We are not talking only about specialist skills; it is right across the wide gamut of workforce need in our state.

I fear that because of the combined effects of the inability of the Minister for Environment’s organisations to actually undertake approvals in a timely fashion; the inability of the Minister for Mines and Petroleum’s departments to undertake their approvals in a timely fashion; the inability of Western Power to connect in a timely fashion; and the inability of business to move forward at the moment due of the lack of coordination across all those areas because there is no staff to actually make things work at a middle management level, our state’s bottom line could well be affected. The government lauds Western Australia’s strong economy, and it is true: Western Australia has a strong economy built on great regional industries that are powering the economy of not only Western Australia but also our whole country. But underneath all those big mining outfits that are churning out the dollars at the moment, the federal government is fighting the gas giants to try to claw back a bit of money through the petroleum resource rent tax. The operational mines from which all those dollars flow into federal and state coffers need a pipeline of projects behind them to succeed the current ones when they reach the end of their time. We know that we need new gas fields, but what have we seen? We have seen a lack of coordination and commitment from the state government, partly because it does not have the people in its departments to carry out approvals processes, and partly because the state government cannot get on the phone and talk meaningfully to Canberra to create a system of cooperation instead of what is basically a stand-off between the federal and state environment ministers in respect of bilateral assessments. That has now fallen away; there is no bilateral movement, as I understand it, happening on Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act matters between the two jurisdictions.

Eventually those industries will not be able to bring on the new projects they need. All this has been glossed over because we have so many of those projects that if some of them do not get up, there will still be enough for it to look okay. But that means we will miss the opportunity that is in front of us to develop this state meaningfully and to integrate the development of things like critical minerals and renewable energy projects to allow WA to become something other than just a provider of primary resources. That is something that could be achieved if we had the skilled workforce to make it happen, but we do not. We have a federal government that seems to think we do not deserve to have those critical skills coming in, and we have a state government that sits on its hands and appears to be wounded that the federal government is not listening to it, but is not doing anything to really get the message across. We have 14 WA Labor members of the federal Parliament who have been ineffectual in putting that message out there, and the ones suffering in the system are the industries and businesses of Western Australia—those who want to get on and grow our economy so that there will be more jobs in the future. If we can get a few jobs going now, it will lead to many more jobs down the track. There is a pay-off in developing those types of industries.

The state government thinks its economic progress is somehow good, but it is not looking at the missed opportunities. It is not looking at what could and should have been, and still could be if it were actually able to get on and get some essential approvals done. It needs to gain an understanding of how to actually fill our workforce shortages into the future. We have a state government that does not want to take on any new ideas; it just wants to accept the status quo, throw up its hands and say, “Oh, it’s Canberra’s fault. Too hard. We’re not going to bother. We’ll just set up an embassy next to the Russian embassy 3 500 kilometres away and that will somehow fix everything.”

It is actually about commitment and making sure that we are establishing relationships with the federal government. The state government clearly had a much more cooperative relationship with the former federal Coalition government; there was a lot of commitment to Western Australia and, undoubtedly, a large amount of money flowing in. Some of it flowed into my electorate through the development of the rare earth refinery in Eneabba, which won a quarter of a billion dollars in funding, which was the type of thing the previous federal coalition government did in this state. The relationship between the Albanese government and the state Labor government is something completely different. The federal government just sees us as a problem. It thinks, “We’ll take as much money out of them as we can at the moment. We’re going to increase the tax on the gas people, but we’re going to make sure,

through Minister Plibersek, that we frustrate any future approvals. We're going to dress it up as not supporting gas into the future while we take all the money that we can get." Otherwise, how is it explained? How do we explain a situation in which the state government allows federal government departments to create such chaos that companies are really at the point of throwing in the towel on a whole lot of projects because they simply cannot get EPBC approval from federal government agencies? Industry figures across Australia have told us about the number of projects that never get to the end of the environmental approval process, so they give up. Some projects might have been waiting for approval for seven years, and they give up.

These things drive international investment away from our state. I know the Minister for Training is probably going to give the government's first response, but one of the most important things in my view is getting people into those enabling sectors if we want to grow our economy going forward—the approval sector and the construction sector to get the housing we need, and to ensure we can overcome the shortage of labour and skilled labour that we know is facing industry right across Western Australia.

I am getting mixed signals from the member for Roe here; he has been doing this and doing that and I am not sure what I am supposed to do!

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** The member for Vasse, followed by the minister.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** He probably just needs to be quiet and let me finish my contribution; I will sit down, and what will happen will happen!

The state government's policies are inadequate and unproductive. It is actually sending the message out there: "Don't come. You're not welcome. We don't want you." It has been doing that since it came to office in 2017 and now it wonders why people do not believe in it. The government cannot turn it around when, for years, it gave the impression that overseas workers were not welcome here. The government did that to students and the migrant workforce. The government is now living with the consequences of the 2017 decision by the former Premier that members opposite all supported—most of them were in cabinet. The minister who will respond to this debate was certainly a member of the government at that stage and would no doubt have had some discussions around the decision to slash the skilled migration list and take Perth out of the migration scheme. The minister cannot disclaim responsibility because it happened a number of years ago. She was a part of those decisions. She is now facing the consequences of that. It is up to her to explain how she is going to turn that around to enable Western Australia to grow and develop into the future.

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [4.30 pm]: I rise to contribute to the debate on the ongoing skills crisis in Western Australia and, in particular, the WA Labor government's continued failure to adequately address it. The skills crisis stems back to 2017, and I will start by focusing on Labor's priorities when it first came to office, which were clearly about promises to the union movement. In March 2017, within hours of becoming Premier, former Premier Mark McGowan moved to limit the number of pathways for foreign workers to enter Western Australia. The then Premier wrote to the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, requesting that Perth be removed from the regional migration scheme. That letter also advised that the government was conducting a review of the WA skilled migration list and that an updated list would be provided. As the Leader of the Opposition said, there was a drop in the number of occupations on the list; it was reduced from 178 skill areas or occupations to just 18, mainly in the health sector—midwives, psychiatrists and several classes of registered nurses. Removed from the list were bricklayers, electricians and other trades. Those workers could not migrate to Western Australia to take Western Australian jobs, as stated by the Premier at the time.

The government promised a revamped TAFE industry that would enable WA to fill those positions. Although the objective to lift the local supply of workers was admirable, the pursuit of that objective led to the exact opposite, with the number of apprentices and trainees in our system actually falling. The data from the June quarter of 2017, when the McGowan government first came to power, shows that the state had 34 605 people in training. In March 2018, 33 065 people were in training. By March 2019, the number had fallen further, to 30 125. In March 2020, the number had fallen again, to 28 825—a 17 per cent decrease since 2017. That is an appalling statistic and an appalling representation of this government's commitment to what should be a key priority of any government.

**Mr T.J. Healy:** Was that connected to an increase in TAFE fees by any chance?

**Ms L. METTAM:** At the end of 2021 and 2022, we saw those numbers start to turn around.

**Mr T.J. Healy:** Have you looked at the 2021 numbers, after four years of TAFE increases?

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Southern River!

**Ms L. METTAM:** I have quoted what the numbers were, up to March 2020.

**Mr T.J. Healy:** Keep going. What was 2021?

*Point of Order*

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Despite your good admonition, the member is constantly interrupting. I ask that he desist.



**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife):** There is no point of order, but I do ask that we try to get through the debate in as orderly a way as possible. The Leader of the Liberal Party has the call.

*Debate Resumed*

**Ms L. METTAM:** Thank you, Acting Speaker.

At the end of 2021 and 2022, the numbers started to turn around. When we consider that most apprenticeships for trades such as bricklaying take four years, those apprentices are still quite a way off alleviating any pressure on the system.

As the Leader of the Opposition touched on, the policy of the McGowan government was basically a highly restrictive approach to the skilled migration program, and that had a significant impact on international students. While international education grew in other states, WA's market share fell significantly. In the first quarter of 2018, WA recorded a 13 per cent decline from the same period two years earlier. At the same time, South Australia reported a nine per cent lift and Tasmania a 28 per cent increase—states that had traditionally struggled to gain significant growth. We heard of international students bypassing Western Australia for those other states. The effect was far reaching across the WA economy, resulting in lost revenue for the tourism sector, which was highly critical of those policy changes. International students were not choosing Perth or WA as their study destination, as perceived opportunities for employment after studying were critical to attracting students to Western Australia. The government completely missed the mark. Following the significant drop in the number of international students, pressure from universities and Western Australian businesses resulted in a major policy change. In October 2019, the McGowan government announced that Perth would open its doors and be classed as a region, making it easier for international students to further their studies and gain work, which improved our capacity to attract international students and also supported the economy.

Like many jurisdictions, Western Australia was shut off from the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that contributed significantly to the skills shortage across the tourism, hospitality, agricultural and health sectors. At the same time as our international and interstate workforce was effectively locked out, in March 2020, due to the pandemic, the government halted the refresher pathways program that had helped experienced Western Australian nurses re-enter the workforce. That program restarted only in 2021. This was such a valuable program for training mature-age nurses and encouraging them to re-enter the workforce.

A lot of concern was raised across the community about the go-slow approach of the government, particularly by advocates for health workers, including the Australian Nursing Federation. The then Minister for Health, who is now the Premier, announced a so-called recruitment blitz in April 2021. That advertising campaign was very slow to start—it did not start until several months later, in October that year. The *AFR Weekend* reported in February 2022 that WA was having to lure doctors with up to \$4 000 a day. Locum jobs ranged from emergency department specialists, ED GPs, surgeons, anaesthetists, paediatric consultants and psychiatrists.

Moving forward to June 2022, when the state was talking up a recruitment blitz, the ANF reported that nurses were leaving the state in droves, with New South Wales and Victoria offering a \$4 000 bonus and wage increases of between three and 3.5 per cent for nurses and midwives. These states are quite clearly very hungry for this valued workforce, something not shared by Western Australia. Although WA at that time boasted a \$5.7 billion surplus, our nurses had slid from being the best paid in 2016 to the second-worst paid in the country, with a 2.5 per cent wage increase and \$1 000 sign-on bonus. In the first half of this year, nurses reported that they were consistently asked to work double shifts and on some occasions triple shifts, with staff shortages compromising their safety and that of patients. That is why we have consistently seen morale amongst our health workers being at such poor levels, with about one-third of those workers feeling uncomfortable or unsafe to speak up in their workplace.

The shortage of workers, particularly the delayed return of backpackers to the state, resulted in crippling staff shortages for the hospitality industry. That has been felt right across the entire state, from the north right down to the south. In my electorate, we began to emerge from the pandemic with many small businesses having reached the point of having to reduce their opening hours because of a lack of hospitality workers and the additional pressure of being understaffed causing fatigue and morale issues as well. Businesses like the award-winning Blue Manna Bistro in Dunsborough had no choice but to reduce its opening hours to just three or four days a week. It was forced to close a part of its business, having an impact on its bottom line and its ability to attract staff for full-time roles, which were more challenging to offer. This employment challenge, particularly in the regions, has also been exacerbated by housing shortages.

Regarding the skills shortage, I recently met with the managing director and some of the team at Goldstar Transport about the professional truck driver shortage. It has a fleet of 170 trucks and it is not unusual for 10 per cent of the fleet to be parked up because there are an insufficient number of drivers. This manifests in products not being available to Western Australian consumers and, as we have seen reported in the media, supply chain issues that have a flow-on effect that impacts the cost of living, including the cost of goods and groceries. A PricewaterhouseCoopers report commissioned by the WA government indicated that the road transport industry will need to fill an additional 9 100 positions in 2024–25. This is one sector of an industry that is really feeling the pinch. It is an issue that has

the potential to impact all consumers. The Northern Territory has added professional truck drivers to the migration skills list. The Goldstar Transport managing director has appealed to the WA state government to make similar representations to the federal government on this matter.

There remains an acute lack of forward supply across the housing sector due to ongoing supply constraints, which is a significant issue that, together with lack of skilled labour, has hampered the delivery of housing in the market. As we know, activity spiked after the pandemic building stimulus; however, there is a lot of ground to make up due to the chronic under supply of housing to the market over an extended period, which has seen the working poor living in their cars. We could be facing a 20 000 dwelling shortfall over the next three years, according to the Urban Development Institute of Australia's urban development index, which has analysed official data from the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation. Urban development index survey respondents say 25 current land estates in the Perth metropolitan area will complete and run out of lots by the end of next year and a further 16 will close in 2025. This means the supply of affordable greenfield land is running out. The forward land supply is reliant on complex infill and more constrained sites that take longer and are more expensive to bring to the market.

In terms of the skills shortage, the federal government incentive for international students, which has been effective from 1 July 2023, means that those who complete a degree in a skilled shortage area are to be given an extra two years to stay in Australia after graduation, increasing that period from two years to four years, if they complete a bachelor's degree and three to five years if they complete a master's degree. In May, for the 2023–24 state budget, there was \$13 million in the funding package to attract international students to WA, including \$1 500 to assist with accommodation, cost of living and course fees to study in Perth. There was little comfort when we saw *The West Australian* headline, "Sorry, but Perth is full", also carrying a story about three international students paying \$1 000 for a two-bedroom apartment in the city—25 per cent above the advertised price—out of sheer desperation, as a result of the shortage of supply in Western Australia. That is obviously exacerbated by the skills shortage, which is the theme of our concerns. A Curtin University student and international students committee president said he spent much of this time trying to reduce the stress of the rental market and said —

"People might have money but even with money they can't find accommodation," ...

Real Estate Institute of Western Australia rental data vacancy rates in Perth in February were at 0.7 per cent, which is a 0.1 per cent increase in the vacancy rate since December 2022, when Perth recorded its lowest vacancy rate in 42 years.

This month the federal government notified the state government that its allocation for the nominated migration program would be drastically cut. As the Leader of the Opposition stated in this place, clearly this government has no influence over the federal government when it comes to representing the best interests of Western Australians and any of their concerns. A weak Labor government is unable to represent the best interests of Western Australians. It is now up to our Premier and our Minister for Training to ensure that this mess is rectified as a matter of urgency. Others will speak after the Minister for Training, but we have seen a history of a go-slow approach, a very lacklustre approach by the WA Labor government to the skills shortage and training. Clearly, it has no clout with the federal Labor government, which is not listening. This is having an impact right across the Western Australian community, whether we are talking about the housing crisis, with less social housing now than in 2017, or international students, who no longer feel welcome with those significant drops and the reputational damage we saw in Labor's first term. Now they are being locked out of renting properties or can rent properties only at extraordinary prices, with some reports of prices being up to 25 per cent above the advertised price. There are also the impacts of cost-of-living pressures on WA households given that the transport industry, amongst many other sectors, is also feeling the pinch. They are desperately calling out for a government that will listen and one that has any form of clout with the federal Labor government.

I will leave my comments there and look forward to the response from the minister.

**MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Training)** [4.51 pm]: I am very pleased to speak on this issue. Obviously, I will not be supporting the opposition's take on it. When the member read out the motion yesterday and asked for a contribution from the government about what we have been doing on vocational training, it felt like a Dorothy Dixier, because we have been doing so much. Our commitment, our resource allocation and our engagement with industry and the public since coming to office in 2017 has been light years ahead of that of the opposition. I will stand very proudly and outline a number of our contributions and our record on this issue.

I will start with the opposition's go-to on the question of training. Members opposite talk about what the McGowan government did when it first came to office, and that was to alter the skilled migration occupation list in 2017. It is true that we went to the election in 2017 saying that we were going to prioritise WA jobs and make sure that local people were prioritised to take up Western Australian jobs. We were going to put WA jobs first. This approach came at a time when unemployment was at 6.5 per cent and youth unemployment was at 13.1 per cent, so it was absolutely appropriate. In fact, we were looking at a domestic recession and a neglected training sector. It was absolutely the right approach in 2017; in fact, it delivered excellent results in the years following, with the economy recovering and over 76 000 local jobs being created by 2020. What governments do in office is change their policy settings. Members opposite are talking about circumstances from before the pandemic, before the budget was brought

into surplus, before debt was brought under control and before the ratings agencies recognised the state government's efforts and acknowledged our state's nation-leading record on economic management. In 2017, we had to deal with the mess that they left us and the then Premier, Hon Mark McGowan, altered our skilled migration occupation list.

Things change when a government comes to office. Over time, we have first and foremost significantly increased our effort on vocational training, and I will outline that. We have talked about it a number of times. When members opposite first lost government, the then Leader of the Opposition was the previous Minister for Training and Workforce. She had presided over a massive increase in TAFE fees. Some fees increased fivefold. If we are talking about sending a message to the market, that sent a very unequivocal message to people who were thinking about vocational training. They exited that market in droves.

I will compare some of the fees that members opposite left us with where we are today. In 2013, someone who wanted to study a standard non-concession diploma of building and construction would have paid \$2 123. In 2017, when we came to office, it cost over \$7 000 to do a diploma of building and construction. Do members know what someone will pay now? They will pay just under \$2 000. They will pay less now than what someone would have paid in 2017—\$1 976. That is a huge reduction under this government. Let us look at the advanced diploma of building surveying. That is another area that is a huge enabler in allowing planning to proceed. Local governments talk to us about this all the time. In 2013, it cost just over \$2 000. In 2017, prior to it coming onto our Lower Fees, Local Skills list, it cost just under \$12 500; it cost \$12 449 to undertake that advanced diploma. Now it costs \$2 400. It is a massive difference. Finally, in 2013, it cost someone \$3 383 to do an advanced diploma of electrical engineering technology. In 2017, the previous government was charging someone over \$11 000 to do that qualification. It is ridiculous. Do members know what someone will pay today? They will pay less than what someone would have paid in 2013—\$3 149. That is the commitment that we have made; we have put real dollars into subsidising vocational training, not just in the TAFE system, but also for private providers. There is a massive number of fee-free courses, courtesy of the federal government. It is a real partnership with the federal government. It is significantly reducing the cost of courses for a number of qualifications—both full qualifications and short courses. If people who have existing qualifications want to uplift their skills, we have an avenue for them to do that. If people want to test whether they want to change careers or enter a career for the first time, they can do a skill taster, or a short course, many of which are free. We also have full qualification courses that are free.

Members opposite should not talk to us about our training effort, because they have absolutely zero credibility on vocational training. Their side did nothing. I know this because I sat on the other side of the chamber. I worked in the trade union movement for a number of years. I sat on the State Training Board for five years before entering Parliament. I know this area very well. Members opposite did absolutely nothing. In stark contrast, we are investing over \$340 million in a number of fee-free courses, most of which is courtesy of a partnership with the federal government. We have significantly reduced fees and invested nearly a quarter of a billion dollars in TAFE infrastructure. That is sending messages to the WA market that we want people to train and to uplift their skills. The majority of that capital investment is in the regions, because we want regional Western Australians to get the message that we want them to increase their skills. We know that that investment will be rewarded and that people who live in regional communities will increase their skills. They have housing, they are invested in the community and they have a commitment to the community, so they will stay there. I am very proud of the work that we are doing.

Members opposite talked about the relationship with the federal government. How many times did the federal cabinet meet in our state when they were in government? None. The member for Roe is looking a little quizzical. I can answer that question. It was none—a big zero. This government has brought the whole federal cabinet over to Western Australia twice to genuinely understand our issues and to engage with our community. I am very proud of the work that we are doing, particularly in training, in partnership with the Minister for Skills and Training, Brendan O'Connor. We are very close to reaching another five-year agreement. Under the previous federal coalition government, members opposite were not able to get an agreement with the states and territories, even those on their own side. They could not get one state or territory to sign on to a new national agreement.

In the interim, we have had a huge injection of funding to deliver fee-free courses in 2023. Members probably heard this week that initially that was slated to be 18 800 places. As I said, they could be either short courses or full qualifications. In fact, we have exceeded 34 000 fee-free places. I meet people all the time who have taken up the opportunity to get into the workforce for the first time and have a taste of gaining new skills or increasing their skills. I am very proud of the work that we are doing. As I said, we have also significantly slashed fees by up to 72 per cent for about 210 courses. The results are quite significant. The member for Vasse spoke about the number of people in vocational training when we first came to office. When we came to office, we were trying to get the budget under control and put in place a professional, rigorous budget planning and allocation system, unlike the chaos that was presided over by the previous government. We immediately froze TAFE fees. It took time to arrest the declines that resulted from the huge increases in TAFE fees and haphazard mismanagement of the vocational training system under the former government.

I could describe the metrics in many ways, but they are all very positive. Currently, 45 000 Western Australians are either in apprenticeships or traineeships. Yesterday I mentioned in question time that North Metropolitan TAFE

alone has over a thousand electrical apprenticeships. It is very, very exciting. Training enrolments are at a record high with 10 000 apprentices and trainee contracts being registered in just three months this year. Whichever way we look at the metrics, they are very healthy.

I am also particularly proud of the hard work we are doing as a state. We are looking at what other jurisdictions are doing for not only commencements, but also retentions and completions. For instance, in the construction industry we have sent a very clear message to apprentices working in the building trades. Often it is very tempting for them to leave in the last couple of years or 18 months of their apprenticeship. They can do a lot of work on site and are very productive, and often they do not need a licence to do the work they need to do. An electrician or plumber must have sat their final test to be licensed, but often in building industry it can be a struggle to keep apprentices for the final year to get their certificate. In 2023–24, we are offering people a \$2 000 bonus if they finish their building and construction apprenticeship. The member for Carine is looking at me expectantly like he wished he had done a building apprenticeship so that he could get the \$2 000 bonus. He would also get a \$500 bonus for safety equipment and tools. That is the sort of work we are doing with industry to understand their requirements.

I have talked in the chamber about the targeted work that we are doing in the regions to give people who live in regional areas an incentive to do their off-the-job training in classrooms if they need help to relocate for that component of their training. If they are in a regional centre and need to leave that centre to get some practical experience, they can get an incentive to do that. The incentive varies depending on the region and the type of work being done. That is the sort of work we are doing across the state to understand what the right policy settings and adjustments are that we need to make to get the results that we want. We also have TAFE lecture retention incentives in the Pilbara, Kimberley and Kalgoorlie. A huge amount of effort has gone into not only resources, but also engaging with sectors and looking at what other jurisdictions are doing and engaging with industry to understand what it needs.

Just this morning I was pleased to present at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia's skills round table. We heard from probably 30 employers around the table about their issues. That included employers working in the manufacturing and advanced manufacturing sectors. The hospitality sector was represented by Crown Perth. BGC Construction was there as well as organisations that represent fitters and general maintenance work. The power industry, the tertiary education sector and, of course, the disability care and community sectors were also represented. It was really good to talk to them about what we are doing, but mostly to listen about their experiences of our vocational training sector and their feedback about how we can improve it. It was good feedback. One member from the housing sector told me afterwards that it was good to hear me say that I understood the different skilled migration settings and understood what would work for small and medium-sized businesses. He said he found that refreshing because what works for large companies will not often work for SMEs. We need to make sure that our vocational training and our skilled migration settings are fit for them. I am getting more exposed to the portfolio now that I am seven or eight months into the job. It is good to have discussions with the other states and understand what is working for them and to understand the case I need to put to the federal government and to be involved in the national discussions about what is important for Western Australia.

Yesterday, it was a great pleasure for the federal minister and me to open BHP's FutureFit Academy in Forrestfield. It is a massive new facility. It is a combination of two former facilities that used to be straddled together. Well over 500 people will go through that facility every year. As members can imagine, BHP does not do anything on a small scale. It had its national management there, which was really good. I also spoke to some of the people who are training at that facility. I met a number of women. Over 72 per cent of BHP's apprentices and trainees are women. It is an incredible effort, I have to say. It is long overdue in male-dominated industries, but all credit to BHP for setting some ambitious goals and working very hard to meet them.

I met some of the people there. It was bittersweet because I met one woman who had left the child care industry and another who had left the health care industry. They had decided to change their careers and become qualified as trade assistants. They were not doing an apprenticeship to become tradespeople; they were doing their pre-qualifications to become a trade assistant to do lower level maintenance work. I did not meet this woman, but I heard about a 55-year-old woman who lived in a family full of diesel fitters. She spoke to BHP and said that she had always wanted to do it and BHP took her on. She is a diesel fitter at the age of 55 and is getting a chance with BHP, which is absolutely fantastic.

There is a lot to like about what is happening out there in our state for vocational training. Yes, it is hard to get the message out that vocational training is not a poor cousin or second-class option to studying at university or taking another career path, but we are doing that work. It is often years of prejudice against that blue collar work that we are hitting up against, but we are giving it a red hot go. When we think about the work we need to do to transition to clean skills and the AUKUS agreement and the work we need to do to gear up our workforce for defence, I am not only confident that as a government we have the ambition and the capability, but that our government agencies in the Department of Training and Workforce Development, our TAFEs around the state and private providers are well primed to do that work. We are in a very good position and I think we are geared up to do that.

Finally, before I sit down I want to say something about the skilled migration program. We understand that this has to be part of the mix. That is why in the last state budget the government announced \$11 million for specific

allocations for people working in the housing sector. This is a dilemma for how we build more houses. Do we hold off migration because we do not have the houses? But in fact we need more skilled labour here to build the houses. I think people understand that it is a conundrum. We have an incentive for about 1 100 people to come in under skilled migration into the housing construction areas. There is an incentive for their employers and to help skilled migration costs, relocation costs, equipment, skills recognition and those sorts of expenses. We are working very hard, particularly with the Housing Industry Association, which put this idea to the government, and we listened.

I know it is a novel idea for the opposition, but we are engaged with industry. We listen to its proposals and we are implementing them. That is the case with the Housing Industry Association plan. Workshops are being held. There was one in Geraldton and there have been some workshops in the metropolitan area as well to get employers on board and also to get the message out to overseas markets that we want people to come in. This government is on the record as saying that we are disappointed in the federal government's decision to slash our state nominated numbers, and we will continue to work to get whatever outcome is necessary to get more people into Western Australia to meet our skills demand. I do not mind whether it is part of our skilled migration nominated list or whether it is some other formulation, but we want to do the work to get skilled migrants here. I have given that message to the Prime Minister, to my counterpart skills and training ministers and also briefly to Minister Giles, who has responsibility for immigration. I cannot think of a better portfolio to see people reach their potential.

As TAFE teachers say to me all the time, this work is life changing. It is so exciting to see the fee-free courses and discounted fees and the investment in TAFE infrastructure. I am very proud of the work we are doing in industry to meet their needs and to link up people, and I am amazed that the opposition would have thought to bring on this debate in this house.

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [5.13 pm]: I thank the Minister for Training for her contribution. I know she has to move on, but I certainly appreciate her responding. I am sure the member for Southern River, along with other speakers, will also respond at some stage.

Today I want to focus partially on the state government's failure to properly prioritise the fundamental needs of our workforce and industries and its inability to work with its federal Labor government colleagues to bolster our skills supply. To me, that is a large part of the focus of this motion today. We saw during the week a Prime Minister who is out of touch. The Prime Minister came over here when there was an election on. He needed those three or four seats to tip the scales and he turned up saying, "I understand WA. I understand what it's all about, but, by the way, we've cut our skilled migration intake by 70 per cent." I do not know what planet he is on. I know he has other issues on his mind at the moment, but there needs to be some engagement. As I said during the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition, there needs to be some engagement between the Minister for Training and the Prime Minister because, quite frankly, the press conference on Channel Seven the other night was an embarrassment. To the credit of the Minister for Training, she saved the day with a Prime Minister who is so out of touch with what is going on in WA that he had to shut down the press conference and walk out the door. I give credit to the Minister for Training in that respect.

I hark back to the letter from Hon Mark McGowan on 17 March 2017 to the then Prime Minister, Hon Malcolm Turnbull. It states —

Dear Malcolm

As you are aware Western Australia has an economy in transition as the State moves from the mining construction boom of recent years. This mining construction phase required a range of skilled workers which were not then available in Western Australia, the influx of which then placed high demands upon services and infrastructure.

Western Australia now needs a skilled migration program that reflects the changed economic condition that the State is experiencing. It is a priority of my government to place Western Australians first when it comes to securing Western Australian jobs.

I would like to request that Perth be removed from the Regional Sponsored Migration scheme ... My government is currently conducting a review of the West Australian Skilled Migration Occupation list ... and will provide an updated list once the review is complete.

I tell you what: the previous Premier ensured there was a transition—the transition to a shortage of skilled labour in this state. I can still remember it. I was sitting a couple of chairs away over that way and I can still remember the Premier proudly standing up and talking about how he was cutting the skilled migration list from 178 occupations to just 18. That was in 2017. By 2021, the former Premier and the Minister for Training were holding a skills summit to fast track training for critical industries because the number of vacant positions for skilled workers was reaching a serious level. This is what I am talking about. The Premier then said we had that transition happening and the government was going to cut back the skilled migration list. As I said, he ensured that the transition happened and we are still feeling the transition to skilled shortages in just about every occupation in this state.

My information is that this will take a generation to fix. A generation is 18 years, so we have some serious gaps in our skilled workforce, and I am curious how the federal and state governments will fill those gaps. From the recent

press conference with the Minister for Training and the Prime Minister, I do not think the Prime Minister has much idea. I go back to a similar occurrence with the former Premier at the end of the COVID-19 arrangements. The state had a reopening date of 7 February and then the Premier, against all other advice that I can understand, made an executive decision that he would shut the gate again. International students spread all over the world were returning to WA or coming here for the first time. There were students in Hong Kong, Europe, North America and India—all over the place. I was talking to vice-chancellors who were in a state of shock because they had met in Parliament House with the former Minister for Education and the former Premier and were told that on 7 February everything would be back on. Then the Premier made that executive decision and that was the beginning of the downhill slide for this government. The Premier's decision to overturn that COVID border update, if you like, was the real turning point. That is when the people of WA started turning.

The Premier left people stranded all over the world, and some of them had no money. That is part of the reason that our international education sector now has 5.8 per cent of the market in Australia and the lowest international education number of any mainland state in Australia. The Minister for International Education now has to pump in millions of dollars to try to repair the damage that the previous Premier did. For those who were not here at the time, like the member for Rockingham, that is what happened. The previous member for Rockingham certainly fixed things up in a big way and that will take a long time to recover from, along with, as the member for Vasse said, the cost of housing and rent. An article in *The West Australian* described two students paying \$1 000 a week for a two-bedroom apartment.

I want to give some figures from 2010 because it is interesting to see the history. In 2010, 33.7 per cent of the WA workforce comprised persons born overseas. That was well above the Australian average of 26.9 per cent. The attraction of skilled migrants has helped WA regularly achieve historically high workforce participation rates and low unemployment rates over the past decade. The constant theme of research papers over the decades is that any strategy for skilled migration must be managed with the cooperation and coordination of all stakeholders, especially industry and the business community. That was sadly lacking in the federal government's announcement and, seemingly, WA Labor was not consulted. This is the bizarre thing about it. We saw the Prime Minister sitting at the cabinet table and saying, "I get WA." Then we saw him walking out the door from a press conference with the training minister, and she was left holding the baby to try to explain why the federal government has cut the intake by 70 per cent. I do not know what is going on here. I do not know where the consultation is, but it is quite concerning.

I move on to some local figures from my general electorate, around the great southern and the wheatbelt. In April 2023, 77 100 people were employed in the regions. In that region, the unemployment rate was 2.7 per cent. The agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors are the highest employers, with 16.9 per cent of the share of employment, compared with 2.1 per cent nationally. Just while I am on it, of course, we know about this government's assault on the regions. We know about what I call the assault on the three Fs—fishing, forestry and farming—but it continues with electoral reform and the south coast marine park under the Minister for Environment. If it is not one thing, it is another. If it is not shutting down the forestry industry, it is demersal fishing, electoral reform—the list goes on. The debate occurred earlier today on the Aboriginal cultural heritage arrangements. People of the regions of Western Australia are feeling it because there is a constant assault from this government. I am sure regional Labor members are feeling it, like the member for Geraldton. There is a constant assault on regional people in Western Australia. It is getting to the point at which regional people, certainly in my electorate, have totally lost faith in this government and cannot wait to see it moved on, quite frankly.

The National Skills Commission employment outlook to November 2025 gives a good insight into the Australian labour market, and high on the list of industries driving growth are health care and social assistance; accommodation and food services; professional, scientific and technical services; education and training; construction; and retail trade. In Western Australia, employment in the mining sector is expected to increase by 16 200. The Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre report published in July 2023 said that WA has been leading the way in mining growth, with employment in that sector up by a whopping 40.3 per cent since February 2020. The jobs are out there. It is a matter of filling them. Unfortunately, these moves by the federal Labor government, in consultation—or perhaps in consultation—with the state Labor government, are not helping whatsoever.

I will give a couple of examples of regional agricultural jobs in WA as of 29 August. On Seek, 587 jobs were posted; Workforce Australia, 31; Indeed, 123; and Jora, 1 241. Going into harvest, that is 1 982 jobs out there with no-one to fill them. That does not include the many posts on Facebook, through which, quite frankly, most employment happens in regional WA. I will give some of the other areas in which jobs are available out there. On Seek in health care, there are 1 679 jobs; mining, 7 741; hospitality, 2 792; construction, 5 842; education and training, 1 413; nursing, 755; teaching, 1 375; corrections, 4 436; and for electricians, there are 3 879 jobs available, with 479 in the renewable energy specialist field. This is an example. The government is talking about renewable energy moving to net zero and all the rest of it, and we have shortages everywhere, including in renewable energy jobs. The disconnect between the federal Labor government and the state Labor government has never been more pronounced. Quite frankly, the federal Labor government seems to be more intent on making irresponsible decisions based on social licence with no historical facts.

We are starting to see this pattern emerging. The government is not focusing on proper economic activity and the likes of energy jobs. Instead of focusing on those elements that drive our economy, it is focusing on a lot of social issues to the detriment of the people of Australia, who are in a cost-of-living crisis. What is the strategy? Where will all the people come from to fill the thousands of vacancies in critical areas such as mining, building and construction?

Training and assessment in critical industries is at risk, with a dearth of trainers and assessors for apprentices waiting on sign-offs. That is a very important element. We have heard arguments about TAFE numbers and so forth. I acknowledge that. I also acknowledge the shortage of industry-trained assessors and lecturers. That is the challenge on which this state Labor government needs to pick up the ball. We have a skilled migration rate for electricians, for instance, of only three per cent, with 5 000 apprentices in the system. The member for Moore, the opposition leader, spoke about Western Power. If we are trying to hook up a business, or a house for that matter, in the regions, it can take anything up to 12 or 18 months. We have businesses operating out of farmers' sheds and all sorts of things because Western Power cannot get an electrician to turn up and run a wire from one side of the chamber to the other. It takes 12 to 18 months to run a wire 10 or 15 metres from a transformer on a pole across to a shed. It is a disgrace. These are the things that upset our regional stakeholders—lack of lecturers and lack of ability to get apprentices fully into the workforce.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** The federal Labor Minister for Skills and Training, Brendan O'Connor, said —

“There are people that are not in the labour market right now that want to get a job and we need to invest in them, we need to provide them the skill so they can work in areas of demand here and now,” ...

We saw the display earlier in the week with federal cabinet in Perth. Now is the time for him to create some action. Of course, we saw the article in Tuesday's *The West Australian* titled “Cook wants visa reversal” following the federal government's decision to cut WA's state-nominated migration program by 70 per cent. The federal Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Andrew Giles, said, “We are not cutting the visas coming to WA or indeed to other states.” I cannot make head nor tail of it. Andrew Giles said that and Brendan O'Connor said something else. Prime Minister Albanese walked out of a press conference leaving our Minister for Training to pick up the baton, which she did well, under the circumstances. Those are the sorts of things that make the people of Western Australia wonder what is going on between the federal and state governments.

I will close shortly. I want to highlight what I think is a concern around the lack of skilled workers in the building and construction sector. We saw this demonstrated in an article by John Flint in *The Sunday Times* the other day. We have seen 52 building companies collapse in WA in the past 18 months. People who ordered houses to be built in 2019 are still waiting for their homes to be built. It is causing major headaches, with families having to rent or move in with their extended family. There was an example on 6PR this morning of an original build from 2019 through the Slatter Group—which has gone under—that was going to cost \$500 000. With the builder having gone broke, the buyer will have to pay another \$400 000 to get the building done. Because the build is now over \$500 000, the Builders Registration Board will not look at it. Apparently, the Builders Registration Board insurance scheme has not been indexed for the past 20 years. Some of these families are trying to get their houses built. We saw that period after the COVID-19 pandemic when the federal and state governments put up \$45 000 in grants. That caused a boom in which builders just had to get the pad down and the said, “We'll worry about it later.” We are seeing the consequences of that. In the article on the weekend titled “Hey Minister, when will you dig in and finally fix the mess”, Rod Harris stated —

“At times, I feel like ripping up my (builder's) registration. I feel ashamed of where the industry is at the present moment.”

He continued —

... the quality and the ethics have gone out the door ...

The article states —

Mr Harris believes the State Government ... is oblivious to the trauma customers are going through, saddled with mounting debts and struggling to get any help.

The state government is ultimately responsible for this nightmare. That is what is happening at the coalface. I thought the article summed it up very well. The Minister for Commerce does not seem to want to deal with it. We saw the regulatory reform called the *Building confidence report*, which was released six years ago. Ministers were eager to adopt the reforms; however, WA has made little progress—the least of all jurisdictions. The report's author said that WA has the most work to do in order to implement the recommendations. The report recommended mandatory inspections; however, WA does not require these inspections.

Once again, this government is focused on rushing through legislation and not focused on protecting consumers and the people of WA who have businesses to run, whether they be farmers, builders, miners or small business owners—you name it. That needs to be the focus, along with the federal government–state government relationship, which has obviously deteriorated. Obviously, it is focused on other issues. The Prime Minister is not up to it. He

wanted to leave the press conference the other day. There is a real problem, and I think the state government, rather than worrying about setting up an embassy in Canberra, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, to do the job of the 14 federal Labor MPs who are meant to stand up for WA in Canberra, should worry about the Prime Minister coming over here and saying that he gets WA but, by the way, is going to cut our skilled migration intake by 70 per cent. It is not good enough.

**MS M. BEARD (North West Central)** [5.36 pm]: I rise today in support of this very important motion. It will be no surprise, again, that I will focus on my electorate in the northern area of Western Australia. For me, some of the changes from the review of the skilled migration program and the working holiday visas are greatly concerning. I can personally attest through many years of experience in the regions to the incredible contribution our skilled migrants and working holiday-makers make to communities, industries and regional development—it is enormous. Sometimes I feel it is overlooked. It is taken for granted by some people because they have always been there and are always there. We saw what happened during the COVID pandemic when they were not there. I know how critical that group of workers is to industries across the region. I have grave concerns about some of those elements and the potential impacts if this review has no modifications. I have written to the minister in Canberra, pleading with her to review the incentive for workers to travel to the regions. I think if it reverts to a one-year visa, we will be in huge danger of not being able to pick fruit and vegetables, open businesses or have those run-of-the-mill things we take for granted.

It will affect food production and small business. It is going to affect our communities. When visa holders go to those towns, they play sport in the local teams. Some of them are there for six months on their second working holiday visa. They immerse themselves in the towns and in the communities across the regions. It is not unusual to see half a dozen of them playing in the local rugby team. I think everyone understands, with the drain of people out of the regions, that is really important.

Buried deep on page 88 of the report, I was alarmed by something that put up a red flag for me. I believe that the removal of the incentive for working holiday visa holders to travel and work throughout the regions is potentially catastrophic for the state. It has sparked concern across the industries in my patch and in the north. They are very concerned about the breadth and depth of consultation that may not have taken place, because that is something that is really important to the regions.

The agriculture, tourism and hospitality industries are struggling, and the visa holders are just coming back. It was quite confronting for people to read the review, thinking that the flow might stop. A lot of people will be very concerned if that flow is stemmed again. I understand that around 137 000 working holiday-makers are currently in Australia, which makes up about 80 per cent of the horticultural harvest workforce. They fill key roles in regional economies. When that tap was turned off during the COVID-19 pandemic, farmers let crops drop on the ground and they picked what they could with the people they had, including their families. Prices will obviously increase over time if that happens. In the town where I live, 150 growers produce around 70 per cent of Perth's vegetables for winter. They are extremely concerned. The grapegrowers are also very worried.

A lot of workers who come through the regions might work for three months of their six-month extension in the north and then travel south to Margaret River and the south west agricultural regions, picking crops or whatever they can do. They are plugging a gap in more than one region. They are travelling around and working in the fishing industry, the pastoral industry or the tourism industry. Sometimes they have two jobs. Sometimes they work in a bar or cafe at night and work on farms during the day. It is a particularly important cohort of people. If anyone travelled north during the COVID pandemic, they would have seen all the signs saying, "Sorry. Closed. No staff". That is indicative of what I fear could happen again. People will not be able to buy a coffee and the shops will be closed for certain hours of the day. When a representative who was in Broome during the COVID pandemic visited me, they said they had their "Fully booked" sign on the front door, but only 60 per cent of their rooms were occupied because they had no cleaners, no-one to help serve and no-one to carry out the maintenance and the gardening. They also had to limit the opening hours of their restaurant, which was well known. Many people frequent that restaurant, even if they do not stay in that establishment. The owners had to cut the number of diners back to the people who were staying there. It damaged their brand. There is a lot of sensitivity around that particular part of the change, as outlined on page 89, which people keep referring to.

It is not unusual when we travel across the north west and visit towns in the Murchison and across the regions to find that the two barmaids, yardies or whoever are backpackers plugging the gap. They become very entrenched in the local culture. They become very good friends of the locals. They are happy to work and they are happy to stay. They save money. They move on, but they often come back for their second year. They are very comfortable to come back. They are happy, they are trained, they save again and off they go. They actually become a large part of the family when that happens.

Members are well aware that I have a hotel. It has been raised in this place several times, for whatever reason, but not always good. In this instance, up until about 2015, we employed between 60 and 75 international backpackers who stayed with us. We would transport them to the river for their work or transport them to the fishing boats. That is the nature of this industry. People say to me, "But shouldn't locals be getting the jobs?" Locals want full-time work,



and this is seasonal work. Sometimes it is only for a month and sometimes it might be for three months. The locals who want to work generally want permanent work. It is perfect for the seasonality and how we cater for the workers, especially the growers who have jobs available, and people sign up. I had a look at the Facebook sites today. A number of backpackers are seeking 88-day extensions because they want to stay a second year and they want to continue travelling. They may continue to travel to the east coast. They want to stay longer. Migration, in whatever form it takes, is vital for jobs in regional or remote parts of WA, particularly in the more remote areas where people are not enticed to live in roadhouses and similar places.

If people go north in the summer, they find they have plenty of space and there are not a lot of people around. That is the nature of the north west. It is the same in the south west, but obviously it is closer to Perth so it is not as noticeable. A lot of these workers who travel north are after experiences. I had a conversation with someone in Canberra who said they want to promote cultural experiences. I beg to differ, because I believe that the cultural experiences that they are getting now are enormously important to them and to the communities. I will go back to the 60 or 70 people who stayed with us for a long time. It depends how we view cultural exchange. For some people, it means going to a session every Sunday or going to the beach and learning about the lifesaving movement. For others, it is about going to a football match. When we travel through the regions, as we all know, people in some of the farming areas go waterskiing on the dams. That is a cultural experience that they do not get anywhere else. If we think about the diversity across our region, with that extension of 88 days and the incentive to encourage people to travel to the regions, they can have a more holistic and larger cultural experience across the regions.

We transported people to the river for many years. My three-year-old at the time, who is now 18, learnt Japanese for three months from three boys who caught the bus every day. I had to try to validate what some of the words meant. They assured me that they were not bad, but who knows! They really immersed themselves in any situation they found themselves in. Those same groups of people travelled east. We would get phone calls from them asking whether we could help them with this or that. They anchored themselves to a lot of experiences. They would have international food nights, when they would cook upstairs and sing their local songs. The member for Mandurah would have loved it. They would invite locals from the river to have dinner with them to experience their cultural foods. Then they would exchange. I believe that the removal of the 88 days will probably jeopardise that cultural exchange from a regional perspective. They get to work on pastoral properties, they ride horses, they go mustering and they camp out with mobs of sheep—things that they would never do in their own country and things that they would never do if they were not encouraged to have those 88 days because they would fly through on a rushed visit. I really hope that is not focused on as a negative, because I think it is a positive.

With people coming into the regions, we see skill sharing. For example, we employed an Italian guy who was the maître d' at The Ritz Hotel London. He popped in and worked for a month. The locals loved him. He was an amazing person, full of personality.

**Mr D.A. Templeman:** Where'd he work?

**Ms M. BEARD:** He worked at our hotel in the middle of nowhere. He brought his skills with him. He worked in several places around town and did the same thing. He upskilled all these people and shared stories and experiences about what happens at The Ritz London and why he did what he did. There is definitely benefit in visa holders spending extended periods of time here. That is evident from some of the experiences that I have had and some of the experiences that people have relayed to me.

When I made the call to Canberra, the people I spoke to said they were worried about the exploitation of workers. I understand that. I know that they have spoken about that in the past. The feedback I have had from growers and people within the industries is that no-one should be exploited; it absolutely should not happen. They asked whether it is happening to just those people. We need to look at this more broadly. They believe that this is happening to a minority of people. Some of the checks and balances that they put forward to me relate to the horticultural and agricultural sector. It has an ethical sourcing compliance through Sedex and Fair Farms. Under this, all staff have to receive induction kits that include workplace policies, procedures, codes of conduct—the list goes on. Most importantly, they include a fair work statement that outlines the rights and legal obligations of backpackers, and the relevant award and possible pay rates according to what they are doing.

All this information is available through the Australian Taxation Office's single touch payroll. Plenty of checks and balances are in place. If it is not being policed, it should be policed. If those agencies are talking to each other, this should not be happening with all these tools in place. Some suggestions include certain things workers can do when they tick off on their compliance. There is an opportunity to provide this information to working holiday visa applicants on the second occasion. They are asking whether the Department of Home Affairs could provide fair work statements to people who apply for the new working holiday visa, and whether more people are needed to police this. There has been pushback on that aspect from a lot of the people I have spoken to in different industries.

I turn to skilled migration. I will share a sad story. A lovely family lives in the town of Carnarvon. They live there now, but that is not where they started their journey. A husband and wife travelled here from Kenya over 10 years

ago. He studied a double major in information technology and business at Edith Cowan University. His wife works in the health industry as a nurse. He completed his studies and they decided they liked Australia and the opportunities here and they would apply for a skilled migration sponsorship visa, which would afford them the opportunity to apply for permanent residency. In doing that, they went to Gascoyne Junction—I am not sure whether anyone here has ever been there. It is a great little town, but it is enormously isolated. It is 170 kilometres inland. It is very, very small. There were maybe eight kids in the school at that time. They went to a regional and remote area under the impression that it would help them find a pathway to receiving permanent residency. In that time, they managed and looked after a facility that has accommodation, a restaurant, a bar, kitchen and the general store, so they did everything. It was the one-stop shop. They managed that for a very long time—years. During the COVID pandemic, it became very difficult as there were no customers, so they volunteered some of their time. They kept the business going. They now have three beautiful children and have relocated to the town of Carnarvon. They hit their roadblock in 2019, and they have been under enormous pressure ever since trying to remain in the town and in Australia. Now they run an apartment complex of 22 self-contained units. The wife is a nurse at the hospital and is extending her qualifications.

Here we have two people in town who are amazing citizens with three beautiful children, taking part in sport, school and the community and holding down jobs in industries for which we cannot find people in regional towns, but they face being turfed out. I find that extremely disturbing. I hope we can find a pathway forward for them. I understand the magnitude of that situation for the family. I also understand the importance of skilled migration for regional development and growth. We have a flood of people leaving and people struggling to come into the regions, and we have a family of five who are more than happy to make the regions their home. I find that very sad. I use it as an example of how we need to make sure we focus on these areas. There is so much benefit in having people like these families helping to grow and develop our regions.

Another thing I have not touched on is that many backpackers coming through now say that they think things will change, that the price of visas will increase and that it is much cheaper for them to go to New Zealand. I hope the government can address some of those issues or it will be *deja vu*, and there will be a catastrophic impact on our regions.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms M. BEARD:** The employment pathway for the regions is extremely complex. We need to look at our industries. In my electorate, there is a hairdresser who cannot find another hairdresser to work for her because she cannot offer the 88 days required under this visa. Every backpacker who is a hairdresser she speaks to says they need their 88 days, but, in fact, the community needs a hairdresser. I harp on about it, but holiday-makers are critical. They are a really important part of the employment puzzle in the regions. They are much loved and very, very valued and an essential part of the overall make-up of the regions.

I turn to the major changes around the corner that have caught my eye and that of many people in my region. I have written to the Minister for Home Affairs seeking an assurance that the regional incentive will not be removed in the final cut. That cohort of working holiday-makers is crucially important. As I said, they bring a range of things to the regions—skill sets and cultural exchange—and it fills an unmet gap. I cannot emphasise enough just important they are. We will not have our fruit and vegetables picked like we need. We need to address this. I urge the WA government to fight really hard for this region—I know I am being biased here—and for all of regional WA. It will have a massive effect because there are no alternatives out there. We do not have students or the families that are in the metropolitan area. I hope we do not get this migration review wrong. I hope things will change; otherwise, I feel that our community really will not have been listened to and the depth of consultation will not have been there. I urge the federal government, with the help of the state government, to respond to the migration review, specifically with regard to working holiday visas and skilled migration across the regions, and to test the understanding of it and make sure it matches the outcomes we need.

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe)** [5.56 pm]: I rise to bookend the opposition's contribution to the debate on this excellent motion. In the first part of my speech, I will go through the contributions of members who have spoken and then add some further comments of my own. The Leader of the Opposition outlined in great and important detail the failings of this state Labor government in the current skills shortages we face and the historic lack of focus it has had on training.

It is interesting listening to members on the other side speak, and I look forward to the contributions of other members in a little while. I refer to the degree to which this government tries to deny any culpability or responsibility for actions it has taken that have led, predictably, directly to the situation we have now. It was predicted at the time that we would end up —

**Mr T. Healy** interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I have barely started!

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order, but member for Southern River —

**Mr T.J. Healy:** I thought he was apologising. He apologised for the apology!

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** If we can listen on. Member for Cottesloe, continue.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Perhaps if the member listened more and spoke less, he would learn more.

It is fascinating that I have heard ministers, the former Premier and this Premier talking in great colour about what a wonderful relationship they had with the former federal government. What a pity that it is not duplicated with a government of their own colour. It appears they have a hostile federal government. As has been pointed out on this side, we will call the current Prime Minister the 30-second-grab Prime Minister. It is embarrassing to hear him try to talk for more than that time. He is a master of the 30-second grab and loves to come over here and say he is fighting for Western Australia, but I think he is fighting against Western Australia. I feel sorry —

**Mr D.A. Templeman** interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** That is an interesting contribution, Leader of the House, because I tell you what —

**Mr D.A. Templeman** interjected.

*Point of Order*

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** The Leader of the House is being deliberately provocative and is interjecting so loudly that the member for Cottesloe cannot make his contribution. I ask that he desist.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday):** It is not a point of order. Member for Cottesloe, are you taking any interjections?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I do not mind moderate humorous interjections, but persistent badgering I am not so interested in.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** If the conversation comes through the chair, we might be able to moderate that a bit better.

*Debate Resumed*

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The contribution from the Leader of the House fascinates me. Our Prime Minister loves to come over here and say how he gets Western Australia. He comes over here for the photo opportunity. He still has not made an ironclad commitment to maintain our GST floor. The only thing he has said is that he will ensure that it is fair. He has not said that he will guarantee the current arrangement or improve the current arrangement, but only that it will be fair. I ask members opposite, what does “fair” mean? Members opposite should ask the Prime Minister what fair means. We have had no commitment from him or the Treasurer. The Prime Minister can pop over here for his photo-ops, go into a control room in Port Hedland and point at the ships, and go around with his hardhat and vest on, but if he is not listening —

Several members interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am glad I have excited members on the other side to get engaged in this debate. If the Prime Minister is not listening to the Premier or the state Minister for Training, what is the point of him coming here? In relation to that last interjection by the member on the dollars, his colleagues like to point out to me the enormous sums of money that the former coalition government devoted to this state to help it. I contrast that with the paltry sums of money that his own party is giving here. The Prime Minister can pop over for all the photo-ops he likes, but the problem is that he is not listening. I have a degree of sympathy for the Premier and the ministers who are trying to interact with their federal colleagues. It has been profoundly disappointing. As the point was made here by a couple of speakers, imagine having 14 members in the federal Parliament from Western Australia who are useless; they may as well not be there. They clearly cannot articulate the needs of the people of Western Australia. I thank the speakers on this side because they have done a good job of articulating the needs of the people of Western Australia. I have to dwell on this only for a little while before I go into that broader summary, but imagine having 14 federal members of Parliament and the state government has to set up an embassy in Canberra. That is the most damning indictment that I have ever heard of the failure of Labor federal members to represent us.

**Ms C.M. Rowe** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Is this badgering?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It is good natured, to date. Members may have realised that I do not sound 100 per cent, so if it keeps us all alive, that is not so bad.

What an absolute joke. I will tell members what good federal members do. They do what the former coalition federal members did; that is, secure the GST arrangements for Western Australia that was one of the salvations of this state Labor government. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the attacks on this state such as the changes in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act and the ban on live sheep exports. Ninety-eight per cent of live sheep exports come out of Western Australia. When the federal government says that it is stopping live sheep exports, it is stopping a major Western Australian industry. It is affecting a major Western Australian industry. The federal government is not attacking anyone on the east coast because that is all it cares about. It only cares about Sydney and Melbourne, and as was pointed out colourfully federally a little while ago, the senior federal members spend most of their time in Vacluse going to exclusive dinner parties. They do not care too much about this state.

The federal government is talking about fiddling with the petroleum resource rent tax. In Australia, 70 per cent of gas exports come out of Western Australia. If the federal government increases the tax on natural gas exports, it will be increasingly taxing Western Australia, overwhelmingly. I have sympathy for colleagues opposite, but that is their test, is it not? Their test is to use their wiles and their capacity to liven up their 14 federal members who are asleep to fight for Western Australia. I wish them all the best with that. If I can give them any help, they should let me know. They may not ask me, but I am here, ready, willing and able to help them in that cause.

The member for Vasse pointed out the loss of students from this state and its root cause. When the government cut the skilled migration categories from 178 to 17, as a couple of members said in their contributions, they took away jobs for students. Government members might say that they were not quite sure that that was going to happen and it was an unintended consequence, but the only problem is that leading industry figures told them that at the time, and, furthermore, that if they cut that skilled migration category, they would cut the jobs for students. The majority of foreign students who come to our state rely on part-time work. In fact, many members know this, and I think this is actually an issue, because many of those students end up needing three or four jobs, which is a problem that needs to be resolved. Nevertheless, they rely on part-time work. Those students were the backbone of part-time work in the state of Western Australia. The other thing with those students coming over here is guess what their parents would do? Many of their parents bought apartments in the state so that their child would have somewhere to live or the parents would have somewhere to stay when they visited. The construction industry told the government that if it took away those jobs, it would take away demand for those units. We saw that collapse in demand due to a lack of foreign student numbers at that time. Now we have around half the share of foreign students in the state than we should have as a pro rata share. We are down to 5.8 per cent, and I will talk a little about that in a minute.

The member for Vasse talked about how the government stopped the Refresher Pathway Connect program. That program brought back people who had maybe moved onto other jobs or retired early to fill those critical skills shortages, particularly in our hospitals. That program was stopped in late 2021, and we wonder why we have a hospital crisis and cannot get staff. The Western Australian hospital system has always depended upon, still depends upon and will depend upon into the future a continuous and significant import of people migrating from overseas into Western Australia to fill those critical positions, but this government stopped a program that was getting more people into the state.

I move onto the Minister for Training's contribution. The minister talks about the things that she is doing now. This is what we see all the time from this government—panic. It makes a decision. It is a bad decision. It does not listen to well-meaning advice from this side of the chamber or from industry figures or others. It thinks it knows better. It goes ahead and does these things, and when there is a consequence, it panics and tries to pour massive amounts of money in to fix a problem that it actually initiated. I welcome the fact that funding is going into this area. I welcome that now we are starting to see a return of students in training to more normal levels that were present in 2016 and 2017 before this government came into power. I welcome that and I hope that continues to improve, but unfortunately it will be two, three or four years before those trainees hit the market and make a difference in our workforce. Meanwhile, all the problems outlined will continue. We hear about \$340 million, mostly in federal money, and \$250 million in TAFE infrastructure.

I want to tackle one topic—that is, the mythology that the Labor government has woven around getting the budget back in control. What a farce! Go and look at the budget, members. The spending is out of control. Go and have a look and do a little bit of homework. I am sure we will have a chance to discuss it in detail in this place. Have a look at what has happened to public sector wages after two years of COVID. There is an order of magnitude increase above the one per cent pay rise; there has been a 26 per cent increase in the number of FTEs in the public service over two years. The government is not controlling its expenditure. That is a myth. The last time I looked there was an overall increase in expenditure of around 30 per cent in the first term of government. That is a massive increase in expenditure. The only thing that happened was there were even more massive increases in revenue caused by factors that were completely out of the government's control. One factor was the excellent GST fix that the federal Liberal members put in place. The second factor was that the iron ore and other mineral resources prices went through the roof. It is a myth for the minister to say, "Boy, have you blown out FTEs."

**Mr D.R. Michael:** Do you think it's too high?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Yes, I think the government has dramatically increased the FTEs in the public service too far. There are no efficiencies in the public service; the government has simply increased staffing levels. I would absolutely be looking for efficiencies in the public service. It is an area that the government has failed to control. It has blown out. We will have a chance to go through this in agonising detail another time, members.

**Mr D.R. Michael:** Nurses, police—which ones?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I love police and nurses; it is all the others who are not doing those frontline services that have blown out.

**Mr T.J. Healy:** Look at the camera and say that again.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** We can play it back. Let us talk about reversing decisions. Five weeks to introduce regulations to enliven an act only to bail on it is the best example of a reversal in the history of this Parliament.

I was fascinated to hear the minister claim that BHP's training facility was a government achievement. We might look at this another way and say that the requirement for the training facility is a lens on the government's failure because it has become so desperate that instead of relying on the public education sector to provide the workers that industry needs—that has been the proper thing in the past; industry has trained people once it has them in their workplace—one of our major industries in this state desperately had to go and spend its money to establish its own training facility, and the minister has the gall to come in here and claim that is a government achievement. Imagine that! The government is failing so badly that the private sector has to come in to fill that gap.

The minister talked about the skilled migration program and that she is disappointed, but that is the test for this minister and this government. There is a significant presence of Labor members in the federal Parliament and we hear that, apparently, government members have a good relationship with them. I seriously doubt it based on what we see happening in this state, but that is the test for this minister and this government.

I particularly enjoyed the contribution to this debate from the member for Roe. He reminded us of the history of the Premier of the day, Hon Mark McGowan, puffing out his chest and boasting.

[Member's time extended.]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The Premier puffed out his chest and said, "What a great job I have done ceding to the union masters." To be fair, I am not sure whether they were his union masters, but they are the union masters for most of the members opposite. He puffed out his chest and boasted that he had gutted the skilled migration program and had taken us out of the regional migration scheme and cut those categories. What was the effect of that? It destroyed the pipeline of students coming into the state and it destroyed the construction industry. I should have dwelt on the construction industry a little bit before. The government destroyed the pipeline of new apartments coming in. It destroyed students coming into the state. Then, to try to get the apartment construction going again, the government panicked and gave up on stamp duty and the like for buyers, and they are mostly overseas buyers who buy off the plan. Again, we see a pattern of ill-thought-out decision-making. The government does not listen to industry and then panics and spends lots of money later to try to cover its tracks. The government removed us from the regional migration scheme and took down the skilled migration categories.

I will dwell on the shutdown of the border during COVID. I said this at the time and I have said it a couple of times since: I had no problem whatsoever with the government managing casual visitors during the COVID period. I said at the time, and other members said it, too, that if the government stopped workers coming into the state with the shutdown, it would cause harm to the state's economy that would go well past COVID.

**Ms H.M. Beazley:** We also saved lives.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It was entirely predictable. We did not save a life doing that, member; in fact, we in Western Australia demonstrated that we could successfully bring people into the state in a controlled manner. Some tens of thousands of people returned to the state because a lot of people came home. A large number of people came into the state, so do not promote the fantasy that somehow or other everyone was stopped from coming into the state.

At the time we said that if the government stopped skilled and semiskilled workers coming into the state, the impact of that would continue well past COVID. The Premier wanted a "strong on COVID" headline grab, so he did it anyway. I know that industry figures were talking to the Premier at the time because they spoke to me as well and said that this was madness. They said that they had lost all their casual workers and would not be able to build apartments or carry out housing construction activities. A substantial number of workers in the building industry are semiskilled. They are people who have skills, but they are not plumbers or bricklayers and the like. They are the ordinary workers who do labouring around the site, but they are critically important. In many cases, the builders told me that they had a shortage of semiskilled workers because there were no casual workers coming into the state during that period, and that stopped an enormous amount of construction activity. That was a decision of this government, rather than taking a subtle approach.

The government stopped people coming over for twenty-first birthday parties or to see the Bungle Bungles because that had been their dream all their life or whatever. If we overwhelmed our capacity to handle migration, that would have caused a problem, but the fact is that that could have been managed. But for a headline grab and political advantage, the Premier of the day, Hon Mark McGowan, was prepared to harm this state. As I said, it was not an idle decision. It was not done without any input or feedback from anyone else, and it had a massive impact. The member for Roe talked about the percentage of overseas workers that we have in this state. I liked, and will now adopt, the three Fs: fishing, forestry and farming. We see a dogged attack on these primary industries. Labor Party members hate primary industry. They hate it and want to destroy it. They want to regulate it out of existence. That is what they want to do, unless it is on the latte strip of Belmont.

Several members interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Belmont is a very sophisticated suburb. My aunt and a number of my cousins live out there and it is a place I enjoy. I worked out there for a time with Western Mining as well. Unless it is in the latte strip of Belmont, the government does not want to know. If it is outside the city, it sort of knows mining is important, but anyone who is doing productive agricultural activity is in the crosshairs and it will do them in.

The member pointed out the scale of job and position vacancies across the state. I think the Labor Party has a plan to deal with the worker shortage. We would have to say that it is a lateral sort of a plan; that is, if we have too many jobs for the people available, kill the jobs. Get rid of the jobs and bring in restrictions. We saw the government's failed attempt to bring in the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act and regulations, which in the form they were in were going to be a nightmare for every landowner or anyone who did any work on land in the state, including the miners. I have said this in a recent debate here, but I really mean this: I hope Labor members talk to their federal colleagues about the absolute stupidity of the time line that the federal government has for the 43 per cent emissions reduction target, because that will kill more jobs in Australia and Western Australian than any other single thing. I have said many times I have no concern with the aspiration. The time line is utterly stupid. As it is applied and, more particularly, as the tax on the so-called high emitters is applied this year and progressively more next year and the year after, we will simply see manufacturing shut down in this state. We have seen the attacks on sheep exports and the like, as I have already talked about.

The collapse of building companies is, again, a matter that sits entirely at the feet of this government, although, we will take some skin on this one; it had some aiding and abetting on this with the federal government. At the behest of some people in the industry demanding massive amounts of federal and state money going into encouraging young people to buy houses that they could not otherwise afford with these first home owner grants, it was massive amounts of money. I think it was up to \$70 000, but I am happy to stand corrected. That was the combination of federal and state grants. What did it do with that? We might say they brought that in. But when it brought that in, that money could be paid not at stud height, which always had been the tradition—I know some people here are experts—and not when the walls were complete and the roof was ready to go on because the building was substantially built and it just needed to be finished off with the roofing and the interiors of the house, but when the cement pad was laid. Guess what? Some members would see it in their electorates. What do we have all over Perth? We have cement pads that have been there for two or three years. We have heard that houses commenced in 2019 are still not completed because of that.

It was utter folly to do that scheme. It helped the people who owned the land and sold it. That is who it helped. All that money went to them because the prices went up by more than the amount of the grant. That is what always happens with those types of schemes and now those houses cannot be built. Furthermore, it encouraged builders to take on far too many customers on fixed-term contracts and now they have been destroyed by high interest rates and rising costs. That is a direct consequence of this state government's decision. Because that payment could be paid on the cement pad, vastly more builders entered into arrangements with customers than they otherwise would had it been a requirement that that payment could be paid only once the construction had reached stud height. Again, we see decisions by this state Labor government having led directly to the problems we have now.

I thought the member for North West Central gave a very lucid explanation of the critical importance of agricultural workers. Again, I admit and accept that those are federal changes, but it is a challenge of this state government to have the capacity to engage their federal colleagues to deal with that issue and to recognise that changing those visas to one year will be catastrophic. I have had a good opportunity to spend time with the member for North West Central in her electorate and to visit a number of areas in the north west. Those workers come back year after year. They will come over for six months for work and then they will go back and study for a time and then come back again. I really enjoyed the member's presentation and contribution because she outlined it beautifully. They become members of the community. They contribute with the critically important work because they do the jobs that most people from Perth are not prepared to do. They will not only do the critical seasonal work that people do not want to do—they like it, however, because it fits their lifestyle—but also add enormously to the fabric of the whole community there.

I implore members to please lobby, harass and cajole their federal members and, if they have any relationship with any of the relevant federal ministers, talk to them about it and the impact that will have on Western Australia. The whole farming sector, literally from Esperance to Kununurra, absolutely relies on those workers that are prepared to do that seasonal work.

**Ms M. Beard:** Tourism.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The tourism sector also relies on those migrants, as the member for North West Central points out. Unfortunately, I do not have time to cover all the contributions, but the story of that beautiful couple and their children in Carnarvon resonated with me. I have met that couple and their children. They are wonderful citizens of Australia—at the moment on a temporary basis. How wonderful it would be to see them stay in Australia. Members can talk about and try to resile from their past, but this government has caused enormous harm to our economy. The government has benefited from a massive increase in the price of minerals and royalties. It has benefited from the GST fix from the federal Liberal–National government, and that has covered a lot of its tracks. I hope it learns from its past.

**MS H.M. BEAZLEY (Victoria Park — Parliamentary Secretary)** [6.26 pm]: I also thank the opposition for bringing forward this private members' business motion this evening because it gives me an opportunity to point out everything that we have been doing in the training sector and industries and how well we are collaborating with the Albanese federal Labor government. It is ludicrous to state that this government is not addressing the acknowledged ongoing skills crisis or that we are not working collaboratively with the federal Labor government on this issue.

Firstly, I know it has not been missed and it has been stated tonight, but the state and federal governments are now of the same colour, and that means we share values and priorities. As the Labor Party, our top priority always has been jobs and skills. It is not that this Labor government needs to be the same colour as its federal counterpart in order to work collaboratively or effectively. That is evidenced by the amount of federal funding that we were able to negotiate from the previous federal Liberal government for our state Labor projects. I know that our success in that space has also been mentioned a number of times today. It is ludicrous given the Liberal and National Parties' record in training and skills when they were last in government.

By the wording of its own private members' business motion, the opposition acknowledged the ongoing nature of the state's skills shortage. I am not sure whether the opposition is aware, though the member for Vasse touched on this, but it can take years of study, further years of apprenticeships and traineeships, and sometimes a number of years of work experience to be considered skilled in an area. Just in case members have forgotten that type of time frame, I will take us back to the Liberals' last stint in government. I remind the opposition what it did to our training sector when it was last in power. Under the former Liberal–National government, TAFE fees rose by over 500 per cent and enrolments drastically decreased as a result. That has meant fewer workers and fewer skills in our industries for a generation. As the member for Roe said, a generation is roughly 18 years, so we are only six or so years into the at least 18 years of damage the former government's policies and training cuts created and that we are working desperately to reverse. When we came into government in 2017, we reversed those massive fee hikes. We froze TAFE fees and reduced many others by at least 72 per cent. We now have the Free in '23 program, which makes tens of thousands of TAFE places free.

During our six years in government, we have worked hard to repair the sector, and it is starting to pay off. It has been paying off for years, actually. Apprentices and trainees in WA have reached the highest number in a decade. We are making sure that Western Australians have opportunities to train, retrain and upskill in high-demand areas that will provide locals with secure and well-paying jobs. Our latest state budget included funding of \$93.4 million for our training sector, including initiatives that support students in the regions to access training, women to access apprenticeships and Aboriginal youth to gain employment. This amount includes \$2 000 training completion grants to help improve apprentices' completion rates in residential construction trades, as we know tradespeople are desperately needed in the state, and up to \$500 worth of rebates for tools and safety equipment. Also, \$48 million was committed to training and other initiatives to expand the state's construction workforce to complete the record 27 500 new homes that will be built over the next year.

In July this year, the government released the *State training plan 2023–24*, which sets the priority areas for the government's investment in vocational education and training for the next two years. The priority areas are advocating for WA's skills needs in national skills reform, preparing a skilled workforce for energy transformation and decarbonisation targets, managing a sustainable pipeline of apprentices and trainees, and building regional workforce skills and capacity.

Our Cook Labor government has also made a significant investment in free and low-fee training in early childhood education and care. As a result, in the 12 months leading up to 30 April this year, WA recorded a 37 per cent increase in traineeship commencements and a 94 per cent increase in completions, compared with the same time last year. This means that the sector has benefited from almost 2 400 new entrants. This is supported by our joint \$112 million 12-month skills agreement with the federal Albanese Labor government to provide fee-free TAFE and vocational education and training places. We work collaboratively with the federal Albanese Labor government, and this joint package includes many other initiatives, such as infrastructure upgrades at Midland TAFE for a renewable jobs and training hub, \$3 million for a trade training centre at Ellenbrook Secondary College and a \$2 million state-of-the-art commercial kitchen at Bentley Pines Training Restaurant at one of the TAFEs in my Victoria Park electorate.

I was at Bentley TAFE earlier this week with both the federal Minister for Skills and Training, Hon Brendan O'Connor, and the state Minister for Training, Hon Simone McGurk—because, you know, visits like that happen with ministers and governments that do not work well together! It was wonderful to speak to the trainees. All the trainees I spoke with have benefited from either reduced-fee courses or free courses or both. Sometimes their first couple of years were reduced-fee courses and then their third year was completely free. Some students were new to their skills, and others were upgrading theirs. One student was a woman who already owns a popular cafe in Kelmscott, just around the corner from the office of the member for Burt, Matt Keogh. Apparently, he frequents her cafe quite often. She was improving her skills to improve her business. If her business improves, her profits improve and she will be able to employ more skilled people. It is fantastic stuff.

Our \$112-million partnership with the Albanese government targets courses in the care, technology and digital, agriculture, construction, hospitality and tourism sectors. It covers course fees for 58 full TAFE qualifications and

provides reduced fees for 56 skill sets. There has been strong demand for the fee-free TAFE places currently on offer. We have smashed the targets for fee-free TAFE, with more than 34 000 enrolments in free courses this year alone. Free in '23 has been so successful that there has been an increase of more than 40 per cent on last year's numbers alone.

Our state Labor government also introduced the defence industry internship and graduate skills program, boosting the number of interns and graduates in WA's priority defence industry. The program will place 190 interns and 50 graduates in the WA defence industry over the next three years to ensure a pipeline of qualified workers. We have enhanced services for First Nations people across 19 jobs and skill centres, ensuring culturally appropriate and specialised support for Aboriginal clients—another multimillion-dollar investment. We have also opened a new jobs and skills centre in Fremantle.

Since 2017, our new industries fund has co-funded three innovation hubs that look to help develop emerging industries, such as data science, artificial intelligence, life science and cybersecurity. Each hub is governed by a unit with a university partner. My local Victoria Park university, Curtin University, is a partner in the data science case; the University of Western Australia in life sciences; and Edith Cowan University in cybersecurity. Last year, a fourth hub was announced to the WA creative tech innovation hub, now known as Creative Tech Village, located in Bunbury.

Our state government has committed an additional \$9.1 million to boost our new industries fund, or NIF, across the next two financial years. Every dollar invested by the government in the NIF generates a gross value add of between \$1.30 and \$5.20. It is an amazing investment in our economy and people.

In April this year, we opened the new \$5.4 million Metronet Trade Training Centre. This centre is the first of its kind at an Australian TAFE. We are leading the nation. It meets the needs of the Metronet program and supports local jobs in the rail industry. As Western Australians know, the Cook Labor government is serious about returning skills, jobs and meaningful work to our local rail industry. After all, we are the ones who reopened railcar manufacturing in Western Australia.

In addition to keeping fees affordable and the Free in '23 program I mentioned earlier, we are delivering a record \$268.3 million to upgrade TAFE infrastructure and equipment across the state. This is the biggest TAFE capital works program in WA's history. There are 15 major upgrades, of which over half are in regional WA.

Amongst so many other initiatives, we have also introduced various job ready programs that provide entry-level candidates with a pathway into traineeships and jobs in targeted industries. Almost 930 Western Australians have been employed following their completion of a full range of job ready courses. All job ready programs are part of the Free in '23 initiatives. Of the early childhood education and care job ready program participants whom I mentioned earlier, 78 per cent are women, 43 per cent are aged under 25 years, and 40 per cent are Aboriginal people.

A recent Australian Bureau of Statistics labour force survey estimated that the number of Western Australians employed as childcare workers or managers has increased by 1 600 to a total of 14 600. Of the almost 2 000 participants who have commenced job ready programs, almost half report that they have already secured employment in the industry or further training, adding to the pipeline of skilled workers needed across a range of essential sectors.

We have launched the job reconnect program to support more mature age workers and jobseekers into the workforce by providing support with work-related costs and through an employer incentive scheme. We are investing heavily in our construction workforce. We have given a \$7.6 million boost to WA's skilled residential construction workforce, and \$34.2 million in initiatives to encourage WA businesses to take on local workers, complete apprenticeships and expedite occupational licensing. We have expanded our wage subsidy scheme to include residential construction apprentices and trainees. We have given \$11 million in targeted visa subsidies to attract skilled workers to WA's construction industry, and have temporarily relaxed migration criteria to meet ongoing skills needs. Our \$1.26 million driver's licence training support program is removing barriers for young people in the building and construction industry to get more young people into the industry more quickly.

There is \$4.2 million to deliver a new apprentice completion grant program to tackle skill shortages and build a sustainable construction workforce. Eligible apprentices in this program receive a one-off \$2 000 completion payment. We have expanded our highly successful heavy vehicle driving operations training program to the Kimberley and Pilbara to help train local people for local jobs as part of a \$3.5 million expansion. We are diversifying the economy by investing a further \$463 million to drive growth in industries that will support the jobs of the future through a number of different mechanisms, including new funding to expand export markets; developing priority sector and cross-sector activities to create jobs for the future; supporting a range of local industries, including energy, tourism and events, international education, primary industries and science, and innovation and technology; opening a jobs and skills centre in Collie; and providing free career and training support to help local workers take up new opportunities through our \$662 million investment to support Collie's economic diversification. The latest new funding takes the state Labor government's total investment in economic diversification initiatives to support job creation and set up WA's long-term future to more than \$3.8 billion since 2021. We are looking outside the state to strengthen our economy and workforce by opening brand new Invest and Trade WA offices in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam and Austin, Texas in the United States.



When preparing to speak this evening I had a look at the announcements the Cook Labor government has made recently in the training portfolio. I found the following announcements in this month of August 2023 alone: the completion of the state government's \$2 million refurbishment of Central Regional TAFE's *Master Class* maritime training vessel; WA TAFE launching new cybersecurity training, the first in the nation; the expansion of training for early childhood educators for WA; and training boosts for the Kimberley, with a new Kununurra health and hospitality training centre. There is also plenty to smile about with TAFE's new \$2.6 million specialist dental facility; and clean energy skills are on the rise in WA. The last announcement was a joint announcement with the federal Albanese Labor government, through which we let the public know that skills ministers from across the country met last week in Fremantle to progress negotiations on a national skills agreement to tackle widespread skills shortages. As we all know, those skills shortages are not just statewide, but nationwide and global.

I again thank the opposition for bringing this motion to the chamber in private members' business. It has given me the opportunity to touch a little on what this Labor government has achieved in the training sector in the last six years, and what we are underlining in order to fulfil our deep commitment to Western Australians to secure WA jobs and skills into the future. I yet again point out the terrible irony of the opposition's criticism of our work in this area, given its track record: 500 per cent increases in TAFE fees and a decrease in TAFE enrolments. The opposition's attempt to wash its hands of the legacy consequences of that terrible, short-sighted action is laughable.

I obviously do not support the premise of this motion. Thank you.

**MS L. DALTON (Geraldton)** [6.42 pm]: I thank the member for Victoria Park for that absolutely fabulous contribution. She pretty much stole all my thunder! Truthful stories are always worth listening to. Coming to this place as the member for Geraldton I am quite bemused by this motion. Out of anything one could look at under the Labor government, training and investment in skills is certainly something that we are very good at. As many members know, I came to this place with a background as a TAFE lecturer. I was a TAFE lecturer for nearly 20 years at Central Regional TAFE. I also had my own business, a cafe in Geraldton called Salt Dish that I had for about five years, so I certainly am not someone who is unfamiliar with training and employment. It would be ridiculous to suggest that we do not have issues in the regions. I take on board the member for North West Central's comments around how hard it is to find people to work in our industries. I come from a hospitality background, too, so I certainly understand that. But they are not new problems. We have had these problems for a very long time, particularly in the hospitality industry. I can speak from experience: it was often very hard to fill positions. However, to say that this government is sitting on its hands—a term that members opposite used—is absolutely ludicrous. I cannot believe that members opposite would even suggest that.

I was a TAFE lecturer from 1999 to just before I came to this place in 2021, so I was a TAFE lecturer under both governments. Between 2013 and 2017, the former Liberal–National government increased TAFE fees by over 500 per cent, therefore cutting funding to TAFEs. That just about decimated TAFEs. I remember when I was first working in the training sector that I met our previous Premier, who was the training minister at the time, when he opened one of our skills kitchens. We could see that we needed that industry to be flourishing so we were investing in that area. What the Liberal–National government did to TAFEs just about killed us. I was part of the “Save our TAFEs” campaign; we worked really, really hard. I had had certificate III and IV classes and traineeships that were filled to the brim, and then it all just imploded. We were struggling to find students because they just could not afford to do their qualifications at TAFE. One of the bastions of our TAFE system was that we were offering training to people, both young and old, who could not necessarily afford to go to university. Enrolling in a TAFE course was something that the average Joe could afford to do, but between 2013 and 2017, it was certainly not affordable for people anymore. That was really devastating.

We are skilling Western Australian workers. As the member for Victoria Park mentioned, the government has provided access to affordable training; lowered fees; introduced the Free in '23 program; introduced low fee settings for existing worker traineeships; provided job ready programs; introduced group training organisation wage subsidies; introduced the job reconnect program for priority cohorts; made significant investments in TAFE facilities and equipment—I will touch on the impact of that locally; provided more jobs and skills centres across Western Australia; introduced defence industry initiatives; and enhanced Aboriginal services at jobs and skills centres statewide. New 2023–24 budget initiatives include scholarships for women in non-traditional trades, work placement and travel assistance for regional nursing students, an increase to the travel and accommodation allowance for regional apprentices and trainees, and expanded programs for Aboriginal jobseekers. They are just some of the initiatives of this Labor government.

I will talk more specifically about my old stomping ground of Central Regional TAFE and some of the investment that has happened there. For those who are not familiar with Central Regional TAFE, it services four regions spanning around 58 per cent of Western Australia, covering an area of about 1.52 million square kilometres. As the main training facility in the midwest, Central Regional TAFE delivers quality training to residents of the City of Greater Geraldton and surrounding local communities, so within the Shires of Northampton, Meekatharra, Carnamah, Morawa and Perenjori. The Batavia Coast Marine Institute is part of the CRT campus located at Separation Point. It is a beautiful institute—a state-of-the-art specialist facility that supports training in aquaculture, maritime and

fishing operations, and conservation and ecosystem management. It helps to train locals for the jobs they want. The BCMI also has close links with the industry and partner agencies and is integral to the development of a skilled workforce for the future in high-value industries, including fishing and the oil and gas industries.

We have already spoken about some of the infrastructure upgrades. As part of the government's record investment of \$24.3 million for infrastructure across WA TAFEs, we recently saw the completion of the \$2 million upgrade of the CRT's maritime training vessel, the *Master Class*. The Minister for Training recently visited Geraldton. We looked at the new upgrades, which are absolutely fabulous. I was working at TAFE when the *Master Class* first came into Central Regional TAFE. It was absolutely fabulous to see the new upgrades. It was great to take the minister for a little jaunt around the marina. The staff and students are really proud of that training vessel. It will support maritime students in the midwest and the Gascoyne. It will provide logistical support for other qualifications, such as aquaculture, fishing operations and conservation and ecosystem management. We are really proud of the fact that a local builder, Dongara Marine, completed the major overhaul of the vessel, which included new engines, gearboxes, hydraulic systems, electrics, air conditioning and navigational systems. When I was on the vessel with Rohan, the owner of Dongara Marine, we talked about how many people actually worked on the vessel during construction. Thirty different trades and skills, including apprentices and trainees, were all part of bringing that vessel to life, which is fabulous. Rohan employs around 30 migrants as well as local community members, which is a great testament to working with the federal government to make sure that we have strong migration employment. Importantly, this vessel helps to upskill local people for local jobs in our beautiful seaside town.

I have a lot more to say about how this Labor government is doing all it can to pull out all the stops and make sure that we are preparing our workforce for the future. I absolutely do not support anything the opposition said. We understand that it is hard to find skilled workers. I find it amusing that the opposition could suggest that this government is not doing everything it can to make sure that we are upskilling our future workers. I know that other members would like to contribute during the last few minutes, so I will conclude my contribution.

**MR T.J. HEALY (Southern River — Parliamentary Secretary)** [6.53 pm]: I rise to address the private members' business motion. I indicate that I will not be supporting it. I would like to acknowledge the very great credibility of the member for Victoria Park, who has a great record within business and industry, and thank the member for Geraldton, a former TAFE lecturer. I come to this debate as a former high school teacher who had to sit with young people who were turned away from TAFE because the member for Cottesloe's government priced a generation of young people out of the market to complete their training. I refer to the comments made by the member for Cottesloe. He said that our government should take responsibility for the mess we are in. He took the interjection but he did not apologise for the fact that 500 per cent TAFE fee increases —

**Dr D.J. Honey:** There were more kids in TAFE.

**Mr T.J. HEALY:** "The poor kids at TAFE"—is that what you just said? "The poor kids at TAFE." This was by your government, which you were a part of as a senior member of the Liberal Party, well before you came into this place after being elected at a by-election for Cottesloe. When I was a high school teacher, I had to sit with many young people who wanted to do certificate courses and apprenticeships but missed out because of what the Liberal government did. I find it interesting that the member for Cottesloe would say to us that we should take responsibility when he refused to apologise.

The 500 per cent TAFE fee increase was one of the reasons I ran for Parliament in the first place. When I was a teacher and careers officer at Southern River College, I came up here and spoke to Mark McGowan and said that this was not fair. I said to Sue Ellery, who was the shadow minister then, that this was not fair. I commend this government for delivering on its promises to freeze TAFE fees and reduce fees for 210 priority courses when it came to power in 2017. I commend the federal Labor government for its support and what it has done in allowing us to deliver job ready programs in priority industries, with \$25 million invested in modern, state-of-the-art TAFE infrastructure and equipment upgrades. The largest amount in Western Australian history, \$43 million, has been invested in TAFE capital works programs in 14 TAFE colleges across the regions. Priority Start and the Metronet Trade Training Centre delivered on each of our promises. The defence industry pathway is a brilliant program. I was at South Metropolitan TAFE Bentley campus last week for a graduation of an incredible program of young people and mature age apprentices who are heading into key industries to support the nation and Western Australia. There are also the year 9 career taster and truck driving programs.

I was very honoured to be the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Training when the government held the first ever Western Australia Skills Summit at Kings Park with all ministers of cabinet. As parliamentary secretary to the training minister, I then hosted each of the 10 regional skills summits around Western Australia—something the Liberal-National government never did in terms of respecting regional communities. We went to Bunbury, Northam, Geraldton, Kununurra, Karratha, Port Hedland, Broome and Albany, and we spoke about their importance. We spoke with industries, leaders and local governments about their needs, and they were very appreciative of the work the government was doing across a number of different areas.

I would like to mention a couple of brief things. The member for Moore spoke. The member for Vasse spoke. I have referred to the member for Cottesloe. I would like to close on one thing: the member for Moore spoke about the

McGowan Labor government freezing TAFE fees. I agree that we have a skills shortage in leaders of the opposition. That is the main thing I took away from his speech. I am happy to table some documents, if the Leader of the Opposition would like. One thing we could offer the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Moore, is the certificate II in leadership, a course now available at a very affordable price, as delivered by this government. The course description says —

The *Certificate II in Leadership* is designed to further develop and enhance your ... leadership skills.

A major component of the course is active participation in a team ...

With practical projects, it will develop skills and self-confidence.

This government is making sure that all young people and mature age students have access to affordable industry placements and TAFE training programs. The member for Vasse spoke about the decrease in training numbers. She did not acknowledge the fact that in an answer to question without notice 382 asked on 16 June 2022—I am happy to table this for the benefit of members—this chamber was informed that, in 2021, Western Australia had the highest ever recorded number of publicly funded course enrolments, at 150 000.

Deputy Speaker, I understand the time, but I will have to keep speaking until you tell me to stop speaking because this is an incredible achievement of the Western Australian government that the opposition is ashamed to talk about. I seek leave to table the document for the remainder of the day.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Yes, leave is granted.

[The paper was tabled for the information of members.]

**Mr T.J. HEALY:** It might be only 30 seconds, but it is an important document, Deputy Speaker!

This government has always delivered on its promises to the community and our sector. I thank the government for all the great things that it does—we will keep fighting!

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

*House adjourned at 7.00 pm*

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