

Division 14: Great Southern Development Commission, \$224 000 —

Mr P.B. WATSON: I refer to page 188 of budget paper No 2 under the heading “Details of Controlled Grants and Subsidies”, and the line item “Royalties for Regions Regional Grant Scheme and Community Chest Grants”. I note that the 2013–14 actual amount was \$951 000 and that the 2014–15 budget amount is \$137 000. The estimated actual for 2014–15 is \$1 573 000, and I guess a lot of that would have gone towards the Anzac commemorations. The 2015–16 estimate drops down to \$543 000. Is there any reason why it is dropping from \$951 000 in 2013–14 to \$543 000 in 2015–16?

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Before I ask Russell Pritchard, the regional manager of industry and infrastructure with the Great Southern Development Commission, to make some comments about this, I would like to say that the regional grant scheme has been an initiative under the royalties for regions scheme since its inception. The decision was taken in the early part of last year to have a tranche of \$10 million over the nine development commissions, which is about \$1.1 million each, over the 2015 calendar year. The current regional grant scheme—including those 85 project decisions made recently by cabinet—and the community chest grants, which are for smaller projects come into the books in 2015–16. The people sitting around me do not know it yet, but there have been challenges in acquitting that. Half of it was meant to be issued in 2014–15 and the other half in 2015–16, so there are challenges around timing. I am supporting them to roll those grants over to be acquitted in the new financial year. A decision has been made and a letter went out recently in support of that. The most recent approval was for 2015–16, so nothing will be brought to book in budget until cabinet approvals that go into the following years. There are certainly budget line items in the Department of Regional Development that might not have flowed through to the development commissions, so Russell might have an additional comment about that.

[12 noon]

Mr R. Pritchard: No, I have no additional comment to that.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Was everything I said right or not?

Mr R. Pritchard: It was absolutely correct!

Mr P.B. WATSON: You do not have to agree!

Mr R. Pritchard: The grant agreements have gone out for all of the moneys for the community grants and the regional grants scheme.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Can you talk a bit closer to the microphone, please, Mr Pritchard? I cannot hear.

Mr R. Pritchard: The development commission has allocated the grant agreements for both the community chest grants and the regional grants scheme but, as the minister said, there is some difficulty in acquitting those in the 2014–15 year and that is why we have a 2015–16 allocation as well.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: I take the minister to the fourth dot point on page 185, which lists some priority actions, one of which is tourism. I know that there has been quite a focus on tourism in the area, which the minister touched on earlier. I wonder whether the minister might be able to touch on some of the initiatives taking place or might be taking place in that great southern area, which I think has great potential to expand tourism further and to benefit from it economically and socially.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: Thanks, member for Wagin, for the question. As the member knows, a lot of the themes coming through on the blueprint planning are around tourism. Of course, the great southern region is a very picturesque part of Western Australia, and one thing in recent time that has been able to put that region on the map has been the Anzac commemorations, significantly changing the profile of Albany on the international stage. We have supported that through some royalties for regions resourcing into some of the facilities and some of the programs in particular that led up to the Anzac centenary. I am very hopeful that it not only was a one-off event that profiled Albany and indeed the Anzacs—as it rightly should as that was the last bit of land that many of those Gallipoli veterans saw—but also will keep on going and we will have more visitations through the great southern region as a product of that initiative. All credit to the City of Albany and all credit to those who were involved for holding a very successful event that will, hopefully, carry on in terms of its impact.

Before I ask Russell Pritchard to make a comment broadly about some of the other areas to do with tourism, there are another couple of projects that we have been involved in that will help tourism. One is the old Esplanade Hotel site at Middleton Beach, which LandCorp has played a role in purchasing. We have been in close discussions with the development commission about how that will be worked through in terms of what should be on that site. Right now, as one of the iconic parts of the Albany city, it is an absolute eyesore. I am hoping we will get good outcomes for that and it will be a good question for LandCorp if we get to that point.

The other project is the hotel development on the foreshore. Although there have been some great developments around the Entertainment Centre, and private developments there with Paul Lionetti with a bar called, I think, South something —

Mr R. Pritchard: Due South.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: It is called Due South. I do not frequent it so I did not know the name, member for Wagin. Again, we looked at the opportunities to support a hotel development on that site, which would really finish off that precinct with some short-stay accommodation. Unfortunately, we could not bring that to bear; the economics simply did not stand up. LandCorp is still in some negotiations with the City of Albany on whether we can change any of the planning constraints that sit around that, which might make it more palatable to a developer. However, right now that is one of the things we have not, unfortunately, been able to deliver. Russell Pritchard might be able to make some comments about tourism as a theme.

Mr R. Pritchard: Referring to the points covered earlier, we have a range of commitments to tourism through the development commission across capacity building and product development. A couple of examples are under the regional grants scheme and to a lesser extent under the community chest fund. We funded most recently some capacity building jointly with Australia's South West against four local tourism operators. Funds are going again into the Perth International Arts Festival event in Albany through the regional grants scheme. One of the larger amounts of money that have been expended under the southern investment initiative was \$1.2 million to the Torndirrup infrastructure associated with The Gap and the Natural Bridge. They are just some examples I can point out.

Mr T.K. WALDRON: A number of shires in the northern part of the great southern working with the Treasurer's group have been a great success and have been well supported by the Great Southern Development Commission. Is there an intention to continue to support that group of shires, as I think others could take a leaf out of their book?

Mr R. Pritchard: Yes, the development commission is continuing to support the Treasurer's group. We have an allocation under our recurrent funding to assist that group with its capacity buildings within the group. We have a large project underway at the moment, apart from the bloom festival that we support, that is instrumental in attracting the caravan, campers and motorhomes event to Albany in September.

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I will make one more point on the back of that. Taste Great Southern has been one of the fantastic initiatives going into the member for Wagin's electorate. I think in recent times some of the programs as part of that have moved up into the upper great or middle great southern region, as distinct from being centred on Albany and Denmark and the south coast, bringing some great chefs to the region and profiling local produce. Interestingly, the notion of branding regions was actually borne out of the great southern region. The Great Southern Regional Marketing Association was one of the first associations to get off the ground. All credit to the development commission because, together with the Department of Agriculture and Food, it was the commission's initiative.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I would like to ask a few more questions and the leader has said to get on, but I would like to congratulate the Great Southern Development Commission on the work it does; it does a tremendous job in our region. Also, to Bruce Manning, who is laid up with a cage around him at the moment, we hope he gets well soon. That was a question and an answer, minister!

Mr D.T. REDMAN: I thank the member for Albany for his ongoing support!

Mr P.B. WATSON: The only thing I am disappointed about is that it is taking something good from Albany and Mt Barker and taking it down to Wagin. What sort of food does the member for Wagin have down there that is exotic?

Mr T.K. WALDRON: It is in my electorate!

The CHAIRMAN: I do not know whether we can allow questions between members of the committee, so there are no further questions on division 14.

The appropriation was recommended.