

Mr Shane Love; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Donald Punch; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr David Templeman

**DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT —
AGRICULTURE BUDGET**

Motion

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore) [4.01 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the McGowan government for deliberately deceiving Western Australia's agricultural sector by claiming it is delivering \$131.5 million of new money into agricultural capability within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

We know that the Western Australian public, this house and the agricultural industry have been deceived into believing that a vast sum of money has been injected by the current government into the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to carry out functions previously carried out by the Department of Agriculture and Food. The government has claimed that \$131.5 million of extra money has gone into the agricultural industry, agricultural research and support for the agricultural sector. We contend that it has not. This misconception that has been put about has been very cleverly played out and presented. I refer to a press release of 18 April from Minister MacTiernan in which the minister claims —

- McGowan Government's 2019–20 Budget to include \$131.5 million of additional expenditure in the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development ...

It further points out —

... to include \$131.5 million of additional expenditure ...

Again at the bottom of the page, it says —

The increased investment provides a long-term, sustainable funding base for core functions.

The only increased investment that is mentioned is \$3.3 million for a critical upgrade to laboratories at DPIRD's South Perth facility. I welcome that, but it is a very long way short of the \$131.5 million that is claimed. At the very end, in comments attributed to the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Alannah MacTiernan, it goes on to say —

“The increase in investment allows us to rebuild capability within DPIRD ...

Rebuild it from what? She has been the minister for two whole years and two whole budgets. Does she mean to rebuild it from her own base?

[Quorum formed.]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have to remember what I was saying. Before I was rudely interrupted by the absence of government members in this chamber, which we note occurs many times around afternoon teatime, when the numbers diminish, especially of government members.

The increase in investment referred to by the Minister for Agriculture and Food, was, as I was saying, to rebuild capability within DPIRD, her own department, the department she has been guiding for two whole years. This is the government's third budget; it is not the first. In the press release, she continues —

... and puts us in a strong position to leverage further research funding from the Federal Government to support WA agriculture.”

That was helpful because what the minister announced was an increase in funding. This release was big on promises but very short on detail. It did not, for instance, outline that part of the purported increase was in fact Grains Research and Development Corporation funding, not the Western Australian government's own funding. I will come back to that later.

Three days after that media announcement, we know that the release was critiqued by the CEO of WAFarmers in a release he put out on 21 April. Naturally, we had a good look at this release that Mr Whittington put out. He made some rather interesting observations throughout this document headed “Budget Drop—A Good Start”, and I quote —

‘State Budget Securing Future for WA Agriculture Effort’ was the title of Minister MacTiernan's pre-budget press drop last week which I read with interest. I'm still not sure what the heading actually means ...

It goes on to say —

This is a big deal and a welcome announcement by the Minister.

Quite astutely, he goes on to say —

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But a quick review of past budget papers show that the numbers don't quite add up. The funding really only constitutes around \$90m ... as the remaining \$40m simply plugs the gaping hole that this government had built into their own budgets through to 2021.

I must point out that this was written prior to the budget being released and therefore prior to Mr Whittington having full access to the actual numbers. However, he goes on to I think, quite astutely, say —

The spin is, it's all the Barnett Government's fault, but after three Labor budgets and two years in power, that is a dead horse that no longer requires flogging. The first McGowan Budget in 2017–18 had DIPIRD's budget seriously hacked down ... So all they have done is filled in the huge hole they have spent the last two years digging.

It is interesting that Mr Whittington's comments have been held out as some sort of fillip for the government. However, when I read this more carefully, there seemed to be quite a bit of suspicion in his writings that we were not made aware of. Even in the estimates, the minister representing the minister mentioned some of the support given by a person such as Mr Whittington. But it does not appear that it is quite as unequivocal as we might have thought. He goes on to say that there is a tick there for Minister MacTiernan finally stopping the staff cuts. Of course, they were her own staff cuts, not someone else's staff cuts. We know that she made the staff cuts.

Dr D.J. Honey: The third budget in.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes, the third budget in.

I think Mr Whittington was suckered into the view that there was some extra money in the budget, because he goes on to say —

The question is now where the Minister will spend her bucket of spare cash.

I think it was demonstrated throughout the estimates process and by some an analysis of things such as the size of the department and number of people working in it that spare cash does not exist. He continues —

While the Minister states in the press release that \$131m will secure the future of agriculture, what I suspect it is doing is just holding together a department which has agriculture as a bit player, not the driver of \$10 billion in production and another \$10 billion in value added employment. I doubt there really is \$80m in a bucket to go onto any big new ag projects, but we can only hope.

I guess his hopes were quashed with a full analysis of what has been proposed in the budget.

The misconception of new money was built up further by the Treasurer's speech in this house. I note that the Treasurer did not mention agriculture in his first budget speech. However, on page 8 of his third published speech, he states —

... the McGowan Labor Government has demonstrated its commitment to this portfolio through additional expenditure of \$131.5 million in this Budget. This will restore capacity and capability, particularly in agriculture, that was slashed by \$100 million under the previous Liberal–National Government ...

Again, I emphasise that this is not the Treasurer's first budget speech; this is the Treasurer's third budget speech. If there has been any slashing in the interim, it has been by his government, not some other government.

The minister has also been presiding over the department for the last two budgets. Any effort to paint an increase in expenditure as simply an increase on what was in the forward estimates does not hold any fruit. The government did the forward estimates for the budgets before the 2019–2020 budget. The budget papers are its own documents and do not belong to a former government. The budget papers contain the government's own plans and any comments about what the former government put in the budget three, four or five years ago has no relevance whatsoever.

It is important that I discuss for a moment just what the former government did for agriculture. If we look at what the Nationals WA in particular had in mind for agriculture, it came about through a Nationals policy—a policy that was announced prior to the 2013 election and carried out throughout the 2013–2017 government. The policy to which I refer is the \$300 million plus Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture policy. Had we been returned to government in 2017—we were not and we did not have power over the 2017–2019 budgets—members would have seen \$20 million of royalties for regions spent on WA Open for Business, \$20 million going into agriculture science research and development and \$78.3 million going into the infrastructure audit and investment fund. Heaven only knows what happened to all that money. We do know what happened to it; it was returned to fund the government's election commitments and not spent in the area in which it was designated. The Water for Food program was guided by the member for Central Wheatbelt when she was the Minister for Water, and that would have received \$40 million of funding over four years. Further, the boosting biosecurity defences program would have received \$10.2 million; the boosting grain research and development support program would have received \$15 million; and the agricultural telecommunications infrastructure improvement fund would have received

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\$22 million. Those things were laid out way back then but we did not have an opportunity to add to them in the 2017–18 and 2018–19 budgets. That was the old program; that was, if you like, the tail end of our plans, not the full focus that would have been the case if we had been returned to government. Some of the expenditure that was made over that time includes \$8 million for Doppler radar projects over five years. Some of that money would have been invested this year. The project was carried on by the government because it was already in train. I was very pleased when the Geraldton radar was recently turned on with Doppler capacity for the first time. The program is a great credit to the former Minister for Regional Development and the former government. I remember the day when the minister had the great pleasure of opening the Doppler tower in Watheroo in my electorate. It was our project that we put in place. I got to go along and witness its opening, which was nice. I do not know whether I was recognised for being there, but I witnessed the opening, which was nice.

Of course, we know that royalties for regions invested a lot of money into agricultural connected projects, such as the Ord project, the Carnarvon flood mitigation work in the member for North West Central's area, the Gascoyne irrigation pipeline and in a whole range of other activities, even in Peel. The member for Mandurah might be interested to know that royalties for regions funds provided \$49.3 million for the Transform Peel program. They also funded the Peel business park, planning for the Peel food zone and the Peel integrated water initiative. We did not discriminate against anybody or any area. Money was invested where it was needed to be invested and, of course, that money came from royalties for regions, which was basically a Nationals policy. Member for Mandurah, a lot of the investment that has been put into the Peel area through the years came, as he will know, from that policy. He should be very grateful to the National Party for having been so generous to him and the area that he represents.

Mr D.A. Templeman: What's your address? I'll send you a thankyou card!

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister can send it care of the Parliament. I do not really want to give out my address, thank you, minister. I do not want unsolicited mail from the minister or anybody else.

There have been claims of an extra \$131.5 million for Agriculture and Food, but I contend that that is just smoke and mirrors. The government has undertaken its machinery-of-government changes and that basically obscures any real ability to crosscheck whether the department is being funded in a greater way in one particular year or another and in what area the funds have gone to because the department now comprises the former Departments of Regional Development, Fisheries and Agriculture and Food. They are all mixed in together so how can we get a handle on what funds are being allocated to agriculture? The estimates was an opportunity to get clarity about that issue and to get some details on the boast of a vast sum of extra cash. The minister representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food is sitting in the chamber and I am very pleased that he is here. He will recollect some of these discussions, I am sure. During the estimates committee, I asked the minister how much of the funding was coming from consolidated revenue and how much was coming from royalties for regions. I wanted to know where this money was supposedly coming from. The answer I got back through the minister from his advisers was in two parts. The first part of the answer tried to show where the money was going. The adviser said —

The budget trajectory that the department was on until this budget had us heading from an FTE base of 1 750 towards roughly 1 300.

I contend that it is a bit hard to know the trajectory of three separate departments under the previous government, but it is completely irrelevant. The Labor Party has been in government for two years. The government cannot use a measure of a projection in the forward estimates from a long time ago as a way to justify that the government is putting in extra money. The government claimed it was investing additional money. We would think that extra money would lead to some sort of increase in the size of the department or the number of full-time employees in the department; however, we heard the adviser saying, "This installs a flat, stable and normalised budget base for the department at about 1 580 FTE." We know that trajectory was based on the Minister for Regional Development's and the Treasurer's own planning for the past two budgets. It was their planning—no-one else's. The government cannot claim that undoing its own plans is actually an increase. It is not an increase; it is simply carrying on business as normal, and at a lower level, I might add, than was the case when it came to power. In fact, when the government took over the budget and took over the treasury benches, the 2017–18 budget listed 1 783 full-time employees, and that number was expected to grow slightly to 1 789. That was the amalgamation of the three departments that I have referred to. We know that in this year's budget, the number of full-time equivalents for 2017–18 was 1 664 persons. Therefore, 120 jobs were shed in the combined departments—now the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development—under this government in its own previous two budgets. Moving forward, in the forward estimates we see a further fall in numbers to 1 639 in 2018–19 and 1 592 in 2019–20. The government's much-trumpeted new money is holding the employee numbers roughly at current levels; it is absolutely not increasing them in any way, despite the purported claim in this press release of 18 April 2019 of "increased investment". Any layperson reading that would think "increased investment" means an increase in what the government has been spending. That is a reasonable assumption, I would have thought. I am sure that is what

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everybody in the agricultural community thought when they saw that press release; they thought that the Treasurer was telling them that there will be additional expenditure.

Let us put that matter aside for a moment and ask: where did that faux money come from? I must say that I am indebted to the astute questioning by the member for Cottesloe in the estimates committee. I will quote the member. He was here a minute ago; he has just ducked out. The member for Cottesloe said —

I am ... absolutely intrigued, because if we are talking about a declining trend, —

There he is; he has returned. Member, I am just quoting you. This is the declining trend that I referred to before, which the adviser pointed out, in which the department was heading down to 1 300 people. The member continued —

this is the government's third budget. This is not the first budget the government is making; it is its third budget. The minister is referring to four budgets ago. If I look for royalties for regions expenditure—I can go through the table, but I will not waste the time of the committee—and in fact if I go out into the third and fourth year of the royalties for regions budget now, a large number of programs are dropping off. For example, although not relevant to this portfolio ... That is a common thing. I am intrigued about how the government can claim to have spent \$130 million in arresting a trend. Any trend has to be owned by the government of the day, when it is its third budget in its third year in office. Just to clarify that, is this \$131 million an increase, not against some mythical trend four years ago, which we all know is nonsense, but over last year?

The minister was very happy to let the director general of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development answer the question. The director general said —

The member's point is very sound. This is the third budget under this government.

I think we all have to accept the reality that, unfortunately, this Labor government was elected in 2017, it had the opportunity of two budgets prior to this one, and it owns the trends. It owns the reductions in the department of agriculture and food and in any other department. It is not just agriculture that has suffered in that area.

Ms M.J. Davies: It's 3 000 redundancies. That was the target.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The target was 3 000 redundancies—there we go. We know that this government was committed to slashing expenditure, and slashing expenditure in agriculture, and it carried that out very brutally. It has now reversed its own trend. That is not additional expenditure; that is holding the expenditure roughly at the level it was at. It is a furphy to claim that there is additional expenditure.

We know that this additional \$131 million of new expenditure comprises a range of different areas. We were told in the estimates hearings that there is \$19.6 million of royalties for regions funds in there. As we know, the royalties for regions program has already lost at least \$40 million out of the infrastructure audit fund, so we know that the funding for royalties for regions has actually been slashed by the department, not increased. This increase of \$19.6 million is probably less than would have been expended by the department in royalties for regions in the first place. There is a claim of \$58.7 million of new consolidated appropriation, but that seems to be only holding the level of employment and the level of expenditure in the department at current levels. It is not new; it is new to what the government had planned to put in its previous budget, but it is not new. It is the same. There is no new expenditure; it is the same expenditure.

There is an allocation for grains research. The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Alannah MacTiernan, made an announcement on 16 March 2019. She was out in the press bagging the GRDC for not spending enough money in Western Australia. That is a debate we can have. She is always bagging somebody, but this was the issue at that moment. We know that a program put in place in that grains research area is partly funded by the GRDC. For people who do not know, the Grains Research and Development Corporation is a federal statutory corporation. The estimates revealed that there is \$22.5 million in GRDC funding in this budget. There is \$22.5 million cash from the GRDC and \$25 million from the department for the six new two-year to five-year projects with the GRDC that were announced in February this year. Therefore, we know that of the \$131 million, apparently \$22.5 million is coming from the GRDC. I put that question to the minister representing, and the advisers answered yes, that is their understanding. The director general referred to the GRDC funding as government money. Let me explain what the GRDC funding is. I suppose it is government money, because it is a statutory government organisation, but it is not state government money. The GRDC is a federal government organisation that is funded from a 0.9 per cent grower levy, which is collected at the first point of sale of grain and is based on the net farm value of grain in 25 crops. The Australian government then puts in a matching contribution of about half of that amount, so it is about two-thirds grower funds and about one-third federal government funds. No thirds are state government funds. That is not money being invested by the state government at all. Therefore, that \$131 million of faux money has to be cut down by \$22.5 million because of the furphy that it is state government money. It is not state government money; I do not think it is actually government money in anyone's mind. It is, in the main, the

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growers' own research and development funds, and that money is not there forever. There must be a program that has been put in place, and it will be reviewed by the Grains Research and Development Corporation. At some point it may withdraw from that funding arrangement and go in with someone else. The GRDC will partner with anyone who will help to develop the grains industry. It is not exclusive to working with government, and better partners than the government could be brought forward in the future throughout the state. For the government to say that it is locking this funding in as part of some sort of bedding-in to provide for the future of the department is a bit risky, because it is actually not the government's money and it is not guaranteed into the future.

Mr P.J. Rundle: It's the growers' money.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is the growers' money, in the main.

Ms M.J. Davies: It's not baseline funding.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is not baseline funding, any more than a grant from any other fund would be. It is a short-term thing, so the government should at least have the decency to drop that claim out of its \$131.5 million.

The lack of clarity that came forward in answer to all our questions during the estimates process was fascinating. Significant incomes and expenditures had in one budget been allocated to one service area of the department. The budget papers are broken up into service areas that roughly give some idea of what the old departments might have done by way of what services had been carried out. In one year there was something like a \$30 million reallocation of a particular income stream from one service area to another because: "Well, we got it wrong in the allocations because we didn't really understand how everything worked." The government is actually trying to tell us that there is a particular increase in one component of the department, while tens of millions of dollars are being allocated willy-nilly throughout. I am sure someone had a really good idea and thought, "Well, that's where it should park", but the following year they changed their mind and parked it somewhere else. That was a \$30 million difference in a service area from one year to the next simply because of an accounting change, so how can the government actually measure that \$131 million has gone into agriculture? Perhaps \$131 million has gone into the super-department, but we do not know where it went. I am absolutely confident in saying that the officers and the minister representing the minister could not provide any clarity to some of the questions that were put in trying to resolve some of the murky accounting problems that this super-department has brought forward.

The only real hard measure of the government's claim of there having been a boost is the full-time equivalent figures across the whole department. Presumably that is an absolute measure; those people have to be funded and have to do some work. One could say that, if the department was holding at a steady level, which it is, the government is spending the same amount of money on agriculture, and probably the same amount of money on fisheries and regional development, within that super-program, but nobody could actually break it down properly. If we look at the budget papers, we see the service areas as they are laid out. They do not really correspond with the old department breakdowns. There are industry development funds put aside as being for regional development, but they are probably actually going into agriculture. We just do not know, and we cannot actually get to the bottom of it. But I do know that there is no justification for the government's claim that there was a \$131 million increase in that program. Many of the questions that were put caused a deal of consternation amongst the officials, as they rattled around trying to look at their own budget figures to see where they could find answers. It is now such a complex department and such a complex area to try to gain any understanding of.

I return to what the motion actually said. Where is it? Here it is; I have it!

Mr D.A. Templeman: It's easily forgettable, that motion!

Mr R.S. LOVE: No, it is not easily forgettable! I know what it is, but I want to make sure when I read it again, because it is important to have clarity. The minister representing the minister may not believe it is important to have clarity on some of these issues, but I think it is very important to be very clear. We are saying that we condemn the McGowan government for deliberately deceiving Western Australia's agriculture sector by claiming it has delivered \$131.5 million of new money into agricultural capability within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

We know that the Minister for Regional Development; Agriculture and Food; Ports—the minister for lots of things!—claimed in this press release from 18 April that there was an increase in investment, but we have not been able to find any evidence in the budget of that increase in investment. Any fair reading of what has been going on here would tell us that we have a government that is trying to cover up its own cuts to that department and the severe budget measures that it has imposed, not just on that department, but on the public service in general and on government expenditure generally. Now it is trying to claim that a reversal of the trends that it put in place is somehow an increase in investment. It is not an increase in investment; it is a steady state of investment compared with what happened in the current year.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 19 June 2019]

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That is the best we can ascertain from the budget. The member for Cottesloe, the member for Geraldton and I became quite exhausted trying to get clear answers about what was actually going on and what was being claimed to be an increase. We could not find the increase. We know that part of the increase is actually royalties for regions money, at a much lower level than would have been the case had the government not been elected. It can hardly claim that as an increase; it is actually a gutting of that investment. The government has gutted the royalties for regions program generally, and specifically in agriculture, and now it is claiming that a very minor investment on its part is somehow a significant increase in investment when it is married to growers' own funds. It is amazing that the government can claim that as an increase.

Dr D.J. Honey: If you apply the logic they've applied there and you go forward to the last two years of the forward estimates, the government is cutting bushfire expenditure, they're actually cutting agricultural research, and they're cutting a whole heap of other research. There's nothing in the forward estimates, if you go out to those two years. There are substantial cuts. This is the logic: "Let's put out a press release, lauding it. Let's see the various cheer squad groups come out and just complain about the government cutting funding." When we asked that question, they said, "Oh, no, no, no, you can't worry about two years out", yet they're going back to the last two out years of a budget four budgets ago and saying, "Oh, no, no, this was an absolute ironclad commitment." It is just absolute nonsense.

Mr R.S. LOVE: We know that a lot of what the government says is nonsense and we know that about the budget for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. I keep getting that wrong because I just call it "DPIRD", and it does not sound quite right to say that in this place; it is almost rude, I think! It does not sound good.

Anyway, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is a very strange beast to try to get to the bottom of. I honestly do not think the minister or the advisers had a really clear idea about what was expended in government in 2017–18, what was expended by government in agriculture in 2018–19, and what was actually planned to be expended in agriculture in 2019–20. I think those questions were beyond them, and because of that I think the claim of putting \$131.5 million into the sector is an absolute furphy. I think the government should come clean with the sector and the Western Australian public and admit that it is reversing its own trends and is going to put into agriculture the same levels of expenditure that it put in for the current year. It is basically holding agriculture at the current level.

The government can probably point to a couple of programs that it is putting in place. Yes, there might be some programs going into the agriculture budget this year, but we know that an awful lot of royalties for regions projects that were put in place by the previous government have tailed off and the government is not going to put money into them. Money from royalties for regions is being sent off to fund a whole range of activities that used to be the business of government, such as school bus services and the Water Corporation's subsidy for water users. Money is simply not available, as it once was, to put into industry development and the things that the community expects royalties for regions funding to be put into. We know that is the case. Royalties for regions investments were transparent. The programs that were put in place in agriculture under royalties for regions were clear. There was a clear allocation of money, there were milestones for the projects to meet and there were expected outcomes. All the government is doing is saying that it will keep the department as it is, which is at a reduced level from what it was when Labor came to government. Very few programs are clearly outlined.

I commend the Grains Research and Development Corporation for finally coming to Western Australia in a bigger way and putting money in there. I would encourage that into the future, but the government cannot claim that as state government money—that is growers' own funds returning to the growers. We all know that Western Australia is a vast producer of grains, many of which are subject to that levy, and that Western Australia contributes a vast amount of money to that levy. We encourage this government to work with other organisations to encourage that expenditure in WA, but it is not actually government money and the government cannot claim that money as part of its boost. It is not part of the investment that the government is making; it is an investment that growers themselves are making.

I think the government should release a different press release. Where the press release that I referred to earlier states that the McGowan government is to provide \$131 million of additional expenditure to the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, it should perhaps say that the McGowan government will expend the same amount of money in the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development in the 2019–20 budget as it did in 2018–19, and probably a bit less than it did in the 2017–18 budget. It might also like to perhaps put in the press release that it has cut 120 jobs from the department and say that it will keep it at the current level, which is 120 fewer people than when the departments were first amalgamated. That would be somewhat more straightforward and honest and would actually reflect the truth. Of itself, there is nothing to be ashamed of in keeping the funding as it was. That is okay. I would be very upset if the government were to continue the trajectory it was on of cutting the funding to, and capability of, the department. If it were to keep on that path, I would be upset. I am not upset that it is keeping the budget at the same level, but I am very upset that it is being dishonest about it by saying that it is increasing expenditure.

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I go back to the comments attributed to the Minister for Agriculture and Food in that press release—that the increase in investment will allow the government to rebuild capability within DPIRD. I think there needs to be another press release that says, “Well, actually, we got that wrong. We are not rebuilding anything; we are holding it at the level that it was, and we are not going to make any further cuts that the McGowan Labor government had planned to make into the future.” If the government were to say that, I think people would welcome it; it would not be accepted negatively in the community and it would be honest. The government has gone out to the community and said that it is delivering \$131 million of new money to the department, but that is not actually true. The government should apologise to the Western Australian community, the house and the agricultural industry for putting out the complete misconception and complete furphy that it is investing and delivering new money into agriculture, when it is not.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA) [4.44 pm]: I rise to support this very good motion put by the member for Moore, and to concur with the assertions he made in his presentation. The motion reads —

That this house condemns the McGowan government for deliberately deceiving Western Australia’s agricultural sector by claiming it is delivering \$131.5 million of new money into agricultural capability within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

The point was very well made by the member for Moore that this is a government that resorts to spin, and that it is falling over itself to try to demonstrate that it is better at delivering regional development and investment into the agricultural sector than the previous government. It has fudged the figures! That is par for the course, when we look at what this government does on a daily basis.

Mr V.A. Catania: It is a pattern.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: There is so much smoke and mirrors. We have been consistent in calling this to account in this place. It started with royalties for regions, which the member for Moore canvassed. I would like to go into that in slightly more detail, because there is a pattern emerging, as the member for North West Central said. The government claims that it is rectifying the perceived ills left behind by the previous Liberal–National government, but what it is actually doing is running an agenda of gutting the public service. I do not think anyone over there can deny that they came to government with a very strong agenda to cut nearly 3 000 public servant positions. That was the first policy out of the gate for the Premier for jobs and the government for jobs—it was going to slash the public service. The member for Moore made the point quite well that in this third budget of the McGowan Labor government, we are starting to see the government trying to rectify some of the cuts it made in its earlier budgets so that it can make sure that when it gets to March 2021, it is on a footing whereby it can say, “Look at what we have done.” It is banking on the fact that people might not remember what it did in the early days of government. People in the agricultural sector, and regional Western Australians in particular, are not quick to forget or forgive when they feel they have been duped.

This government cannot be trusted on its investment and proposed investment, particularly in this space. The member for Moore mentioned some of the commentary from the CEO of WAFarmers. There were words like “the government’s numbers don’t add up”, “the spin is in”, “the DPIRD budget was hacked down from the outset”. It does not bode well for the government when one of its key stakeholder groups makes public statements like that. I would have thought that that would be a cause for concern for not only the minister, but also government members opposite, who have to deal with these stakeholders and members of the sector more broadly. The government has been congratulating itself on stemming the tide, when its own budget papers show that there has been a cut to those departments. That continues to be a concern from our perspective, because there has been no real clarity in the three budgets that have been handed down.

I recall that in the first budget handed down by the McGowan Labor government, I tried to get a handle on how that new department was going to function. It is still not clear. The director general still cannot provide any degree of clarity on how the functions within that department are working, who is reporting to whom, or what the final structure of that department will look like. We are three budgets in. We are two and a bit years into a government, yet we have a fairly significant department that we would argue is still in a state of chaos from not only a regional development perspective, with its links to royalties for regions, which I will come to in a minute, but also the point of view of agriculture and fisheries, which are two key industries driving our state’s economy and for which the department is responsible. That would absolutely be the feedback that members are getting as they travel around the state.

But of course that will not be said publicly in any sense because good public servants do not air their dirty laundry in a public way. The contacts that we have within the organisations, and then the reflection of that into the stakeholder groups that deal with them on a daily basis, have real concern. There is no clarity.

The director general—not in this year’s estimates, not in last year’s estimates and not in the government’s first budget estimates—could not provide any degree of clarity around how those functions would continue. Those

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public sector cuts, coupled with that machinery-of-government change, threw that department into an enormous amount of turmoil. Now the government hides behind that change by saying that it is unable to give us specifics. We have seen that both in the estimates that are currently occurring in the Legislative Council and also in the estimates that were held in this place. It was like trying to nail a piece of jelly to the wall; the officers could not quite tell us. They were not hard questions. I reviewed the questions that the members were asking in the estimates committee. They asked for the baseline figures around where the government has been saying that it has been able to increase the funding so that we could test that. Where is the equivalent against the previous government's record so that we can test the theory? Some of the answers were very telling. I have only looked at this year's estimates, but I was in last year's estimates and the estimates from the year before, and, from my recollection, the answers were very similar. There has been some commentary in and around Hon Colin de Grussa being able to specifically ask the Minister for Agriculture and Food, "Can you tell us the levels of funding within the department?" The minister said that it is not possible to break these down because the departments have been merged. How can we measure that?

Mr V.A. Catania: At least she's honest.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: She was too honest in this case. The minister could not tell us because the departments had been merged. How can the minister write a very specific media statement headed "State Budget securing future for WA agricultural effort" off the back of the budget, saying —

The McGowan Government is securing the future of the State's agricultural efforts, with the 2019–20 Budget to include \$131.5 million of additional expenditure ...

If the minister cannot tell us what the department looks like and she cannot specify what is happening within that department, how does the government, with any clarity or confidence, then stand behind the statement that it made in that media statement?

Mr V.A. Catania: You blame the former government!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, but that is par for the course. The former government was responsible for everything!

The minister has made some big statements. I agree with the member for Moore that this government is misleading the agricultural sector in Western Australia.

The other concerning outcome of questions during the estimates process both this week and during the budget estimates was that there was some commentary around further job losses in this department. I noted that some work had been done by a member in the Legislative Council who found that 47 FTEs had been pulled out of various service areas across the department's budget. Under questioning, it would appear that that figure is 60. It is a net reduction of about 60. Again, there was no specificity from the director general because that process has not been completed. I am very concerned that the department that is responsible for such an important part of our state's economy is still going through the machinations of change that was brought about by this government.

How do we provide clarity for industry, how do we provide a strategic direction and how do we give anyone confidence if we do not have our own house in order? That is exactly where we find ourselves today. That is completely at odds with the situation when we were in government. We had a very clear agenda. It was laid out both through the royalties for regions budget and through the Department of Agriculture and Food. When we were in government for eight years, there was a very clear focus on the issues that were important from our perspective about what would take the agricultural sector, the fisheries industry and those primary industries forward to allow the private sector to make those investments with confidence. That included a \$350 million program through royalties for regions called Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture. That did an enormous amount to boost the capabilities of and work in with the department of agriculture's core and base funding and the public servants who were involved in the projects that were run by the department on a daily basis.

As the member for Moore mentioned, a raft of other projects were funded through royalties for regions that increased and supported capacity-building in the agricultural sector, such as those related to Doppler radars and mobile phones. If we spoke to WAFarmers, the Pastoralists and Graziers Association, anyone involved in broadacre farming in our agricultural sector or anyone who is working with sheep or cattle, they would say that they need access to technology and they need to access that technology in a timely manner. They need to be connected to the rest of the world. One of the most significant investments we made during our time in government was to expand the mobile phone network and start looking at those broadband capabilities so that our industries could connect in a twenty-first century way. That was not done through the department of agriculture; that was done through the royalties for regions program. In addition to what was being spent by the department of agriculture, all those things served to enhance our sector. I was privileged enough to be in charge of the Water for Food program in cooperation with the former Department of Regional Development, which again was largely driven through the former Department of Water. It was about expanding irrigated agriculture opportunities across

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the state, looking at increasing our groundwater investigations, giving the private sector confidence to make a very significant investment whereby a single investor would not invest to look at proving up water resources, and working with key stakeholders to ensure that they had access to a pipeline for land tenure changes that had bedevilled many of the station and pastoral industry players in the Pilbara and the Kimberley and giving them opportunities that they did not have prior to us being in government.

We drove a very strong and aggressive agenda in the agricultural sector right across the state. Since this government has come to power, it has made cuts and then, two budgets down, it came out and patted itself on the back and said, “Look at us. We’re so good; we’ve actually rejuvenated it.” I do not think anyone in the sector is silly enough to believe that. It will become more and more evident as we see two more budgets from this state government.

The reason we do not believe the statements this government makes is that, alongside the ones it is making about this \$131 million of new money, it also claims that royalties for regions remains unchanged. Mr Acting Speaker, bear with me, because it is an analogy that warrants investigating or diving into a little. The member for Moore pointed out that a significant amount of cost shifting is going on within royalties for regions, but there are regular claims from those sitting opposite that royalties for regions continues to exist and that it is doing the job it was designed to do when it was brought in by the Nationals in government. I promise members that at no point did our government ever anticipate or think that a big chunk of the royalties for regions funding, which should be used to innovate, extend and support our government agencies to deliver programs that actually expand our agricultural industry, both here in Western Australia and by connecting us to our overseas markets, would be no longer available for those projects—that the government would spend it on providing a subsidisation to the Water Corporation. We talked about this in this house. It is about the opportunity cost of spending royalties for regions funding on programs like that instead of working with the department of agriculture and the fisheries and forestry sectors to deliver the programs that we saw working incredibly well when we were in government.

I am sure that the member for North West Central will talk about programs involving the Gascoyne food bowl and the master planning process that we went through. Those programs were all about setting a foundation and were delivered in concert with industry because we had access to royalties for regions. That opportunity has gone. The baseline funding has flatlined+ if we take our best understanding of what we could get out of the estimates process. We can see that there are more job losses on the horizon. The Premier was unable or did not want to answer the question today in question time around reductions from a regional development commission point of view. The regional development commissions were intrinsic to us being able to deliver the programs that we were talking about just then, as they were the eyes and ears on the ground. Notwithstanding the hypocrisy of a government that continues to say it is all about jobs and regional communities, it then talks about the fact there will potentially be further reductions in our regional development commissions. The hypocrisy in every element is unbelievable.

This government has created an enormous amount of chaos and confusion with its machinery-of-government changes. It has done that deliberately. It is a very old playbook from the Labor Party when it comes into power. It is difficult for the government and the industries that are reliant on these departments to assess whether they are better or worse off. On the ground, out in the electorates when we talk to our stakeholders, I do not think the rhetoric matches the reality. The amount of \$159 million over four years will pay for our own school buses. Although that is something that is very worthy and we should continue to pay for, it should not come out of royalties for regions. Imagine what that could do to partner with sectors across the agricultural and fisheries industries to drive innovation and support further growth. The \$180 million funding to TAFE should be coming from the Department of Education’s budget, but it is coming from royalties for regions. All of these things are very worthy initiatives to be funded, but not from royalties for regions. There is the cost opportunity.

[Member’s time extended.]

Ms M.J. DAVIES: This motion put forward by the member for Moore has real merit. There is spin and rhetoric versus reality. We see it again and again, not just in this portfolio but right across government. It was disturbing to me that despite the rhetoric of, “We’re here, we’re improving things for the department of agriculture”, as recently as this week it was acknowledged that there are further redundancies to come. Because of the way the department has been created, the government was unable to specify whether they would be from the agricultural part of the department. I do not think that is good enough. It is not good enough that the government cannot provide us with clarity on who is working where and how that compares with what had been in place previously.

We were really proud of the program of funding that we put in place. The member for Warren–Blackwood, who is sitting next to me, for a time was the Minister for Agriculture and Food and then Minister for Regional Development. I do not think anyone can question our record in this space. Significant work was put in place. The reason we had the ability to put together \$350 million worth of funding through royalties for regions in Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture is that a degree of work had been done when we came to government, but they were all plans sitting on a shelf. These were plans that the previous department of agriculture had been unable to fund. It would not

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spend the money. It was not given the opportunity to drive that change. Along with some of the feedback from industry at the time about what was relevant and, I guess, up to date in terms of working through what had been left by the previous Labor government—I think that was right across government—there were plans for everything, but they never spent any money or did anything that left a legacy.

A \$350 million investment through Seizing the Opportunity certainly set the foundations. Water for Food was one of those. There were investments in the northern beef industry and in the sheep industry development centre. We put \$10 million into helping grain growers better manage risk when we were dealing with, and continue to deal with, the impacts of significant frosts and weather events. We also invested in Doppler radars; developed the brand WA so that we were connecting to our international markets; as well as put \$20 million towards biosecurity. I would argue that that is one of the single most important things we should be protecting in Western Australia. We have all these natural assets, but there is distance between other markets in the rest of Australia and our borders, from an international perspective. We need to keep investing in that. It was one of the 16 or 17 priority areas that was addressed by Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture.

We invested in the Muresk Institute to make sure ongoing education opportunities were available for a future workforce for the agricultural sector. When this government came into power, the investment we had made, which was always to be a long-term investment, was cut and it said “goodbye”. It has reintroduced Curtin University back into that organisation. I do not have a short memory. I was around when Curtin left the first time. It is on notice in relation to that particular organisation. I dealt with it when it was exiting stage left the first time around. It left a very bad taste in my mouth. I am not criticising Curtin University—it is a fine organisation—but I criticise the way it dealt with Muresk. I do not think the university had any pressure applied to it by this government. We need to ensure we get a good outcome. It is an enormous opportunity for the industry and it needs to continue to receive support. It would be an absolute shame to see that fade into insignificance because no attention is being provided in that space. It is in my electorate. Looking at the people who are the leaders in the industry, particularly the ones I speak to in my part of the world—I am talking broadacre agriculture; also banking and agribusiness—many people in those positions came from Muresk. They did their degrees through Muresk. I am not arguing for a return to the good old days. I understand that the agricultural sector continues to evolve, but I certainly was very disappointed to see a lack of commitment by this government to the degrees that were being developed out there and that they reverted very swiftly back to a diploma rather than a full agribusiness degree. It was very disappointing to me. I think that is a reflection of a government that has taken its eye off the ball in this space.

There were a whole raft of other initiatives. The member for Warren–Blackwood will be able to speak to it with a greater depth of understanding, but at the same time that we were dealing with all of these issues, we were also putting our hand up to participate in what was a drought pilot to try to change the way we dealt with drought responses from a government perspective. It is not an easy thing to do. We were happy to take on some of those more challenging issues in government. It is widely recognised that that drought pilot has set the foundations for what is an accepted way of dealing with those communities, businesses and individuals who find themselves at the mercy of mother nature. It shifted us away from what I think was a dreadful system. We needed a state government to be brave enough to put its hand up and participate as part of that pilot. I remember that it did not come with a whole lot of bouquets at the time. I speak to people who have gone through the process. Parts of it continue today and feed into that broader discussion around drought relief and drought response from a government perspective. For any government that deals with that, it is a very difficult and challenging policy area to work in. We were prepared to make some of those hard decisions and work on it by not only investing through royalties for regions and making sure the department was ready to take on those challenges, but also dealing with some of the gnarly policy issues. They were issues that impacted a whole raft of communities; not some of the side issues that the current Minister for Agriculture and Food is dealing with. That has been reflected to me in comments as I travel around my electorate. A significant number of people are in the bigger industries but there seems to be a focus on the smaller niche industries. I am not saying that is not warranted. Everyone can have their own area of interest, but it is done at the government’s peril when it ignores those who actually generate a significant amount of the state’s economic drivers.

I share the member for Moore’s concerns about the budget. It is, once again, smoke and mirrors. We see it with royalties for regions and we see it with the department of agriculture. It is exactly the same. I want to ensure that we are holding the minister to account for the statements. We will continue to try to get to the bottom of what the department actually looks like and what the funding looks like over the forward estimates, and make sure that those statements are backed up with facts. I have to say that members of the Labor government have fallen short under the questioning of our members, both in this place and in the Legislative Council. Comments from WAFarmers and others in the wake of the budget have been along that vein. There is a spin and those numbers do not quite add up. That is very disappointing because it is an industry that is very close to my heart. We need to make sure the government does not drop the ball on this. In its efforts to prove that it has credentials in the regional development and agricultural sector, it has overplayed its hand, and that can only be to the detriment of an industry that I think deserves much more.

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It is with regret that we move motions like this in this house but we cannot let go media statements such as the one the minister put out in the wake of the state budget on Thursday, 18 April, claiming there is \$131.5 million of additional expenditure within the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. We simply do not believe it. We do not think the questioning that has been pursued in estimates in this house and the Legislative Council provides any further evidence to prove that. What concerns us is that, under further questioning, we understand there are likely to be further job losses, and that will create further uncertainty and chaos in a department that needs a degree of stability in order to get on with working with that very important sector across the state.

MR D.T. REDMAN (Warren–Blackwood) [5.11 pm]: I, too, want to make a contribution to the fantastic motion put up by the member for Moore. All members from this side of the house are asking is for the government to stump up and tell the truth about what is going on in agriculture. I can see in a debate like this about a sector worth \$8.6 billion in 2017–18 that the government has rolled out government seats to come up to the debate: member for Collie–Preston, yes, a regional member at the other end, the coalminer down there; and the would-be regional member, the Minister for Local Government, who considers himself regional. I might have a fight with my good friend and colleague the member for Dawesville. I understand he is right at the end of the train line, so he hardly gets a badge for being regional, certainly from where we come from. Of course, the member for Bunbury and the member for Swan Hills would also like to think they are sitting in regional Western Australia. Clearly, the government has rolled out the big guns to take up the fight with the Nationals today.

Mr D.A. Templeman: That is the first one. Wait till you see the second one!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I think there are two things. They have brought out the C-team.

Mr D.A. Templeman: We have the second wave. Dad’s Army will have a go!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: At a pinch he might be C-plus, but he is the C-team.

When the lead speaker from government, who is not the Minister for Agriculture and Food but clearly is the spokesman in this place, stands up to speak, he will tell us two things. The first is: What is the consolidated base fund that goes into agriculture and primary industries in Western Australia? What is the number? The minister cannot spout out in media releases what she has done unless she knows that number. What is the number? The second is: give us a vision for the sector. Give us a plan. Give us something that the government is working towards. Agriculture is an \$8.6 billion sector in Western Australia, so what is the government’s vision? What statements will bring together some sort of plan that indicates where the government is headed and what it sees as important, and explains why it is making these investments? We do not have the vision, a plan or an agenda. We see random statements that come out from time to time, picking off pet topics from the random minister in the other place. We know there is some randomness about that. In fact, I find really interesting the feedback I get from people I know on the ground that the average time an agriculture adviser stays in the minister’s office is 92 days. That is how long it takes for an agriculture policy person to stay in the minister’s office. I think there is a bit of random decision-making going on there, and that is concerning. It seems that from past debates in this house and comments from my good friend the member for Roe, she seems to take her riding instructions from the *Call of the Reed Warbler* rather than laying out an agenda for agriculture in Western Australia. There is no agenda.

The other question I would like answered by the Minister for Local Government is: what is the government’s agenda? Try to articulate that agenda in response to this, because that might give us a little bit of confidence that the government is making investments that make a difference.

Mr R.S. Love: I think it has something to do with the *Call of the Reed Warbler*.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Yes; it might be, sadly, where that agenda comes from. We have a sector worth \$8.6 billion heavily dominated by grain, worth \$4.5 billion; cattle, worth something like \$800 million; sheep meat production, worth \$600 million; and wool, worth about \$1 billion. I remember when that was as low as \$400 million or \$500 million. There is horticulture and bees, wine and all the others. It is a pretty significant sector that needs an articulated response from government, with a plan and an agenda and on why particular investments are being made.

We are coming out hard on this because the government has said that it is investing new money to make a difference because somehow that reflects on what the previous government did or, as members opposite have suggested, did not do. I want to articulate an agenda for agriculture. The Liberal–National government laid out an agenda for agriculture. The last iteration of that was called Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture. It was not just a made-up set of plans and words; it was based on the contemporary reporting and papers that highlighted that Asian-century opportunities were coming before Western Australian farmers. We are, essentially, an export-focused state. A big part of our market base was in the group of countries that lies to our north and we had the pathway for product to go from farm gate right into those particular markets. That is not easy. There are a whole heap of entry points where we need to make investments and lend support, with interaction with the federal government and the private sector to make that happen. The investments we made were targeting the barriers or areas that were,

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effectively, stopgaps to allow product to go from farm gate in Western Australia right through to our Asian markets in particular. That is what it was designed to do.

There are five main themes, including understanding our asset base, understanding our land base and understanding our water base in Western Australia. What assets do we have in the agriculture space? There is research and development, not just publicly funded R&D but R&D teaming up with the private sector, because research and development is a very, very costly business. We need to team up with the private sector to ensure we can maximise the work that needs to be done in Western Australia to make a difference. We need pathways to market, whether it be infrastructure for ports, roads or rail, to ensure there is a supply chain that can get that product to the markets in a timely way.

Mr D.T. Punch interjected.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I am looking forward to the member speaking and articulating the Labor Party's agriculture agenda in meeting some sort of coherent plan.

Market access is about not just finding out where the markets are and who wants to buy our product, but also making sure we meet the needs of those markets. Biosecurity is another theme. Those countries do not take our product unless it meets particular biosecurity standards. This is a complex space. The other theme that came through was training—understanding the workforce and where investments needed to be made to support a sector that was growing and that we knew was changing and needed a workforce to match the opportunities and growth in Western Australia and to profile that. We need to profile to the broader public how important the sector is for Western Australia. There was a specific agenda to articulate to the broader community, and particularly the agricultural sector, why these investments were made.

A lot of regulatory work and a lot of biosecurity work sits in place that is really important. We need to put that on top of the base funding that came through the department of ag. About 15 programs were rolled out under Seizing the Opportunity. They can be googled and it will bring up a page that shows what all those programs are. I have highlighted the ones that are left. There are five out of the 15 programs that were rolled out with a very specific agenda to get rid of the barriers and to allow products to go from farm gate right through to sophisticated markets in Asia. All the points in that supply chain had an investment opportunity that we were making as a government to make a difference and, in many cases, teaming up with the private sector to achieve it. We had a plan, an agenda. We articulated how that plan would happen and we made an investment to make a difference. This government does not have that; it does not have an agenda for this significant Western Australian sector, which was worth \$8.6 billion to Western Australia in the last financial year. The government has a range of random investments that are not connected to a broader agenda.

If we take the very basic numbers of \$350 million in Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture and divide that by four years, that adds up to almost \$90 million a year on top of the baseline in the department of agriculture and food. The government claims that it has committed an extra \$131 million—the member for Moore has quite rightly articulated that that is not true—but from what I have seen, it does not add up to anything like that. I am sure that the minister representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food will focus on the department, not the broader agenda. What also came through Seizing the Opportunity, as the Leader of the Nationals WA quite rightly highlighted, is that the agency was partnering with a heap of other agencies to do business. For example, it partnered with the Department of Water to do the Water for Food program. It was rightly placed within Agriculture because it looked at unlocking and understanding Western Australia's water potential to roll out irrigated agriculture well beyond what there is now. That work is the basis of the investment decisions that the private sector is making now. It also had an alignment with the Department of Training and Workforce Development. It had a relationship with it for Muresk Institute, as the Leader of the Nationals highlighted. What has happened there? I remember the member for Collie-Preston, probably sitting where I am now, giving us a real barrelling about not looking after Muresk. What has this government done with it? I am willing to bet the member for Collie-Preston cannot tell me what has happened to it. I can tell him what has happened to it.

Ms M.J. Davies: Not much.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: It has gone backwards—not much. As the shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food, the member for Collie-Preston said it was a key issue, but sitting over there, he has not supported it.

Mr M.P. Murray: You invested nothing and let it run down!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: We did! We invested \$15 million, from memory. This government needs to own up to its failures.

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will keep going. There was a partnership with the Department of State Development to have interactions with our overseas trade offices to understand the market opportunities and get the alignment. We

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even invested agriculture people in those offices. Why? Because agriculture is important in Western Australia and we made that investment in the supply chain. We invested in a plan. This government has no plan. What is the basis of its investments, where is it making them and why is it making those investments? I would love to hear the government try to articulate that today. Under our government, there was an alignment with the Department of Lands for land tenure reform to allow pathways to higher levels of tenure to support the backing of banks to make investments in the ag sector. Again, it was groundbreaking work. There was what was happening at Gogo station and what was happening in the Ord Valley region, in Mowanjum and in Skuthorpe, just out of Broome. Throughout the pastoral areas, there are opportunities for higher levels of agricultural investment, particularly in the irrigated agriculture space. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet, in the Office of Science, also had a connection with the research and development space to lay out where investments needed to be made to actually make a difference. We had a plan when we were in government and we made investments through royalties for regions that backed up that plan. Many of those investments—in fact, two-thirds—have been washed away and now we have a government with the petulance to say that there is \$131.5 million of extra money, but that includes royalties for regions money, as the member for Moore quite rightly highlighted, that has end-dated investments, because one of the points government members made is that it is not baseline funding. All RforR funding has an end date. It has to stop at some stage, unless the government renews it. What is it saying about its own investments, because it also has royalties for regions money in it?

As the member for Moore rightly highlighted, the government cannot claim that Grains Research and Development Corporation funding is contributing to baseline funding in the department of agriculture and food because it has been soaked up into a bigger agency with no understanding of where the lines are drawn. How government members can stand in this place and make statements about agriculture is beyond belief. That has been proven in budget estimates in the hearings I sat in with the Treasurer and others, and by the members for Moore and Cottesloe, who have clearly sourced all the flaws in the government's arguments. That is pretty clear.

Let us look at some of the things that happened. The Minister for Tourism has been very critical about our investment in the Ord, which unlocked potential that had not been unlocked for 40 years. It lay there for 40 years. We made significant investment in the expansion of the irrigated sector and in unlocking the Ord final agreement, which has given the traditional owners benefit from the land they have ownership of through the native title settlement that Eric Ripper did, which was a fantastic piece of work. For the first time, those opportunities were unlocked. Those opportunities were not there before we came to government. As I said, there are pathways to better tenure. The Water for Food program is now playing out in significant investments in the Myalup–Wellington project, which the minister is certainly aware of, and in the southern forests irrigation scheme, which is in my electorate. Those two investments were not a part of, from memory, the original Seizing the Opportunity. They were stage 2 investments that went beyond Water for Food. A lot of the Water for Food work was in the Kimberley, the Gascoyne and the Pilbara, and as it came down here, my good friend and colleague the Leader of the Nationals WA put it on the agenda. They are still on the agenda and, in both cases, they are being rolled out. It is certainly pleasing that this government supports them.

The member for North West Central will probably talk about how our investment in the levee banks in Carnarvon is protecting the sector. That might not relate directly to agriculture, but it is making a difference in the agriculture sector. There is also the Pilbara Hinterland Agricultural Development Initiative, an investment in irrigated agriculture at the Woodie Woodie mine. There was a massive amount of dewatering, and there is a fantastic amount of fresh water. It is checking out what can grow in the circumstances and how to make it work. Again, that investment happened in our time.

I am cautious to raise the state barrier fence, but making it dog-proof was an investment. We increased the number of doggers out there. Yes, more could have been done.

Mr M.P. Murray: Fair go, fair go! At least give the minister for ag some credit on the dog fence.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I do, as has the member for North West Central.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Let us look at a few other decisions that were made in our time. Another one was taking the grain breeding program out of the department of ag and partnering it with the private sector. InterGrain was set up. Barley and wheat breeding programs are hopefully trying to compete with some of the bigger plant breeding companies in Western Australia. We deregulated the coarse grain sector in barley and canola. I think lupins was the other part of that. We repealed the Genetically Modified Crops Free Areas Act. I remember the member for Collie–Preston sitting here saying, “The sky’s going to fall in. The genie’s been let out of the bottle.”

Mr M.P. Murray: What was the difference in the price of GM and non-GM canola this week? It was \$80 a tonne.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Clearly, it has absolutely nothing to do with that and market opportunities. Those things fluctuate on a whole range of parameters that I am sure the member for Collie–Preston does not understand. I am

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 19 June 2019]

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sure the member will rest easy sitting over there wearing his cotton shirt that is made from GM cotton, because that is about all it is. In fact, all government members are wearing their cotton shirts. Member for Collie–Preston, the sky has not fallen in. It just shows —

Mr M.P. Murray: There's one thing I'll always do, member. I won't run out and hide and not vote, like the member for Moore did last week. He never had the guts to stand up in here. He left the room!

[Member's time extended.]

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The one thing that is alive and well is that there are still a few Luddites sitting on the other side of the house who refuse to accept what is going on in the world, and they will hold themselves back in more ways than one.

I do not want to take up the other debate because I will probably get a fight from the members at the back of the house, including the member for Swan Hills, if I do. I will stay out of the energy space on that one.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Just think about what that is like for Hansard and for me, who is not feeling particularly well. Please, shoosh. The member has the floor.

Mr D.A. Templeman: The only runner in the chamber is the Speaker. He's the only runner.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I call the Leader of the House.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: The chief Luddite!

While I am on the topic of things that seem to test a few people in this place, there is a premium food centre in Manjimup that is part of a program to support businesses that provide premium foods, high-value foods, foods produced in small volumes, organic foods and biodynamic foods to develop opportunities in the marketplace. The government has not funded it.

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Quite frankly, the member is just digging a hole for himself. He needs to come into the twenty-first century.

We opened two new facilities to support gene technology in Western Australia called New Genes for New Environments—one in Katanning in the member for Roe's electorate and one in Merredin in the member for Central Wheatbelt's electorate. The member for Central Wheatbelt talked about the drought pilot. Although we supported an initiative with the federal government at the time—in fact, it was with Tony Burke when he was the minister, and, in my view, it was a very progressive bit of policy work—unfortunately, it was not taken up. One of the criticisms I had of the minister who followed him was about not taking that up. It is interesting to note—I am getting some emails now—that with the drought conditions on the east coast, officials from government agencies are ringing officials in Western Australia to find out the settings and principles behind the decisions made about the drought pilot work that was done six or seven years ago in Western Australia. Western Australia will have another 2010. They are not good years for an agriculture minister, whoever they are. Likewise, the east coast is facing the music. In those situations, governments need to respond effectively in areas that will make a difference, and it has to have the policy settings before it gets into those scenarios. Governments should not do drought policy when states are in a drought. I think that is some very good work that, hopefully, will play out over time.

WA Open for Business is still alive. It is funded in the budget through royalties for regions. Sadly, it is not a shopfront. My vision was for it to be a shopfront so that those who wanted to get into export opportunities had somewhere to go and someone to talk to about finding the business-to-business connections that are needed to get contracts in place to make investment decisions at a farm level. That level is not there, but certainly, in name, it is still there.

I refer to research and development funds for grower groups. It is easy to stand in this place and refer to publicly funded R&D. How big is the agriculture department as the key performance indicator of the government's investment in the agriculture space? It is more than that. It is about having an agenda, which I have talked about, and having investment that supports grower groups that now have an increasing level of capacity. There is the South East Premium Wheat Growers Association in Esperance on the south coast, the Liebe Group, the Facey Group, the Mingenew Irwin Group and Southern Dirt. A whole range of groups that have capacity are bringing their own resources to the table. In many cases, they are now attracting federal government funds. State government supporting funds for that were not going into the agriculture department; they were going right into the grassroots work that needs to happen. This government has cut those funds. We put that in place, but this government has taken it out. What will they do now? They do not have a connection to government. There is no opportunity to synchronise the investment decisions that have been made between the government and the private sector to fit an agenda, which, as far as we can see, now seems to be blank. That has gone now. They are out there trying to do their own thing, in some cases independently. We put money into the Grower Group Alliance, which undertakes a bit of coordinating activity across all the grower groups. If someone from overseas came here, they

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were sent to the whole group and work was not repeated between the different groups. There was a bit of an agenda that we tried to support.

I think we built 2 000 weather stations across the wheatbelt and in areas of the south west land division. That agenda was not about finding out whether it was going to rain in the gulf on Saturday; it was about supporting the information that the private sector needed to put in place multi-peril crop protection insurance that farmers could utilise. It was about managing risk. Understanding the rainfall at a much more granular level enabled the necessary information to be provided for those investments to come to the table. Those weather stations are out there now. People drive past them along Albany Highway. They look like a little spinning thing. They are only small. I think they cost \$2 500 each. Of course, as the member for Moore said, Doppler radar and all those sorts of things are tools that farmers can use in their decision-making, and private sector groups can offer risk-management tools in that space for farmers to access and utilise.

We put an extra \$20 million into biosecurity. The government has also done that, which is good to see. The best protection we can have is to keep out the things that we do not have. Keeping a level of investment in that space is really important.

Mobile phone towers do not sound very important for the ag sector, but they are. There are 344 new towers in WA. The minister and the government certainly support that, which is pleasing to see. Increasingly, that is moving towards broadband, IT networks and fast internet services, because that supports the technology in the ag space, and that was highlighted by the member for Central Wheatbelt.

I come back to the key points. When the minister responds, if he is going to articulate \$131.5 million, what is the base number that sits in the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development? If he does not know that, he cannot spruik what might or might not be extra. It has now been buried in a superagency. Trying to find the lines between the different organisations or different subsets is near on impossible. We did not get the answers during the estimates hearing. It would surprise me if the minister could provide them now, because very specific questions were asked and the answers did not come out then. It is a very blurry space and we are not getting any understanding of it. When the minister stands up, he should articulate in his own words a vision for the sector in Western Australia and how government interacts with the private sector to make a difference for an \$8.6 billion sector. As the member for Moore highlighted, that is not the value-add part of it; that is just the raw agriculture sector—the broad commodity base. The notion that royalties for regions funds can be included in that number and the government can say that it is new money, it will not stop and it will keep on being invested is inconsistent with the lines it was running against us for the Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture program that we rolled out. Likewise, the Grains Research and Development Corporation funds cannot be guaranteed year in and year out, so it should not be in any number that the government produces. It is a number that is negotiated from year to year, depending on the investment priorities and the research and development programs that have matching funding.

There is a lot for the Minister for Agriculture and Food to think about. We on this side do not believe the minister has done a good job in this space. There is no agenda and there is no investment decision that makes any sense. That is, sadly, the state of affairs of the priority that this government is showing for the agriculture space. As the member for Moore articulated very well, the government cannot say in its third budget what it is doing without having some sort of ownership of what it did in its first two budgets. At the very least, it should have some sort of agenda and plan.

This debate has highlighted that there are still a few Luddites over there. There is no agenda. The investment decisions that the government has made are smoke and mirrors. The ag sector is significant to Western Australia. The ag sector has massive opportunities. It will not be stuck on \$8.6 billion. There are massive investment opportunities, particularly in the north. The Water for Food space was laying out the initial foundations of that, but there is a long way to go and it needs government to play a leading role. I have been a little bit critical of industry in some cases. I think the leadership in industry is a little fragmented, and that is showing through in some of the broader discussions between the two main agri-political groups out there. But government can play a role in trying to pull that together. I do not believe that is happening with this government. It is certainly not happening with the Minister for Agriculture and Food. We would love to hear in the response from the minister in this place what his vision is for the ag sector in Western Australia.

MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury) [5.38 pm]: I stand to make a sensible contribution to what is a particularly mean and miserable motion.

Mr R.S. Love: Come on! What a way to start.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: It is. I have been in this place now for two years and when I first entered Parliament, I thought that I had some pretty good views and ideals about the role of an opposition. I thought we would get some sensible

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action to hold government to account and that it would help sharpen a path of thinking in debate so that we would get better outcomes. But what have I found over the past two years?

Point of Order

Mr R.S. LOVE: This contribution has no relevance to the motion at hand and I ask you to bring the speaker back to the relevant motion.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Points of order are heard in silence. Member for Collie–Preston, I call you for the first time. Leader of the House, you have already been called. Points of order are heard in silence. There is no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.T. PUNCH: In the words of the great Paul Keating, I intend to do the opposition slowly today!

I thought oppositions were about helping to stimulate good quality debate, but over the last two years, time and again, all I have heard is negativity: how terrible the world is and how terrible the government is. There may have been a few exceptions, but there have been not very many sensible contributions for taking our great state forward in a visionary sort of way. I hope that in the remaining two years things start to improve a little.

We need to acknowledge that governments approach things differently from oppositions. The opposition holds this view about the past and what it achieved in government, but the reality is that there has been a change of government, and changes of government bring a different perspective. The opposition might well long for the sorts of things it has done in the past, but we have a different approach, and that is the issue that the opposition has to recognise and critique us on, rather than weeping and wailing about what it has seen in the past.

I want to talk about two points that the Leader of the National Party made in her contribution. One was a critique of the department's structure. We know that the department is going through enormous change; it has to go through enormous change, because industry is changing and the state is changing, and we have to be nimble and adapt as we go. The opposition is trying to create a sense that the eight and a half years of its time in government was characterised by stability, vision, planning and an orderly rollout of programs. I remember the famous Western Australian regional development commission—one commission for the whole state; that did not last very long. Then there was a nexus of restructuring, with the Department of Regional Development and the commissions trying to work out their respective roles and never getting any clear sight or leadership from members opposite about their vision for regional development. Of course, agriculture is a major part of regional development.

The second thing that the Leader of the National Party raised that I want to talk about generally is the issue of opportunity cost. Opportunity cost is about choice and having degrees of freedom to exercise choice so that pathways forward can be selected to decide which will achieve the best outcomes, and being focused on outcomes. Over eight and half years the previous government went from a situation in which we had a pretty positive fiscal position to one in which we have a debt of up to \$40 billion. There is an enormous difference between going out and saying, "Oh, I fancy doing this project over here" or "We'll roll out this strategy over there; we'll do this in agriculture and spend, spend, spend", and what this government has to do, which is to take a much more strategic view and look at where the returns on investment are and make sure that we operate with the fiscal discipline that Langoulant clearly identified as lacking in the previous government.

It was not all roses over those eight and a half years. We had a situation of continual structural debate within regional development and, as I will talk about a little further on, continual structural reform and agendas within the Department of Agriculture. There was also a complete lack of fiscal responsibility, which means that this government has had to make some pretty tough decisions. We have had the courage to make those decisions and to hold true to them and build resilience into the state's financial position, so that we are in a position from which we can go forward with a clear agenda that is affordable and will leave the state in a much better situation.

It may surprise members, but I actually have a long history of contact with the agricultural sector. When I first came to Australia I went down to Manjimup. That is a fantastic place for horticultural production, and potato production back in the day. I remember picking potatoes, the old back-breaking way. I still know farmers down there: Del and Keith Edwards have a beef farm at Palgarup, which is a family farm that has been handed down. Most of the dairy area was built on old, traditional family farms and they were a great contribution to the agricultural sector. When I was a student I did what many students did and worked on the wheat bins, and was exposed to the grain industry. I started in a place called Ogilvie, just near Binu, and I can still remember the families and individuals up there, such as Python Drage. The wheat was Australian Hard, back in the day, and there was oats and barley. They went through many challenges. I worked my way through all the wheat bin areas, through to Calingiri, over a number of years.

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It is quite interesting; I took a bit of a tour back through those areas in the member for Moore's electorate and had a look at them, and it was quite intriguing just how much capital investment had taken place in the bulk handling arena. I got a sense of positivism out of those agricultural areas. It has been an interesting journey in getting to know those groups. My first posting in the public sector was in Moora, and I frequently worked with farmers and understood the sorts of challenges and experiences they faced, but I also gained a really good appreciation of what it was like to live in the bush. Virtually all my career has been spent in regional WA, gaining an understanding of the real trials within the ag sector but also the real sense of community and positivity that exists out there. I have seen that continuing right the way through. The importance of an agricultural department to that sector is enormous.

I have had a look at the ag sector over the term of the previous government. Back in 2008–09 when the previous government was first elected, the Department of Agriculture had an operating income of \$301 million and 1 591 staff, so it was a pretty good, solid department. It had a clear sense of purpose and direction and it had been working through the issues of change that had emerged with regard to dairy deregulation and the exposure of our horticultural sector to imports from overseas and interstate. It was really quite a buoyant organisation.

By 2012–13 the total cost of services had dropped to \$226 million and it had 1 285 FTE. That is quite a significant difference. In 2014–15, the total cost of services was at \$221.9 million, so again, that is a continual drop in expenditure. At the time of that drop in expenditure, Hon Nigel Hallett was a Liberal backbencher in the Legislative Council. In a PerthNow article headed "Agriculture job cuts increase WA biosecurity threat: MP", he accused the director of the Department of Agriculture of —

... slashing his own cash-strapped department "without a whimper".

That was in June 2015. From my reading of the annual reports, it clearly looks like there had been a program of slashing expenditure and cutting back on the department, and then what happened? One of the backbenchers got up and blamed the poor director general, who was trying to make sense of what it was he had to deal with, and the scope and functions of the department, as it rapidly changed as a consequence of those cutbacks.

The director general responded and said —

... the department remains focused on the plan to double agricultural production by 2025 ...

That was visionary, but, at the same time, the government was cutting back on resources. I wondered why that might have been the case and why it happened around 2013, which was around the time of the second election in the term of the previous government. It was also when the Liberal side of the previous government was able to govern in its own right; it did not need the balance of power with the National Party, so I think the balance of power within the cabinet room might have subtly shifted a bit. One thing I do know the National Party holds dear is the agricultural sector, and it was subject to a continual slashing of funds. Maybe there was growing realisation in the government of the time that they were heading for a train wreck with the budget, that the fiscal forecast was not looking particularly bright and that cuts would have to be made. Maybe there was a little bit of pushback about the scope of how the National Party had managed to leverage a second Treasury through royalties for regions in the first term of the previous government. Maybe that was the case. I do not know, because at that time, of course, I was more of an observer from within the public sector than a player within the government.

Mr D.T. Redman: And, I might add, a strong advocate of royalties for regions.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am still a very strong advocate for royalties for regions. I am very glad that the legislation has not changed. I was dismayed when the Western Australian Regional Development Trust raised the issue of the funding of core government services back in 2013 or thereabouts. That was when the Regional Development trust, in its capacity of holding royalties for regions in trust and holding the government to account for how it was spent, first started to raise the alarm bells about the use of RforR to fund core services. The clearest example of that was the funding of the development commissions and the then Department of Regional Development out of RforR. They were previously funded under consolidated revenue, but they magically appeared on the books as a grant from royalties for regions. When we talk about the substitution of what would traditionally be core government business, I still think there is enormous difficulty in separating out what is core business and what is not. That was a problem with royalties for regions. That was a problem with programs like Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture, in that nobody really knew how to spend this big bucket of money. I well remember the planning and thinking about shifting it from program to program, working things up, wondering whether it could be spent and wondering whether it could be spent within the cap annually—all those sorts of questions became the preoccupation, rather than there being a focus on good program development based on outcomes and good evaluation. Those are the very things that the member for Warren–Blackwood was talking about. Yes, I am a big advocate for royalties for regions, and I will continue to be an advocate for royalties for regions. But as I said right at the beginning of my contribution, I recognise that this government will spend in accordance with the fiscal discipline it has generated for itself and which it needs to maintain for the whole of the state. It will be different from how it has been used in the past, but it will still be used for the benefit of regional Western Australia.

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When I was thinking about the debate today, I was maybe expecting less criticism and a bit more of an alternative vision. The member for Warren–Blackwood talked a little about that, but I was actually expecting something from the Nationals WA on some of the topical issues in agriculture—things like precision agriculture and some of the new technologies being applied to agriculture. Something that I know the Minister for Agriculture and Food is very keen on is the areas of regenerative agriculture and soil and land management. They are some of the frontier areas in research. In the middle of the agricultural cuts that I spoke about, I actually remember being approached by industry members from the ag sector who were concerned about the rapid loss of intellectual knowledge out of the department as a consequence of redundancies, and of that knowledge disappearing to the eastern states, particularly in the research sector. They wanted to look at how the private sector could take up some sort of centre of excellence in terms of the research expertise that was being rapidly lost to the department under the previous government’s watch. That is really critical when we are asking what agriculture is going to look like in five, 10 or 15 years’ time, because it has been going through enormous change. I know that members on both sides of this house have been very concerned about the impact of that change on farming families.

I thought National Party members might make more of a contribution on the guiding light, in where the sector is heading. I did go to “Big” Nick. During the last federal election campaign, I wanted to see what the federal contribution might be. We heard a lot about “Big” Nick from the member for Roe. I met “Big” Nick in Bunbury. He did not say a lot, but I did meet him. I met him at a very special gathering at Maker + Co, which is an innovative start-up sort of service that has developed in Bunbury, which is quite a contradiction in terms to “Big” Nick. I have pulled out four of “Big” Nick’s policies. This has actually gone off the website now. I might get this signed by “Big” Nick one day, as it could be a collector’s item, because it has disappeared from the website and people cannot go back and see what he was promising. He was very concerned about higher education contribution scheme relief in regional WA. His policy was that if anyone went back to work in regional WA, they would not have to pay their HECS fees. That is very laudable. Another policy was to expand the defence presence in WA’s north, with an 800-strong military base.

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I do not know how defence or education and HECS relate to this motion. I urge you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to bring the member back to the motion that we are debating.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, just make sure that you focus on the motion we are debating.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I certainly can, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank you for your guidance. They clearly do not like a few home truths, because where I am coming to with this is that there is not a skerrick of an agricultural vision in this document, which is what members opposite were talking about. “Big” Nick’s policies also included removing tax benefits for fly in, fly out operations and free entry to the National Anzac Centre in Albany. But where was agriculture? Where was the future of agriculture? We heard a lot about animal welfare in the lead-up to the federal election, but there was nothing in those policies about animal welfare. If we are really serious about the frontier issues in agriculture, we need to embrace the issues around value-adding, animal welfare and the coexistence of the agricultural sector with the community in a way that grows and makes the agricultural sector prosper. I am not seeing that. What we had under the eight and a half years of the previous government was three different ministers.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: What about you? You had two housing ministers in the first three months.

Mr W.J. Johnston: In four days.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: Four days!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There were three different ministers. Where was the carriage of intellectual vision across three different ministers? Under the former government, funding for the Department of Agriculture and Food was reduced by around 25 per cent. It is no wonder that Trevor Whittington has been so positive in his praise of this side of the house. Trevor was a former chief of staff of an agriculture minister. The previous government also built a further 37 per cent cut into its forward estimates. DAFWA had dispensed with all non-core staff by 2013.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I know that members opposite are very interested in this topic! I might come back to my tour through the member for Moore’s electorate afterwards.

The former DAFWA had dispensed with all non-core staff by 2013. I am not sure what non-core staff are. By then, the cuts I mentioned earlier that were causing the director general and Nigel Hallett, a former member of the other place, so much pain were built in. It was starting to cut into core capabilities. That is when I started to hear that whisper in the industry about the future of research. Questions were asked about the ability to retain the intellectual

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capacity that was rapidly going over east through a brain drain, because people did not see a positive future here. That impact was partially offset by transferring some core staff to RforR-funded projects. I do not take away the fact that there were some very good projects. I have had a look at the list; there were some very good projects. Alternatively, they went to externally funded sources. We have heard about projects such as the regional men's health initiative; the regional workers incentives allowance payments; Perth Royal Show concessions, with free entry for children; the wild dog management program; and Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture. Well do I remember the head scratching about what would be involved in Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture. Northern Beef Futures was another good policy.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: That was a good policy.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am not taking away the fact that they were good policies. What I am saying is that the ag department was being decimated. Maybe there were some issues within the Liberal–National alliance that meant that the ag department was seen as an easy target in terms of the consolidated revenue reductions that were being experienced. In came RforR and its substitution for core government services. I would have thought that the ag department would be well and truly into areas such as Northern Beef Futures and that that would be part of its core business. We found that core staff were being funded through RforR to deliver on those programs. Then, of course, there was the radar as an enabling technology project. That was a great project until the Minister for Regional Development, on climbing up the first of the towers, found the “Made in South Australia” tag. It was a lost opportunity.

We found that the culture of the ag department shifted from long-term visionary planning to expanding RforR within the legislative requirements of how it must be spent on a short-term ad hoc basis. It lost its ability to be in charge of advising government on a clear strategic agenda. That short-term funding resulted in many staff being offered only short-term contracts, which makes it really difficult to maintain quality staff into the long term and offer staff an opportunity to build a career inside an important agency. The sum total of what the former government left us after eight and a half years is a legacy of an ag department that was considerably diminished in its capability by dint of a lack of resources and a lack of flexibility in having to meet numerous grant agreements with the former Department of Regional Development. It essentially had to give its power away to another agency.

Based on the budgets that we inherited, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development was forecast to decline from 1 640 FTEs to around 1 300 FTEs over the next four years. That was what the former government left us. That was its legacy. It really frustrates me when I listen to the opposition and the National Party move motions such as this. I know what is really happening; the grabs go on Facebook that say to the constituents, “We’re in here lobbying for your interests against a government that has no commitment to you whatsoever.” That is the rhetoric behind it all, yet we have a strong commitment to agriculture. The Minister for Agriculture and Food; Regional Development has been a fantastic minister. She has been around the regions talking and listening to people, and building a platform based on industry input and industry connection. That makes all the difference. I am very pleased to be an observer of what the minister has achieved. I look forward to the integration of regional development, agriculture and fisheries that will come out of DPIRD—the primary industries agenda of this state in recognition of the fantastic contribution that it makes.

It is pointless coming in here and moving these sorts of motions, which I describe as mean-spirited. After eight and a half years of huge debt build-up, we need to work with industry through pretty difficult times with a sense of positivism and a sense of the future. If members of the opposition had come into this place and articulated a clear vision and a clear pathway forward, I am sure that the Minister for Regional Development would have been the first to acknowledge that and the first to work with them to take positive ideas forward. To come in here and weep and wail over the decisions that we are making and the contribution that we are making to this sector in our term of government lets it down considerably as an opposition.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [6.02 pm]: I wish to make a very brief contribution to the motion moved by the member for Moore. Members have provided a lot of detail in their speeches today. The thing that struck me with the budget reply speeches is that every metropolitan member got up in this place and spruiked the \$131.5 million of new money for agriculture. I do not know what goes on, but it appears to me that the Treasurer hoodwinked not only people out in the regions and WAFarmers, but also his own members. It was quite disturbing to see that nearly every single metropolitan member had been told to get up in this chamber and talk about the \$131.5 million of new money that has come into this budget. That seemed to be the theme. As the member for Warren–Blackwood mentioned, we cannot get to the baseline. I was quite appalled when I watched the estimates committee hearings. All that the members for Moore and Cottesloe seemed to get in response to their questioning was that the former departments of agriculture and food, regional development, and fisheries combined to make up a fairly new department, so the government was not quite sure where it allocated the money. There was some here and some there. There seemed to be a blurred line. That was the thing that struck me during those estimates. That is one point that I wished to make.

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The other point that I really want to focus on is the Grains Research and Development Corporation levies. Putting \$22.5 million into the government's budget is a dodgy practice, quite frankly. Every tonne of grain that farmers deliver has a levy put on it. That levy goes to the GRDC and is used mainly for research and development. I do not believe that it is right and proper that this government claims that that is part of its budget. I would like to think that in years ahead, it will not appear in the budget.

I wish to briefly speak about some former royalties for regions projects. I think the former Liberal–National government had a fantastic track record on royalties for regions, in particular, in the agricultural sector. Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture was mentioned. That initiative attracted a unique \$300 million funding package over five years. I would like to talk about a couple of the items funded by that package. We have spoken about the Doppler radars. They are an absolutely essential element of our farming sector. The \$23 million that was allocated to them is fantastic money and well spent. I would like to compliment the three members in front of me who were an integral part of that, and also the member for North West Central. They had that vision and they understood the importance of accurate information on rainfall data for the likes of spraying and cultivation. That is absolutely essential for our farmers. When I go out to the Newdegate Machinery Field Days every year, I see the Doppler radar that has been built. The member for Moore mentioned the one in Geraldton. I know that money has been allocated to the site in Esperance, with its completion not too far away, and Albany recently launched one. This network goes right throughout the state.

Another project I want to mention is the \$22 million state agricultural telecommunications infrastructure improvement fund, of which Tim Shanahan is the chair, and Steve Mason is the CEO. They have done a fantastic job lobbying the government. We had that money available. I am concerned that there was enthusiasm amongst members of the previous Liberal–National government for a network right throughout the whole wheatbelt—right throughout our agricultural regions. The fund was also used to run optic fibre down our railway lines to connect areas that were not covered and get networks out to the last mile providers so that everyone in the agricultural sector could have improved telecommunications.

The jewel in the crown is the \$49.3 million Transform Peel project at Nambeelup. I am sure that the member for Mandurah would be reaping the benefits of that. It is a fantastic project and I am looking forward to seeing how it develops over the year. I am sure the member will enlighten us as we move forward. It is of benefit to his electorate. I should not imagine that there would be too much criticism there.

Another project that is important to me is the \$10 million sheep feed facility that was built at the Katanning research facility. I think we have recognised how important our sheep are to our ag sector and the research that has been done. I notice that an announcement was made last week about how sheep convert feed to muscle and so forth.

I think that is a continuation of the good policy that was set in place by the previous government.

Mr M.P. Murray: I heard you were trying to breed one with five legs!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No. There are no problems with that down our way. It could be an issue in Collie, but there are certainly no problems with us!

The one I want to draw everyone's attention to is the policy document of the ag minister, *Call of the Reed Warbler*. Members will recall that I have previously brought this to the attention of the Premier. That is of concern to me. Some chapters that I will bring to members' attention are Gondwanan Ark, Dynamic Whole, Call of the Reed Warbler, and Dancing Under the Moon. I think there is a little bit of scepticism. It is focused on regenerative farming. I host a regenerative farming group at Parliament House. I am learning about that all the time. In this day and age, I do not think this needs to be the basis of our ag policy.

I want to mention a couple of other things, including the regional education cuts that took place under this government. It took the confidence out of our ag sector. The one that comes to mind the most is the ag college trust fund. We lost 20 per cent. Our ag colleges have a group that gets together to talk about their machinery requirements and what is needed. They share ideas. It is a fantastic scenario. I thought it was a cheap shot to pull out 20 per cent of that money.

The member for Central Wheatbelt spoke about the Muresk Institute. That is another one that is taking confidence away from our regional sector. As we know, education and health are very important to everyone in the regions. Seriously, taking away the boarding away from home allowance was not impressive. Many of our ag families are disadvantaged by distance. Obviously, the final one was the Moora Residential College. We have spoken about it many times. It was saved by Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack, and also Mathias Cormann from the federal Liberal Party. We were out there rallying in the Moora community, along with the member for Moore. The member for North West Central did a fantastic job rallying and talking about the regional education cuts. It all comes in to part of this package in which agriculture is so important to the state of WA. The member for Warren–Blackwood spoke about \$8.6 billion. Australia is looking to a target of \$100 billion by about the year 2025. We are currently

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at \$59 billion. Our regional people were kicked but they have bounced back up. They fought hard, and well done to them.

I want to talk briefly about the regional development commissions. Every regional development commission worked hard to put a blueprint together. There are nine regional development commissions around the state. Agriculture was a very important part of each of those nine development commissions, whether it was the Kimberley, the Pilbara or the south west. We heard from the previous CEO of the South West Development Commission. I was chair of the Great Southern Development Commission. We worked with ag, our natural resource management groups, Landcare and our farming groups. When I first became involved with the National Party, the member for Warren–Blackwood was the ag minister. He rang me up and asked me to bring some farmers to the ag department in Katanning. He said he wanted to learn what is important to our farmers about what the ag department provides. He was a hands-on minister. He was getting advice about how important the ag department was and what elements of the ag department were important to our farmers. That is what happened with our development commissions. Unfortunately, the way I see it, our development commissions have been gutted. They have all had a change of board and a change of chairman. The funding is not there. They are struggling for purpose. I call on the government to come back into the mix with some funding to really help our regional development commissions go back out there.

The member for Bunbury told us to talk about something that is positive. Our farmers are the most advanced in the world. To be honest, a lot of them have to do it themselves. The former Liberal–National government gave them recognition. Seizing the Opportunity Agriculture helped out the likes of the South East Premium Wheat Growers Association in Esperance. That is one of the most advanced farming groups in the state. The crops at Precision Agriculture are fantastic. It is very advanced, as is the Facey Group. Southern Dirt is another one that combined sheep and grain. We really supported it. It was at the forefront of our thinking when it came to ag.

We have been asking: What is the baseline? What is the trajectory? That is what we cannot get. It seems to be the blurred line in the state budget. That is exactly why the member for Moore has moved this motion. We cannot identify where the line is. What is the baseline? What is the upside? Why has the government included \$22.35 million of Grains Research and Development Corporation R&D funding? Quite frankly, I think that money has been taken out of this budget rather than increased, as all our metro members were talking about. The government needs to have a good, hard look at itself.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston — Minister for Seniors and Ageing) [6.16 pm]: Deputy Speaker —

Mr D.T. Redman: This is going to be good!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I am sure the member will be disappointed that I will not be up here for the full 20 minutes! The first thing I am going to ask these white knights from the bush, who call themselves the National Party, is how many live in their electorates? I think we had better call a count to see whether some are misleading Parliament! I know that some members have moved into the city.

One thing about the member for Bunbury and I is that we have maintained our positions in the country areas. We listen to the people in those country areas and we understand them. We are not part of the Vic Park or Claremont coffee set. We are true blue, living in our electorates. When I was googling, if that is a word, I came across the royalties for regions website and saw a very fresh faced–looking young man who was on the board of directors named Mr Rundle. That meant he was a part of the directorship when the money was wasted. The money was blown across the world. He was so young when that photo was taken that he still had pimples on his chin! I can understand that. He did not understand what was going on; he had it put over him by some more senior National Party people.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I am sure. The member must be embarrassed about that. The member for Warren–Blackwood was party to and a director of that group of people with Tim Shanahan and a few others. I hope the member learnt some lessons from there. What it really proved to me was that it was a great breeding space for Nationals candidates. They all got their directions from there.

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I do not know how this is relevant to the motion moved by the member for Moore.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think the motion is from the Leader of the —

Mr R.S. Love: It is to do with agriculture spending.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have the wrong one.

Debate Resumed

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Mr M.P. MURRAY: With all due respect, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is quite a long lead-in, I must say, but I will get to the point. It is about the decisions made for country sections of the ag department and the pork-barrelling in some of the midwest areas and the Pilbara. However, some of those shires are now struggling to keep their facilities going.

I come back to some of the areas that concerned me at the time and that was the gutting of staff numbers in the ag department sections in Albany and Bunbury. In the Bunbury office, staff numbers were stripped down from 25 or 28 to about three. The same occurred in Albany and upper Geraldton. When I went to, I think, Merredin, during debate on genetically modified farming, I went to see what research was being done. It was the weirdest thing because all the doors were shut and I thought: That's a funny sort of office. There was no-one in the office. I felt as though I was captive or something like that because the departmental people and advisers from the minister's office were following me around. I was not allowed to open a door and the staff were not allowed to talk to me because they did not want to talk about what they were doing along GM lines. Having said that, staff numbers were stripped out well and truly before the last election. I am glad to see that the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Alannah MacTiernan, has recognised that and is putting people back into those positions. We need them there. It is great to see that that is happening, yet the mob across the chamber is whingeing. I do not quite understand why, when we are giving back something that they took away, they are having a crack at this government about it. It is really sad that rather than supporting the industry, they are being negative and dragging it down.

Let us look at a few other things that happened in that time. I am sure members opposite will recall the \$20 million promised for the rail line to help Manjimup, another country town, and Donnybrook. However, the rail line was "relocated"—taken out and lost.

Mr D.T. Redman: Hon Alannah MacTiernan closed it.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: No; it was already closed. We were going to open it.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The member for Warren–Blackwood knows that we are talking about it because it was in his area and he is completely embarrassed about what happened there.

Let us look at the Boyanup saleyards when the member for Warren–Blackwood was there. He removed the money for planning et cetera and used it for a truck wash in Esperance. Is that true, member?

Mr D.T. Redman: Where?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: When he was there, he took out the Boyanup saleyards money and used it for a truck wash in Esperance. He let down the south west cattle industry. Still to this day, we are trying to reach a position on the saleyards. Private enterprise wanted to be part of that but the member for Warren–Blackwood took the seed money away and collapsed the industry in that area.

I am amazed about the opposition's comments on biosecurity. Fancy talking about biosecurity being removed. The Nationals took away the sparrow keepers on the Esperance strip. He has let the sparrows come across the desert. Five people worked down there.

Mr D.A. Templeman: I knew one of them.

Point of Order

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I believe the member should be talking about starlings; they are not sparrows. He should put the record straight.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is not a point of order but good try.

Debate Resumed

Mr M.P. MURRAY: He can call them what he likes. What we call them depends on which country we live in.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: The member for Moore should not talk. He was too frightened to even vote the other night and now he wants to have a say. I was so frightened the other night because he came out so quickly that I had to drop the shoulder because I thought he was going to run over the top of me. I thought he was a rugby player coming towards me. The vote was on and out he went! Geez! It was really, really rough. The keepers of the sparrows or starlings or whatever we want to call them, were disbanded by the member for Warren–Blackwood's government. If we get an influx of starlings there, it will cost a lot of money to get rid of them. Further to that, the staff numbers at the stock checkpoint in Kalgoorlie was brought back to one person working there. As a result, after coming across central Australia, the cattle had to stay on the truck for longer before being inspected. The number of staff

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was wound back. I am not even sure whether it remains to this day. People up there can tell me. It was wound back from about 10 people to one token person on the stock gate. Do not say that we have not done our share when it was the member for Warren–Blackwood and his government that gutted the biosecurity at the time. In addition, it allowed weeds such as cottonbush to run riot over the south west. I do not know what we will do about it; it has been let go. His government also removed the biosecurity requirements attached to blackberry bushes. A defining line had been drawn to indicate which blackberries had to be sprayed and which did not. That line has been removed and it is accepted that there is a problem there. It all happened under the member for Warren–Blackwood’s government. It is incredible, to say the least, for the member to have the audacity to criticise the current minister.

I am sure there are a few more notes here. I remember that at one stage privatisation of all these areas was happening rapidly under the leadership of the member for Warren–Blackwood. But what happened? He was removed from that position because he was so behind and so close to the Premier—somebody used other terms about what he was doing, he was that close—then he was rolled; he was kicked out; he was moved on because of the divisions within his party. We know who caused those divisions because he has been around for a while. He swapped sides; he has played chess in the political arena but he missed out. He thought he was going to get a ministerial spot, but he missed out and he is still sitting on the backbench in his nice white shirt. I will not mention any names! He is still there up the back. Maybe he should have stayed with this side. No; he would not have won his seat; people would not have accepted him.

Back to the issue of agriculture. The minister also—I was glad this was corrected—did a lot of work to get the dog fence built in the Murchison and down further, which was something that needed to be done. It is a shame that an acknowledgement of it being fixed had to be prompted. I must take my hat off to the graziers and farmers who have worked very hard and stretched the value of one dollar into about \$50 worth of work by getting involved and having their own groups work on different sections of the fence. That is the way true-blue Aussies want to work so that we can stretch out that money out and get results.

There are a few other issues here. Another one the member for Warren–Blackwood mentioned was the Ord River expansion for which he gave credit to the Nationals. I will go back quite some time. Many members were not here then, so I will give them the benefit of the doubt. The first person to sign off on the second round was John Bowler, who at the time was the minister for regional development. I think the member was on that trip. The member cannot deny that he was up there when we made the announcement in Kununurra or Broome. That was the start of that. To hear members opposite try to take credit for that is just incredible. It is not fair that they are trying to change history to suit their own selfish ways.

I have watched the member for North West Central stand up three times. He is getting a bit of exercise in! That is probably the most exercise he has done for a while. I probably should do some myself.

Something that let me down very close to home was the so-called SuperTowns strategy that was introduced by the Nationals WA. Some areas got all the money while others got very little. The newer members of Parliament should consider what happened. In the SuperTown in my area, there are only 1 000 people left. If members look at some of the reports that have been released, there is certainly plenty of evidence to suggest that throwing money towards prettying those towns and brightening them up was not enough; they needed an economic base. It did not matter whether it was in agriculture or industry, royalties for regions missed the mark. Despite those towns having nice roads and facilities, they had no future because they did not have an economic base and people to work there.

This motion is way off the mark. Given the time to repair the damage the former government did, the Minister for Agriculture and Food will do a very good job.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [6.31 pm]: I did not know the dodo was alive! The member for Collie–Preston is obviously very misguided and extinct when it comes to what has happened in regional development and agriculture in previous years. The Minister for Agriculture and Food is totally against the agriculture sector because she does not want live exports. How can we have an ag minister who is against a major plank of regional Western Australia, being live exports? The member for Roe —

Mr M.P. Murray: This is a serious interjection. Wasn’t it the federal minister that shut it down?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The Western Australian Minister for Agriculture and Food campaigned against live exports. There is a photo of her doing so on Fremantle Traffic Bridge. Quite clearly, she advocates against live exports. Obviously, the Minister for Agriculture and Food reads her agriculture bible, *Call Of The Reed Warbler: a New Agriculture a New Earth*.

Clearly, the \$131 million worth of new money is not new money. The Minister for Agriculture and Food should probably read *Accounting for Dummies* because she and the department need to make sense of accounting basics and read and understand financial statements. I will give a copy of that book to the Minister for Agriculture and Food because clearly the \$131 million is smoke and mirrors. The people of Western Australia, especially those in

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the agriculture sector, have been misled to the tune of \$131.5 million. When we speak to government bureaucrats in the superagency, they all say the same thing: “We don’t know what we’re doing. We don’t have the staff requirements to carry out our functions.” That is the constant and common theme we hear when we speak to staff in the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development superagency. How can the government put so many agencies into one department and know what is going? Everyone in agriculture knows that the Nationals WA in government delivered. Everyone in agriculture knows that the Labor Party is against agriculture because it is against live exports. It is quite clear: the federal election proved the fact that people in WA support live exports. Clearly that is the case. Perhaps people in some of the metropolitan seats do not, but they do in regional Western Australia. It is all intertwined. The government is portraying a constant theme. There is a constant theme of cuts to regional Western Australia, which was capped off at the end of 2017 with changes to regional education, including the Schools of the Air, the Moora Residential College cuts and so forth. They are a part of agriculture because people who live and work in the bush have families in the bush who need to be schooled. The government tried to take away the Schools of the Air and the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which are iconic in Australian history.

I turn to what the National Party was able to deliver through royalties for regions in my patch. It provided \$25 million to the Gascoyne Food Bowl initiative. Flood mitigation had been talked about for more than 60 years but no government was able to deliver in that area until royalties for regions came around. That flood mitigation strategy involved putting some dirt around Carnarvon to stop the water affecting the horticultural industry.

Mr M.P. Murray: I think you’re stretching the lucky.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We stretched that \$45 million into \$60 million when the federal government came up with \$15 million. We used \$45 million from royalties for regions and \$15 million from the federal government for flood mitigation for Carnarvon to save its horticultural industry. Impacts on the horticultural industry affect the town of Carnarvon which affect the Gascoyne which affect the price of food in Perth.

Mr M.P. Murray: You’re not going to mention some of the corruption that went on with it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Stand up; I want to know what that corruption is. If you have something, stand up!

Mr M.P. Murray: You were leaking to me about what was happening, don’t you forget.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: There was no leaking. I think the member is gasbagging a bit. He should stand up and say if there is anything untoward about the flood mitigation project.

The National Party came through with royalties for regions funding for the infrastructure and piping to get water around for the horticulture industry. The Water for Food program unlocked potential and allowed us to see what water is available in the Gascoyne, the Pilbara, the Kimberley and right around the state. A lot of work went into surveying the water quality. It was absolutely vital work for not only the pastoral industry, but also industry in general if the opportunity arises to develop land, whether it be diversification of the pastoral industry through centre pivot irrigation, growing feed or even towards horticulture. Work was done under the previous government through Water for Food.

I am glad that the member for Collie–Preston spoke about the Murchison vermin cell. I will give members some history about it. It has no stronger advocate than me; indeed, at times that advocacy caused a bit of tension between me and the then Minister for Regional Development and Minister for Agriculture and Food, the member for Warren-Blackwood. The National Party put in \$1.25 million through royalties for regions for the fence, but it fell short. The current Labor state government put \$1 million into it. The federal government put \$2.2 million into it via a member of the National Party who was then the agriculture minister. National Party members can hold their heads quite high when it comes to the Murchison vermin cell, which allows 53 pastoral stations to have small livestock. Once the cell is fenced off, it will need some more money to employ doggers to clear the cell that has been created. Once the capital investment occurs by those pastoralists, that will generate an economic boost for towns like Mt Magnet, Cue, Meekatharra, Sandstone and Yalgoo in the Murchison area. Stay tuned. The National Party led the way in the Murchison. Trials of growing hay have been done in Tom Price in a partnership between Rio Tinto and the government. Those opportunities have occurred right around the state.

I know that we have spoken about phone towers. The ability to have connectivity in areas such as the Murchison, Gascoyne and Pilbara is absolutely vital to agriculture. Telecommunications is vital to businesses—something that everyone takes for granted. A huge amount of money was invested in the agriculture sector by the previous government and the return from the agriculture sector to the state of Western Australia is huge. This government is short-changing that and is trying to dress up \$131 million as new money, when staff are saying that they do not have support, there are not enough of them and they have been cut to the bone. When we see the Minister for Agriculture and Food hold up a sign that says that she is against live exports, how can that person lead a vital industry into the future? If the government is saying that \$131 million is new money, I say to the government that

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it should not worry about the *Call of the Reed Warbler*; I think it should start with *Accounting for Dummies*. That is the only way it will be able to work out how much money is being spent on agriculture.

Several members interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The few members in the chamber who are shouting out will not be around in 2021, because people have woken up to the way that the Labor Party tries to dress up a duck as a chicken or a chicken as a duck.

Mr D.T. Redman: Sparrows and swallows!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Sparrows and swallows!

Mr D.A. Templeman: You're a goose.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister must be a little piglet then. We know who the dummies are.

We all know that the people have woken up to the fact that this government does not know what it is doing in the bureaucracy in Western Australia. It is in disarray. It is under-resourced. The people of Western Australia, particularly those in the ag sector, know that they need the National Party back in government. Clearly, this government takes the agriculture sector for granted.

Several members interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I am sure that at the 2021 election, the members who are yelling out will not be in this chamber. I have seen members come and go and I will see these ones come and go.

I definitely support the motion moved by the member for Moore. It is spot on. Like I said, the Minister for Agriculture and Food should get *Accounting for Dummies*.

MR I.C. BLAYNEY (Geraldton) [6.43 pm]: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr D.A. Templeman: You asked me some questions and you won't let me answer them.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: I will not be too long. I am really looking forward to hearing from the Sir Les Patterson of Mandurah!

I was relieved to see the hole filled in this year's budget for agriculture with the conclusion of those royalties for regions projects. I was genuinely worried that that would not happen, which would have been quite serious. However, this puts us back on the same base. I think the minister made that point during the estimates hearing. It is probably always the case that restructuring a department takes longer than is expected, and that is certainly the case with the current restructuring of this department. It is working its way through the three-pillar model; it has done the first couple of layers, which makes sense. Like, I dare say, my colleagues in the National Party, I will be interested to see in the detail where the gaps are in the agriculture department services. That is my concern. For example, with the entomology service, not many entomologists are needed, but one or two of them are needed. There are specialist qualifications that can be quite critical.

We could have an interesting argument about how we can account for the funds that are coming from the research and development corporations. I will never argue about getting some of our levies back. In fact, I was a funder for one of the RDCs. I think the Western Australian department has been a bit lazy in trying to get as much money as it can out of the RDCs, which are nearly all based in Canberra. Doing more work in that area and putting better proposals to them should enable us to get more money, but we have to put skin in the game to get the matching funds. Of course, it also relies on personal contacts, which make it easier for the ag departments in the eastern states to get access to those funds. The people who work in the RDCs went to the same university as the people who work in the state departments, and they are not connections that, as a rule, Western Australians have. It needs a sound business case, but the sound business case cannot be that we have paid X millions of dollars and we want it back; that does not wash.

I think the future for agriculture is very positive. Throughout the world, quality food is attracting a premium more often, especially if it is safe and does not have chemical residues. Chemical residues are the real issue that people look for. The price of wool crashed in the early 1990s. Looking back on it now, the Pastoralists and Graziers Association was right. It always said that we had to look at wool in the same way as we look at wine; it has to be a premium product and the quality has to be right and eventually the market will sort it out, and eventually the market did sort it out. The sad thing is that it took about 30 years to do it, and there were plenty of dead bodies left along the road.

The transformation of the northern agricultural beef industry into a live export-focused industry has worked extremely well. A couple of weeks ago, I was on a station in the Kimberley and I looked at the investment that was being made there, the quality of the cattle and the technology that was being used. They want to put in another

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layer of investment, if you like. That is a niche that is developing brilliantly. The one industry that seems to be really hard work at the moment—it is going to continue—is dairy. We just do not seem to be able to make the figures work for dairy in Western Australia, and that is very unfortunate.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Why do you think that?

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: We do not have a very long growing season relatively. They need more supplementary feed, and supplementary feed is expensive. Others would probably know a little more about it than I do, but that is just economics; they just cannot make the figures work. The deregulated market is not necessarily a particularly free market when there are only a couple of major buyers. That is always difficult.

I think we are really going to see the potential of GM crops on the Ord River with GM cotton. I suggest that the next time any of our ministers are in Kununurra, they have a talk to Kimberley Agricultural Investment about the potential that it sees for GM cotton. It is quite exceptional. It can select layers of traits that it wants in the varieties. It will grow varieties next year that are quite different from the ones it is growing this year. I was looking at a trial there a while ago and it had planted as the barrier crops around the GM trial some of the old varieties, which do not carry the GM gene, so they are susceptible to *Heliothis armigera*. They were just devastated and the GM crops were totally unaffected. There appears to be—I am absolutely certain—absolutely no side effects or concerns being passed into the environment or anywhere else from those varieties, so that is quite amazing.

I think the Fitzroy Valley has potential. I understand the government's concerns; it is saying that this is a special area and everything else, but I am sure there is the potential for us to take a considerable amount of water out of that river that currently just goes out to sea. We could do some useful things there, so please do not just dismiss that out of hand. It will mean jobs, and if the Fitzroy Valley needs one thing more than anything else, it needs jobs.

I recently spent a week looking at agriculture at the University of Kansas and the University of Nebraska, which was a very positive experience. Their structures are quite different. Their agriculture departments are very much just regulatory bodies and the extension services are run out of the universities. That is an interesting model and one that really does deserve some thought. Kansas has had a huge amount of rain, and to qualify for government price support they have to plant maize crops by the end of May.

Mr D.A. Templeman: To qualify for what?

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Government price support.

If the crop is not in by the end of May, they have to plant soybeans, and there are all sorts of problems with soybeans because the main market is China, and because of Trump, the Chinese have stopped buying American soybeans. I asked them, "Why don't you just go ahead and plant the maize anyway?" They said, "It doesn't qualify then for the government money", so they are going to go and plant another crop that is not going to be as profitable. That makes absolutely no sense, and it shows how ludicrous at times government involvement in the market and in agriculture can be, when they start telling farmers what they can do and when they can do it. It does not work; farmers must be left alone to make those decisions themselves.

Biosecurity is absolutely a number one priority; we certainly said so when we were in government. It is absolutely critical. If members have been following the African swine fever outbreak in China that is happening at the moment, they will know it has been absolutely devastating to the Chinese pig herd, and it has now moved into Vietnam. If that ever gets into Australia, it will be devastating to our pork industry, because there will be nothing that can be done apart from eliminating all the pigs within a certain number of kilometres of any outbreak. We have to do everything we possibly can to make sure that does not get into Australia. I hope that the state government and federal government are conscious of that.

With regard to aquaculture, in Israel aquaculture sits under the agriculture minister; it does not sit under fisheries, and there are quite logical reasons for doing that. That has enormous potential for growth in Western Australia, and I welcome the investment in the last budget in that area.

That is about all I have to say. I was happy to see the figures put back up to where they were, to level it out so that money stopped flowing into the Department of Agriculture and Food when those couple of royalties for regions projects finished so it balances out. But it is an area that warrants more investment and I hope the government accepts that and hopefully finds a few more dollars for the industry down the track.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Leader of the House) [6.52 pm]: I want to thank the member for Geraldton—I know he has wide experience in agriculture in Western Australia—for his very level approach to the debate this afternoon. Unfortunately, I have only about seven minutes to respond, but I hope the National Party might bring on this —

Several members interjected.

Mr Shane Love; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Terry Redman; Mr Donald Punch; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Ian Blayney; Mr David Templeman

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have only just got to my feet and now Nationals members are interrupting me!

The interesting thing is that they hate this; they hate the fact that their history in government is so poor. The Nationals hate that in the previous government there were three agriculture ministers, two of them National Party ministers — Several members interjected.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: One? That is right; the Nationals were upset because they did not get it the third time. Nationals members hated that during their time in government, or semi-government. They did not extricate themselves from the Liberals with regard to agriculture, of course, which is what they should have done. We know that when the National Party was in coalition with the Liberal Party, the previous government oversaw a massive decline in the resourcing of the department that was then responsible for agriculture, and that was widely reported from a variety of sources. One had only to go to country towns where there used to be agriculture department offices and research offices. The previous government presided over a massive decline in that resourcing and expertise. We saw the expertise go out of the department, and the previous government oversaw that. That is why it sticks in the craw of National Party members that the government led by Mark McGowan is returning it back to the base. Yes, we have gone through a machinery-of-government process that is focused on ensuring we have a coordinated approach to our primary industries in Western Australia, but it sticks in their craw that they oversaw the decline.

That is why they keep attacking one of the hardest-working ministers in this government or, in fact, any government. They hate the fact that Hon Alannah MacTiernan is consistently going out to the regions, as Minister for Agriculture and Food, to promote our agricultural and primary industry products and defending them when they are under threat, as we saw on a number of occasions. I will always remember her rockmelon experience out the front of Parliament House when that industry was seriously impacted by the listeria outbreak that had occurred in the eastern states, but was affected by hysteria over listeria from members over there. She was out there, defending the industry.

Every single weekend, she is out in some regional community, meeting and working with people involved in the industry, talking to pastoralists, farmers and communities that are actively engaged in making sure that we have a very strong primary industry in Western Australia. She is out there all the time. I cannot even get the plane sometimes because she is consistently out there, all the time. She is fixing the dog fences out in the pastoral areas that the previous government did not continue to fund. She is out there making sure that she is doing those sorts of things. The Nationals do not like her because she is working harder than their three ministers in the last government put together. She works far harder than anyone that I have known in that industry, and she is respected for it. She fronts up at thousand-person meetings that are called when the Nationals ship in good old Barnaby Joyce, with his massive hat. He started the whole problem with the live sheep export industry, but she fronts them. She is not afraid, and you guys hate that. You hate the fact that she is out there defending primary industry, working with the industry, and talking about making sure that we continue to expand and diversify our economy. Central to that, of course, is making sure that we have a viable food export industry in this state. She is making sure also that we are always looking at new markets, promoting new markets and promoting our food. As the member for Geraldton very, very clearly highlighted, we know that one of the great advantages of Western Australian product from our agricultural regions is its reputation for high quality. That is what the minister is focused on, absolutely. Biosecurity will remain a priority, because if we are going to keep and maintain that high quality reputation for our product, protection of it is a key issue.

The \$131.5 million is real money. If I had it here, I would be able to show it to members. It is real money, and it demonstrates that this government recognises the wrecking ball that the National Party presided over when they were in power with the Barnett government. The wrecking ball that they let sweep through the department needed to be fixed. That is what the Minister for Agriculture and Food has been doing. Yes, we have had a very important and significant machinery-of-government change, which is making sure that we use all the resources available and all the expertise. We are bringing them back into these departments, so that we can have an effective primary industry going forward. That is the vision. It is a very strong one. It is being delivered and articulated throughout Western Australia by an outstanding minister, whom you guys hate. National Party members will do anything to denigrate and attack her. I tell members what: she is respected throughout Western Australia and Australia for her tenacity and advocacy. She stands up against whingers like you—wimps who do nothing in government to support the very people they purport to represent! That is why “Big” Nick did not do so well.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

House adjourned at 7.00 pm
