

**PRIMARY INDUSTRIES — GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE**

*Motion*

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [4.01 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the WA Labor government for its blatant disregard for primary industries, as evidenced by its ill-considered fishing policies, its abrupt ban on native forest harvesting and its failure to stand against federal Labor's devastating live sheep export ban, weakening the foundation of Western Australia's economy and betraying the livelihoods of regional Western Australians.

The problem I have today is that in some ways, I actually have too much material. I look forward to listening to the Leader of the Opposition and the member for North West Central speak on this motion at some stage. I am sure the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Fisheries will be keen to rebuff my arguments. However, as per the motion, I can say that I am deeply disappointed by the way that this government is assaulting the regions. I have said this a few times and I will continue to say this: we have seen a continual assault on people who are just going about their everyday hard work and business.

We saw the likes of the forestry scenario in which the former Minister for Forestry was down in Manjimup saying how great Parkside Timber was and urging it to get involved in Western Australia. Then a couple of years later, he pulled the rug out from underneath it. That was quite amazing. I was in Manjimup the other day with Hon Colin de Grussa, the member for Cottesloe and Hon Dr Steve Thomas. Of course, as I said in question time yesterday, 42 members of the Labor Party were invited to come to the water forum. At the forum, they put up on the big screen who had been invited, who had sent an apology and who had not bothered to send one. They confirmed that there was no-one in attendance, including the local member and the Minister for Water.

That forum the other day in Manjimup gave me a really good sense of what people in the regions are feeling, along with many other events that I have been to, including the farmers rally in Katanning about Aboriginal cultural heritage and live exports. I was given the real sense that people in regional WA feel that they have been attacked. I have no doubt that the minister over there in his former role as the CEO of the South West Development Commission is very aware of the precious natural resources in the Manjimup region, such as the water, forestry and food bowl—all those good things.

**Mr D.T. Punch:** I'm very aware of your record too.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes. Very good, minister.

I can say that there is disillusionment out there. There are some beautiful big dams out there and just about all those that I saw were full. However, there is confusion out there about departmental staff, the Minister for Water and the local member, who is the chairperson of one of the water committees, not turning up. Those are the sorts of things starting to affect these local communities. As I said, the trip to Manjimup brought that home to me in a lot of ways. It is obviously not particularly familiar territory to me in some ways. A few weeks before, I was at the live export and Aboriginal cultural heritage forum. I can assure members that there was disillusionment in the room. There were probably about 600 people there—farmers; supply chain, pellet and transport operators; local school teachers; and members of the community. They were, and still are, not happy about the attack on regional Western Australia. That is what this motion is all about.

The response at the Katanning rally told me that regional people have had enough. We have heard the Labor Party say that it is the party for the regions and has the most members from the regions. I can assure members that, come the next election, that is going to turn around. This unlimited assault on the people of regional Western Australia is quite disturbing and they have woken up to it. There was no better demonstration of that than that from the Premier today in the chamber when I asked him about the live export industry. We know that federal Minister Murray Watt has come out with a proposed live export ban. He has said that it will not be implemented until sometime after the next federal election. That may not be a problem because, given the way he and the Prime Minister are going, there is every chance that he will not get elected anyway. In case he does, I will say that this ban that he and the federal Minister for Agriculture are looking to put in place will be one of the most destructive things that I have seen. It caters to animal welfare groups and activists when there have been continuous improvements. In 2018, we all saw the vision. I understand that people get upset about that and that there were improvements to be made. Those improvements have been made, but what are we doing now? We have a federal Labor government that wants to export our animal welfare outcomes to the likes of South Sudan, Ethiopia, Romania and many other countries. All those countries do is count the sheep on to the boat and worry about what gets counted off later on at the other end. They do not worry about what happens in between.

That is the issue that I brought up with the Premier today. To me, the real concern is the way that our farmers, regional communities and supply chain operators are being exposed. Their livelihoods are being exposed and reduced by a policy from someone from the eastern states who has absolutely no understanding of how the Western Australian market operates. What is more, he will bend over backwards for the live cattle industry, which I fully agree with,

and help out Indonesia with vaccinations and you name it, but when it comes to live sheep export, which is 97 per cent based in Western Australia, there is absolutely no effort. He just handballs off responsibility to the live export panel, which I have met. I have been to several of its meetings and its terms of reference that give the panel nowhere much to go. It is quite a bizarre sequence of events. I was trying to point out to the Premier today that he needed to go into bat for Western Australia and our Western Australian producers. It was disturbing for me today when I saw the Premier's response and his disconnection from the issue. He stood here and read out the prices per kilogram of lamb or mutton; I do not know which. He said that the prices go up and down and there was no need to worry about it and we could just go back to other crops and sources of livestock and it would not be a problem. I am worried about and see an impending crisis in regional Western Australia. I am glad we have the two ministers in the chamber today because it is important for them to understand what is going on out there with the mental health of our farmers in regional WA.

As I tried to explain to the Premier today, this time last year we were receiving around \$150 a head for the likes of red tag wethers, which are basically one-year-olds. That was very good money. Everyone was happy and everything was going along well. What happened? Murray Watt turned up with his proclamation that he was going to ban the live export of sheep, with 97 per cent of it happening in WA. That is fine! It does not affect him. He can sit over there in the eastern states and that is not a problem! However, this affects people's lives. It is a \$130-odd million industry with 3 500 jobs in WA. It is along the same lines as the Western Australia wool industry, which is also well and truly affected.

Those are the things that I was trying to explain to the Premier and the minister in the other place. I want to focus on the minister in the other place not quite understanding that we are seeing a potential impending crisis. We have a lot of sheep being carried across from the autumn period. The three-month summer ban of live exports has been put in place, so we cannot ship out any sheep in that June, July and August period. As of now, some shipments will be starting again.

**Mr D.T. Punch:** So you think they should be done during that period, member?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** No; I do not. I am comfortable that the previous federal government took those steps in response to that footage and so forth, minister. The federal government's response improved those outcomes. It put that summer ban in place, and I am comfortable with that, and I think the sheep growers of Western Australia are as well.

Now we have a carryover. Farmers could not sell their sheep in autumn this year because there were only a certain number of live sheep boats. We are getting back to almost one boat a month at the moment and all our abattoirs are full. The likes of the Western Australian Meat Marketing Corporation in Katanning; V&V Walsh, over in the minister's part of the world; and a spread of other abattoirs around Western Australia are full.

**Mr D.T. Punch:** They were supporting it, too.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes, absolutely. They are full, and that is the problem. WAMMCO is full and cannot squeeze anyone else's sheep in there. It is a cooperative and its members put sheep into the abattoir, using up their allocation and, unfortunately, there is no other space. There are worker shortages and so on, but they can only work so many hours a day and put so many sheep through the abattoir, so that is where the problem is.

The recent federal government decision on Qatar Airways was a rather bizarre thing, which I will expand on. Minister Watt said that we need to put out more chilled product—that is, stop live sheep exports and put out more refrigerated and frozen product. But how does it get over to the Middle East? It gets there by Qatar Airways and Emirates. But what has happened? The federal government had banned extra flights from Qatar Airways, which is one of the most bizarre things that I have seen. Obviously, one side of the government is not talking to the other, and we have one federal minister making a decision about Qatar Airways—on whatever basis; we are not quite sure—that has an effect on something that the government wants to do, which is increase the amount of chilled product going out of Australia.

I find some of these things a little bit hard to believe. What I am seeing is quite concerning, including what I saw from the Premier today, quite frankly. I do not expect the Premier to know everything about sheep or what happens at this time of year when feed is drying out or new lambs are coming on stream from the winter time. If a farmer has 2 000 or 3 000 new lambs on stream, they have to offload some sheep to make way for those new lambs. As the season goes on, it gets dry in the northern part of the state, in the wheatbelt, so the farmer has to have some methodology to get those sheep out of the system.

As I said, I do not expect the Premier to know all the intricacies that I know from being a sheep farmer for 30-odd years. I do not expect that. I do not know things about the union movement, which he specialises in, as many other members in here do, but he needs to take on board some things that Hon Colin de Grussa and I are saying because we have experienced them.

I will now talk about the early 1990s when the flock reduction scheme happened. Eventually, Minister for Environment, we will have to have a self-imposed flock reduction scheme here in Western Australia because there will be too many sheep with nowhere to go and farmers will be getting paid less for them. Some farmers are now getting paid 50¢ or a dollar or are not able to sell them and have to pay \$4 or \$5 to transport them to the sheep yards, so they lose \$5 or \$6 a head by the time they pay yard fees and commission and the like.

We are already hearing stories of farmers having to shoot their sheep. Last week one farmer rang me and said that sheep that he got \$150 for last year are now getting anywhere between 50¢ and \$5 a head. It is costing him \$4.40 a head to transport them to the sale yards. He does not have a firearms licence to shoot the sheep. He rang up the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and it said, “No worries; send them up to a feedlot or ring up Fletchers or WAMMCO.” But that is not the answer, because they have no capacity to accept those sheep.

I will detail this to members because Hon Colin de Grussa was part of the flock reduction scheme in 1990 when farmers were paid \$6 a head to shoot their sheep. It was called the bullet through the brain approach and it was used to reduce the national sheep flock. In the late 1960s the Australian Wool Corporation introduced the reserve price scheme for wool, which was essentially meant to be a buffer to smooth the ebbs and flows in prices that are consistent with many commodities. The scheme may have continued, but, inevitably, greed and poor management took hold. The floor price was lifted 70 per cent in one year, in the late 1980s, and of course the stockpile started building up. I am sure both ministers can recall when we had a massive stockpile of around four million bales of wool. Growers were getting paid an amount that was not really a market price for their wool; it was being subsidised by the reserve price scheme of the Australian Wool Corporation.

On 24 July 1991, the Australian Wool Corporation announced that it was broke and could no longer continue buying wool to add to its stockpile and the scheme collapsed, taking the industry with it. In the death throes the scheme introduced a complimentary intervention initiative called the flock reduction scheme, which was intended to stem, to some degree, the amount of wool coming onto the market. Growers could voluntarily cull and euthanise their young ewes and be paid \$6 a sheep by the AWC for doing so. That is what farmers did. They shot by the thousands red tag ewes, nice young ewes for breeding, brought in bulldozers, dug huge pits, set up yards and drove perfectly healthy ewes into the yards and shot them. In a report on ABC’s *Landline* archives, Charles Massy states —

The three years following the wool price collapse were horrific. The calamity tore the heart out of many rural communities.

In 1990, the average annual farm income for wool was \$2 000, down 90 per cent on the previous seasons. He continues —

These are the untold social costs. The opportunity costs you couldn’t calculate. The environmental costs—because the land was really worked hard as people tried to make a living.

... a lot of add-on costs that are incalculable.

The destruction of merchant capital, good-will manufacturing capital, was permanent and devastating, and we lost so many customers that said, “There’s no way I will go back near that industry.”

That is what happened. That scheme was brought in to pay people \$6 a head. It is estimated that by April 1991, 10.5 million sheep had been destroyed. The ongoing trauma of that scheme is playing out now for growers who suffered following the shooting of their stock. I am trying to explain to the ministers in front of me today that another version of the flock reduction scheme is starting now, with growers losing feed in their paddocks as we see the end of a dry winter, especially in those northern parts of the wheatbelt where a lot of them are facing having no crop because they have not been able to get enough rainfall to sustain a crop. There is no kill space available for them. As I said, they are selling sheep for 50¢ that were worth \$140 or \$150 a head last year. This is the dilemma that growers are facing now. There is a new wave of new lambs coming onto properties, which might be 2 000 to 4 000 lambs, and farmers cannot feed them all. It is a very concerning scenario. I think the member for Moore and Hon Colin de Grussa went through that scenario with the flock reduction scheme. At the time I was working in Perth, so I did not go through it per se, but I was farming sheep either side of that time in the 1980s and 1990s.

It is not the producers’ fault. It is amazing how good things were looking last year. We had a sustainable live export industry. There was confidence. We have had a couple of good seasons of pasture growth and the like. Ewes were originally selling for \$60 to \$80 a head, which was a normal price, going up through the \$150 range, and then good breeding ewes got up to \$200 and \$300 a head. This time last year things were looking fantastic. As a sheep producer and as someone who knows how the system works, it is disheartening that a decision is made from a federal politician from Queensland who seems to think that it is not a problem: “I’ll cater to the animal activists. I’ll cater to the inner Sydney and inner Melbourne voters. I will just make this decision because Western Australia is a long way away.” We all know how hard both sides of government have had to fight to sustain the GST. We see how it works—not in my backyard. The minister and the Albanese government have calculated that they can mess up the lives of thousands of regional people, farmers, but it will not cost them votes; it is not a problem. Rick Wilson has

the electorate of O'Connor. He probably has more sheep in his federal electorate than anyone else in Australia. Melissa Price in Durack and Nola Marino in Forrest both hold Liberal seats. They will make that decision. It is not really going to have any effect on them electorally because they are focused on Sydney, Melbourne and Queensland, where Minister Watt comes from. That is why I imagine the cattle side of it continues. What they do not understand is the effect this will have on families and on people's lives in Western Australia.

I do not want to frighten people, but I want to make ministers aware of what Hon Colin de Grussa and I see when we have had that experience. We know how seasons work. The member for Moore is the same. We know what happens at this time of year when there is no rain in late September and early October. Pastures dry out and there is nowhere to carry the stock, and there is a long, hard summer ahead, with six months of handfeeding the stock. That is quite disturbing, as is how arbitrary decisions such as these can affect people's lives. That is what I was trying to point out to the Premier today. When I asked him that question, I was hoping he would say that he would get on the phone to federal Minister Watt because this is not good enough. We need to support our regional Western Australians. We need to support our regional communities. We need to support our people who in a lot of ways are the heart and soul of Western Australia. Close to 60 per cent of the state's income comes from the regions. That is why it is so upsetting for me as a regional member when I look at somewhere like my electorate.

Ravensthorpe has lithium, nickel and gold and many other types of minerals are spreadeagled throughout Western Australia. Of course, in the goldfields are gold and iron ore. We know the income and royalties that come from iron ore in the northern part of the state, in the Pilbara, Kimberley and the member for North West Central's electorate as well. For regional members, it is quite upsetting to see how hard our communities are doing it and then to see the way this government is treating people. I was in Manjimup the other day, and people there are disheartened with the way things are going and the lack of empathy, in a lot of ways, from their Labor government members. The Minister for Environment has certainly seen that. He has seen a response from the communities of Esperance, Hopetoun, Bremer Bay and the like about how they are disturbed and concerned about the south coast marine park, which I will talk about shortly. It is quite bizarre for the government to purposely set out to almost eliminate regional families and communities, and in the same breath have people like Hon Darren West say, "Look at me; I'm the only working farmer in Parliament"—if you do not mind, while he takes his salary as a full-time member of Parliament. I do not quite know where he is coming from saying, "I'm the only working farmer in Parliament." We have Hon Steve Martin, who is a farmer by trade. There are me, Hon Colin de Grussa and the member for Moore. We have all been mixed up in it. It is quite upsetting.

**Mr D.T. Punch:** Are you still a farmer?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes, I am, but I do not go around talking like Hon Darren West as though I am the only working farmer in Parliament and that people need to listen to everything I say. I am trying to talk about the plight of our regional Western Australians.

I will give a quote here. Wool is a very important part of the Western Australian economy, worth something in the order of \$600 million, \$700 million or \$800 million. An article on ABC online states —

Wool producers say Western Australia's \$655 million wool industry and regional communities would suffer "catastrophic" consequences if the federal government closes the sheep live export trade.

...

Former Wool Producers director and vice president of WA Farmers Steve McGuire said shutting down the live export trade would have a "significant to catastrophic" impact on the state's wool industry, and supporting industries such as shearing and trucking.

"The federal government has made it quite clear that it thinks live export doesn't contribute enough financially to warrant being saved," Mr McGuire said.

"They're operating under a false assumption that you can get rid of live export and it won't have much effect. This has been the problem all along."

With expectations that the WA sheep flock would contract by 30 per cent without live export markets, Mr McGuire said it was difficult to say how much wool would no longer be grown, but said it would be hundreds of millions of dollars worth.

There is another industry. The wool brokers, the wool buyers, the wool processors are all part of the wool industry, which is part of the sheep industry—the Merino self-replacing sheep industry in Western Australia. That is why it upsets me when the Premier said that in 2021 we got so many cents a kilo, it went up again in 2023 and has now gone down a bit. He has no concept. I do not know how much he has tried to find out. As I said, I do not know much about the union movement that the Premier is a specialist in, but I would appreciate it if he talked to me get a better understanding of how the sheep industry works. Then he could ring up Murray Watt and say this industry is important to WA. As I said, he had that leverage when Anthony Albanese picked up the phone and said "You've got to drop

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the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill, Premier, it is messing up my Voice referendum.” That was the chance; that was the leverage that the Premier had to say, “Not a problem. We’ll backflip on the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill; you reinstate the live export sheep industry.” That was the opportunity our Premier had. It is quite upsetting.

I remember when I asked the Premier a question a few months ago about it and he proudly told us about Minerva, one of the abattoirs in Western Australia that started again 12 months ago in Esperance and in Tammin as well. He proudly spoke about how great that was. What has just happened? Unfortunately, in my electorate, in Esperance, in Shark Lake, Minerva Foods has shut the door again for the moment and we are not sure how long that will happen for. When the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Jackie Jarvis, was asked about it in the Legislative Council, she said it was only a small abattoir so it would not make much difference to the red meat sector. I assure the ag minister that it will make a difference. A lot of sheep producers around the Esperance area send their sheep to that Minerva abattoir in Shark Lake, and it does make a difference to them.

I make a side point here. I turn to our getting one-third of previous income from our new season lamb. We got \$70 a head last year, but they were worth \$200 a head, yet lamb cutlets at the supermarket are \$35 a kilogram. Two lamb shanks cost \$9.30, diced lamb is \$29 a kilo and premium lamb back strap is \$53 a kilo. Those prices are from the Coles website today. Someone is making money. It is quite concerning. There are Coles, Woolworths and the middleman. I do not know what is going on, but the producer is not getting the money. Spring lamb was getting up to \$200 a head last year, now we are back to around \$70 a head.

**Mr R.S. Love:** According to the Premier, that is normal.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Yes, apparently it is normal to get one-third of the income. There is certainly no real income there. Does the Leader of the Opposition want me to continue? Okay, I will.

I go back to the submission from the WA Grains Group. As I said, the minister sent across a panel to do a job with specific terms of reference. How could the sheep export panel go outside that window when it was given such narrow terms of reference? Basically, the federal government said it would ban the industry and the panel was told to see what it could dig up out of all the submissions to see what came in from producers and supply chain people. There were hundreds and hundreds of people. It was a little like the sessions on the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill. Hundreds of people worried about their businesses and their lives turned up to those forums and tried to explain to the four people on the panel how their lives would be affected. It was interesting that the WA Grains Group put in a submission even though it does not really have anything to do with sheep—but it is that worried. Live export flows into the grains industry. Fodder is another thing. I have spoken to pellet producers with \$40-odd million in turnover from the pellets on those live sheep boats. These are things that people do not think about. They are very clouded by that vision. As I said, none of us like that. We are all very disturbed by the images. Those processes have been improved, and there is a supply chain involved. They talk about WA veterinarians who reported that up to 50 per cent of their income was derived from live exports. There are about 3 500 workers involved. This paragraph, which I spoke about briefly before, from my notes states —

We believe that the Albanese government’s recent decision to deny Qatar Airways an additional 21 flights per week is not only anti-competitive, it is ignorant and senseless. Industry’s opportunity to airfreight chilled meat to alternative markets has been denied us.

This clearly demonstrates the government’s lack of concern or ability to assist with the industry’s survival. The WA Grains Group wrote a letter to Hon Jackie Jarvis. What is she doing about it? The last time I heard Hon Jackie Jarvis talking about it, she said, “Look, I put my best foot forward. The federal minister is going to press on with it, so now I am just going to roll over and help him with the transition out of it.” This is what we get. We have the Minister for Agriculture and Food and the Premier not standing up for WA. They have an opportunity to stand up and be counted.

I made a submission to the panel. I was one of the few MPs who took the trouble. I would like to bring some points to the attention of the ministers here today. They include that the decision to ban live export is based on political rather than scientific or economic grounds and that the WA sheep flock will see a decline in its critical mass, threatening the withdrawal of the central parts of the supply chain.

A sustainable and self-replacing sheep flock requires between 13 and 14 million Merino sheep in Western Australia. I may not have explained it well enough, but the ban has reduced confidence. As soon as the federal minister made the announcement, people started to pull the rug out. The live exporters said, “We’ll send ships through to Europe and Africa and other places.” They started reducing the numbers. We have abattoirs concerned about how many sheep they are going to book in. At the same time, we have buyers in the sheep yards who are saying, “Well, we’ll start dropping the price now, because we can, because we are starting to lose another couple of markets.”

As I said before, one of the most bizarre things was the Qatar decision. The federal minister said we need more chilled and frozen product, but the federal government is also not allowing Qatar Airways to put on extra flights. The other day this state Labor government and the Premier recognised that Qatar Airways was the airline that brought

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people in—I think it brought 70 people across from the Middle East back into Western Australia. The government had support from Qatar airways. I think our Premier needs to stand up and be counted and say that Qatar Airways did the right thing by us during COVID and ask the federal government to do the right thing by the people of Western Australia.

Those were a couple of elements of my submission. I also mentioned regional pellet producers, the demise of the wool industry, and not enough abattoirs with kill space. Without the ships it will be costly to keep sheep on farm, which puts the farmer at economic risk. We are starting to see that happen. I am worried about the sustainability of the WA Merino sheep flock. We need about 13-odd million sheep. I predict we are going to lose hundreds and thousands of sheep this summer. This will lead to the gradual demise of the WA sheep flock. That will lead to the gradual demise of all those supply chain industries. It is a real concern.

In the state budget earlier this year I asked the former Premier, Mark McGowan: “Isn’t it ironic that you budgeted \$22.4 million for electronic ear tags to adopt the national systems and, at the same time, you are overseeing the demise of the WA sheep flock because you will not stand up and be counted?” What did the Premier do? He made a joke about it to his 53 colleagues here in the house in question time, as if it were a joke. That \$22.4 million was for an electronic sheep and goat identification tagging system. That was in his own state budget and he made a joke about it. That question was played on the *WA Country Hour* a day or so later, and the sheep and goat producers of Western Australia were horrified at the arrogant attitude of former Premier Mark McGowan. They could not believe that he was treating their industry as such a joke. We have a Premier who does not understand what is going on at the coalface. We have a WA Minister for Agriculture and Food who also does not understand what is happening at the coalface.

This Labor government loves talking about climate change. What have we seen? Yesterday, we heard the Bureau of Meteorology talk about El Nino and the potentially hotter climate over east in the next couple of years. In 2010 we sent something in the order of 1.6 million sheep across to the eastern states because they had a reasonable season there—we had a season that is starting to develop something like this year in WA. We were able to send those 1.6 million sheep across. It worked out quite well. It appears the eastern states are coming up to a couple of hot dry years. I hope that does not happen, but there is every chance that it will. That is another thing that is not quite understood. The eastern states will only buy sheep from Western Australia when they have a reasonable season and they can absorb all of those sheep. That is another element to it.

In my contribution to the panel on live sheep, I wrote about the impact on grain growers. Lupin and legume-based pastures, which are important rotational tools, among other things, that return nitrogen to the soil, and reduce the need for the application of inorganic nitrogen to the following crop. If those tools are not economic, they will be lost from our system. I pointed out the impact on mental health in the sector. We saw that impact during the live cattle shutdown. We saw what happened when Joe Ludwig closed it down in 2011 with not a lot of planning or thought. We saw the massive mental health impact in Queensland and the Northern Territory and northern Western Australia. There were quite a lot of suicides out of that. It is still going on because that court case and compensation has not yet been completed.

We have seen a generation of farmers affected by the flock reduction scheme. I am seeing a natural flock reduction scheme now. As my electorate officer said, the trouble with this version of flock reduction is that it will be done in the silence of the individual. There will be no neighbours to help like there was last time. This will have a devastating effect on mental health for years to come. We know it will. This story is about to play out again in the next few months. It is a legacy by the Premier and the Minister for Agriculture and Food that we will not forget in a hurry. They will be causing pain. That is exactly right. Hon Colin de Grussa and I went out today to talk about the fact we think there is an impending crisis. We are worried about it. It is time that this state government started dealing with it and recognising it with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and any other people with experience in the industry. We are worried that there are hard times ahead. It is one of those things whereby, with the experience we have as sheep farmers and the like for many years, we understand seasonal conditions, the impact that the live export industry has and the support it provides as a base to the market. We understand how it affects flow-on confidence down the track. In the space of a year, it is quite disturbing how sheep prices have gone from \$150 down to \$4, \$2 or 50¢. I saw many producers and stock agents at the panel seminars almost in tears about the impact it is having on them, their towns and their families.

That is the initial part of the motion. Members have probably heard enough about live export from me. With the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Fisheries in the chamber, I want to move on to talk about the concerns I have. We saw the people who run tackle shops and operate charters, and fishermen down on the front steps of Parliament the other day. Some of the concerns they expressed were about the imbalanced approach, from my perspective. Some of the charter operators have almost been penalised because they have not fished as much as others, so they did not get an opportunity to continue with it. I hope that is something the Minister for Fisheries will re-address. For some tackle shops right around Perth and Mandurah, it is really starting to play out. This government needs to think a little bit more clearly about its consultation process. It needs to think a little bit more about fishing

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tourism operators and the way the process is going to be done going forward. Some operators were inexplicably refused any allowable catch allocation and are effectively barred from accessing the scheme due to the catch-related criteria. Providing a catch experience specifically related to demersal fish is intrinsic to these operators' tourism business models, irrespective of the small numbers involved. To effectively exclude these operators from the fishery as well as barring them from applying to the small grants scheme will inevitably lead to a significant number of them losing their businesses and livelihoods. It is a little bit like the forestry scenario. It just got pulled out of nowhere that we are banning forestry, after saying "Parkside Timber, come over to WA; we welcome your investment!"

A member interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife):** Sorry, Deputy Leader of the Opposition—pause. Unfortunately, I have to make the point to the member for Bassendean that if you are going to interject, you need to be in your seat.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I point out to the member for Bassendean that I drove past Parkside in Manjimup on Monday and there was not a lot of activity. That is another thing this government needs to think about. It needs to think about its saw logging scenario. We asked the Premier a question the other week about whether he was aware some of the sawlogs are now being put aside by Hon Jackie Jarvis for firewood.

**Mr D.T. Punch** interjected.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** It is quite disturbing.

*Point of Order*

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I have a point of order. Hon Jackie Jarvis is not directly responsible for the allocation of logs through an auction process. It is managed by the Forest Products Commission.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife):** Thank you, minister. That is not a point of order.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I was concerned by the Premier's lack of knowledge on that subject as well. It is a pattern we are seeing develop in which ministers are making decisions and not telling the Premier. We have the scenario of just cutting off the forestry industry, saying it is not a problem. It is a bit like federal Minister Watt appealing to voters in inner city Sydney and Melbourne. This government is appealing to the member for Fremantle's voters by saying, "Let's cut off logging to ensure the member for Fremantle gets re-elected at the next election. Don't worry about Manjimup, Nannup, Pemberton, Bridgetown or all those communities in those areas. We'll just give them some little compensation package." We were told by several people in the south west the other day that the suicide rate in those communities has increased by 30 per cent in the last year. These decisions have flow-on impacts and this government needs to realise that.

I want to spend my last few minutes on, of course, one of my favourite subjects—the south coast marine park. Obviously, we heard the minister today reject my questioning about the likes of The Pew Charitable Trusts, which seems to be a US-based environmental conservation organisation with some sort of impact in the decision-making. It is one of those things: where there is smoke there is fire. Constituents are coming into my office in droves, telling me how worried they are, including members of the shire council and members of the community. Up in places like Kalgoorlie, people are worried about the south coast marine park because they go down there to do their fishing, taking the four-hour drive down the highway. To quote Western Australian Fishing Industry Council chief executive Darryl Hockey, he said the consultation process so far has been "abysmal". An article in today's *The West Australian* reads —

The proposed South Coast Marine Park extends along almost 1200km of coastline from Bremer Bay to the South Australian border, and extends 5.5km offshore.

...

Mr Hockey said trust "went out the window" after commercial fishers were duped into revealing their "secret spots" so sanctuary zones could be designed around them, resulting in these areas being "immediately locked up".

"Technically, I think it's 100 times worse than the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act process," he told *The West Australian*.

This is what I brought up today. Hon Colin de Grussa is quoted as saying the —

... marine park plan would "wipe out a lot of these businesses".

... Esperance would have no commercial fishing operations," he said.

He also said the recreational sector would be affected, with talk of fishing off the beach being banned in some areas. I look forward to the Minister for Environment allaying those fears for people in the community of Esperance. Looking at the consultation process, some of the main people in the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and

Attractions have departed the scene, so the minister has to pick up the baton again with different people to try to fire up the consultation process. We know there are problems between the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Fisheries and their various departments. We know there is grief there. How can a process happen properly when those two departments are not talking properly? Of course, Carioa Marine Consulting was commissioned to produce a report. The report admitted that the information was based on the most current scientific literature. However, it acknowledged that the WA south coast is relatively understudied compared with other areas. The government has been relying on the Wilson report from the mid-1990s and it is not up to it.

The people of Esperance, Kalgoorlie and Hopetoun are awake to it. They know that the consultation process has not been good enough. This applies to both recreational and commercial fishers. I heard the minister being interviewed by Belinda Varischetti on *Country Hour* a few weeks ago and he said, "I'm sure my good friend the member for Roe will bring up some of these subjects in due course in Parliament and we'll discuss them." Yes, I am bringing them up, as are the community of Esperance, Darryl Hockey and the commercial and recreational fishers down there.

When a government chooses a course of action that has the potential to destroy livelihoods, it is obliged to put forward a strong argument that it is the only available option and will be for the greater good of our state. That is not happening with this government. The government has shown that it has a city-centric strategy on policy. It should be no surprise that we come to this conclusion. The only thing this Premier has done has been to announce an embassy in Canberra. That suggestion was thrown out the door by his federal colleagues. The government thinks that by deflecting issues with some nonsense, everyone will be happy. The looming crisis in the bush caused by the live export issue and many others is on the shoulders of the Premier and Hon Jackie Jarvis. It is also on the shoulders of the two ministers who are sitting in front of me. The people of regional WA will not forget.

**MS M. BEARD (North West Central)** [5.01 pm]: I rise to support the motion. I will first touch on a point made by the member for Roe about the lack of consultation on many fronts. This issue has become increasingly important across the regions that I represent. People do not like to be blindsided; they like to be included, to have robust discussions and to be able to feed into a process. When something is dumped on them, they struggle to understand what that might mean for them. Good examples of that are the issues concerning Schools of the Air, the Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation and the lobster industry. There are several.

I believe there needs to be better consultation at the grassroots level. Consultation is obviously going on, but, clearly, the right groups are often not included in those processes. That can cause unintended consequences that can be devastating to people in different industries and in different facets of their lives. I ask the government to be mindful of unintended consequences. In my patch, those unintended consequences have led to an increase in mental health issues. People contact me about implications for their businesses and what it means to them. I can tell the Minister for Environment that someone called me because they are struggling to get an outcome on a hydrocarbon project. They have a deadline looming, so they are very stressed about that. There are some blockages along the way and people do not know where to go or how to get there. That is concerning as well.

I am sure that the Minister for Regional Development would agree that retaining our regional populations is crucial, but we are seeing a drain from a lot of these regions. That is happening for a raft of reasons. I will touch on some issues in the regions that I think need attention. Tourism is a massive industry. Tourism WA and the tourism industry promote our fabulous state, which is fantastic, but nothing is happening at the back end in our amazing remote places. I was in Hamelin Pool last week for the Beats in the Bay festival. When I went to visit the stromatolites, four different groups of people were there. They had come from all over Australia and one person had come from Germany specifically to see the stromatolites. The damage that occurred there happened in 2021. I would have thought that that would be a priority, given it is a World Heritage area. UNESCO clearly has an interest in that. We need action on this kind of thing so that the reputation of the regions and tourism in Western Australia can be upheld. Smaller shires, with their small rate bases, obviously struggle to provide the infrastructure that is required for the increase in tourism, so they need help in that space.

The working holiday visa is another incredibly important issue for regional areas. Without the working holiday visa extension after the 88 days, industries all over the state, including agriculture, will be under pressure. I urge the Western Australian government to lobby its counterpart in Canberra to not go forward with the recommendation on page 89 of the report. That is a massive issue for growing the number of people in our areas and retaining them.

Obviously, access to our areas is also very important. We have issues with air services. I understand that there are lots of challenges, but we have to remember that air services in the north are equivalent to buses and trains in Perth. These places are a long way from anywhere. People absolutely rely on air services for business, health and family reasons. People call me now because they are concerned that their children will not be able to get on a flight home from boarding school if something goes wrong. If a boarding house closes, what will happen to boarders who are stuck in Perth? We are raising these really important regional development issues for very good reasons.



Obviously, health is an issue as well. We have Tom Price Hospital and Paraburdoo Hospital. There is a lack of maternity services in Carnarvon, which is a regional centre. It is incredibly important that we return to the space that we were in before as soon as we can. The lack of services is encouraging people to leave the town because they do not feel that they have the services they need. They are also concerned about postnatal care. The nursing posts that are further out in my electorate are incredibly important as well. We have growing industries in lots of places; industries in Mt Magnet, Meekatharra and Wiluna are all growing rapidly. We need to make sure that services are kept up to speed with everything that is required for those people.

Members will know that there is a petition about the patient assisted travel scheme at the moment. Western Australians receive the lowest fuel levy in Australia at 16¢ a kilometre. People in New South Wales get 40¢ a kilometre. I know that the Minister for Health is saying that the ideal situation is to provide services close to where people live, but while that is not happening, people in the regions need more help. Pensioners come to me and say that they have to cancel appointments because they cannot afford to go to them. They might need three appointments, but they go to just one because they are not in a financial position to afford all three. We have called for an increase in the fuel and accommodation support that is provided. People do not get help under PATS for dental services. Some places have no dental services or they are sporadic. Some people suffer until it is a massive issue. Doctors tell me that if people let dental issues go too far, it can become a serious health issue. There is also an issue with taxi vouchers. When elderly or sick people come to Perth for treatment in the city, they have to catch two or three buses in an unfamiliar landscape. They are struggling to get the support they need, being taxi vouchers. Also, the definition of patient escorts and carers needs to be expanded. A lot of people have to travel a very long way and they struggle to travel on their own without a support person, who often has to pull themselves out of their work environment for two or three days, or, if their transport is cancelled, it could be for up to a week. If people who use the patient assisted travel scheme have their flight cancelled for whatever reason, they might not be able to get a flight home for a week. They could be stuck with the accommodation costs for four or five nights in Perth, but many of them do not have the financial resources to deal with that. That is really important.

I have touched on mental health services. An increasing number of people are asking for mental health services, which indicates to me that pressures—obviously, there are lots of reasons for this, including the cost-of-living increases—in the regions are definitely starting to bite. The cost of insurance in the north west is particularly high. People tell me that they are contemplating not insuring their properties, if they can do that. People with mortgages obviously have to insure their properties, so this is forcing some of them to potentially think about selling their homes and moving away, which is not something that they want to do.

Freight costs are a massive impost on a lot of businesses. The cost to run a business is escalating, as are the freight costs. Basically, it is really expensive for people to transport their goods to towns now. At what point can they not pass on that cost, because people are not going to enter into that space?

We need to focus on the retention of populations in the regions. Obviously, sport is a major part of the regions. I know that there are grants out there to support clubs. My daughter is at school in Perth at the moment, and she is going to fill in for the soccer team to allow it to compete at the country week event. She is very happy about it. The club probably had enough players for two teams in a previous time. It has a knock-on effect for a lot of groups across towns.

Anything that is happening across the regions within industries that is going to have an impact on businesses needs to have an overlay of tourism, and I ask the government to make sure that that happens. I know that in the town of Carnarvon, business trade is down by 40 to 60 per cent. The no vacancy signs have not been out this season, and people are really struggling. It is the high season, and people are wondering what they are going to do and how they are going to maintain their businesses once they get to summer. Coincidentally, the Minister for Housing has just walked into the chamber. I noticed today that there was commentary about the funding available for infrastructure in Kalgoorlie. Immediately after question time, I had a call from someone who said, “What about us?” There is a massive shortage of workers’ accommodation in Kalbarri and Exmouth, and there is a dire need to have their sites at least ready for someone to pick them up. We need to somehow find a way to help facilitate growth. My question to the Minister for Water was exactly about that. If we want to make sure that these towns are going ahead, that they are growing and that they have the ability to match the tourism marketing campaign within the state, we really need to look at the grassroots and what might be needed to facilitate that.

I have said before that people do not want underground freeways; they just want basic services. I note that there are plans to seal the Gibb River road. I travelled along Goldfields Highway recently, and 124 kilometres of it is dangerous. There are quad-axle trucks banging along that road all the time, along with people towing caravans. It is the only state highway in Western Australia that is not sealed, and it is becoming increasingly busy. A lot more tourists are travelling up to Gunbarrel Highway along that pathway. Wiluna is in the process of finalising its caravan park, so that will attract more people as they pass through. I urge the government to please consider that project. There have been fatalities and there will continue to be fatalities. It is a state highway, and it is becoming busier, so it most definitely needs to be given some priority. It is a really important access point for that group of people and for the tourism industry to grow and connect.

General staff shortages are an ongoing issue for everybody, but education is crucial. There needs to be a multipronged approach in some towns in my electorate. We have cohorts of people who have not been educated at all from a very young age. We asked some questions this week about Target 120, and I am pleased to hear that it is moving along. I have spoken to people on the ground about it. It will take a long time to put that process in place. I know that it will take time, but we need to make sure that kids are safe. There are limited activities for kids in lots of these towns, especially in areas like Mt Magnet, Meekatharra and inland spaces that are not near the water. There is a need for these kids to be occupied, and I think the Meekatharra bush classroom is a really good education model to look at. Those kids are starting to re-engage in a different environment and, hopefully, they will flow into the mainstream education system. I think we need to look outside the box. With what is happening in the north with the growth in industry, we need to prioritise our services, especially as people move into these areas. There has been growth in Exmouth from the defence base. At some point, a lot more people will be coming into that area, and they will have to coexist with tourists. We really need to push those areas.

It is important that the government supports regional businesses and communities, and works collaboratively and engages with people on the ground. I urge the government to engage with people on the ground through a more robust consultation process. They sometimes feel blindsided. They work hard and they bury themselves in what they do, and they just want to be heard. I know that Perth is a very long way from a lot of these locations, but the government should spend time speaking to the people it would not normally think to speak to. I know that when people go into towns, they pick out the people they always see. A whole raft of other groups would benefit from consultation, or at least just being asked where they are at.

I will finish by saying that I am worried about how some people across the region are coping and travelling at the moment. As we have seen, we need to rebuild that level of trust.

**MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Regional Development)** [5.17 pm]: I find it strange that on a day when the member for Roe has congratulated the Minister for Education on our commitment to supporting regional and remote teachers, he would criticise this government for its commitment to regional Western Australia. On the back of that, I think of the \$11 billion in infrastructure investment in the state budget; capped airfares to directly support access by people who live in the regions; a raft of infrastructure projects, such as port improvement works; record health investment; education investment; road safety; and the commitment to rail transport. I am not sure that I should really mention the tier 3 rail line and how we arrived at that particular problem, but it is a very significant problem. I note the impact of things that are well beyond this government's control. Fuel costs absolutely have an impact on the cost of living in regional WA. This government is doing everything it possibly can.

When I visit the regions, the message that I get is that virtually every community I have been to is at capacity, with the volume of work, the demand for labour and the need for housing, which our Minister for Housing is working incredibly hard on delivering. He mentioned today the opportunity to generate development for up to 500 new accommodation units in the Kalgoorlie area. They are all about recognising that regional Western Australia is working incredibly hard. There are incredible levels of employment and gross output. When I was talking at a goldfields–Esperance resource event, people talked about the incredible level of investment, but there are challenges, and we know that. The challenges require leadership to address them. They do not require rhetoric; they require data and evidence. They do not require conclusions that are just drawn out of thin air, which is what a lot of the presentation that members opposite have provided has been so far.

They spent 45 minutes criticising the federal government. Why do members opposite not talk to their federal colleagues and strongly ask them to take that up? The critical issue they were trying to say is that we are not doing enough to persuade our federal colleagues to change their view. I can tell members that this government has made it very clear that the current arrangements for the summer bans in the northern hemisphere for the live sheep trade have been acceptable. Minister Jarvis has, at least 20 times as I understand it, very clearly talked to the federal minister, raised the issue and presented the issues as we understand them here. She directed the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to do an economic analysis to show what the impact of losing the live sheep trade would be on Western Australia. Data is what we take forward, not rhetoric. She has been a very strong advocate. I have raised the issue with Minister Watt. Two Premiers have raised the issue. There is a difference between just going and berating somebody, and raising the issues in a clear-minded, data-based way and recognising the best outcome that we can achieve for Western Australia if the federal government persists with the policy that it took to the election, which it won. That is what Minister Jarvis is focused on. Members opposite would do well to support her in those efforts rather than to simply try to use this motion as a political statement to say that this government does not care about farmers and regional Western Australia.

The Labor Party has a lot of members who live in regional Western Australia. They walk down the main streets and talk to constituents every day. They go out into the localities right around regional Western Australia and talk to people. They are very sensitive to the challenges. Governments cannot fix everything with a magic wand. Tough decisions need to be made. Being in government sometimes requires courage to make those decisions. Those decisions are based on evidence,

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science and the best interests of the state and the communities that we serve. Those people work very hard. I was very disappointed when the member for Roe criticised Hon Darren West for being a member of Parliament and a farmer, but then, within a sentence, said that he was a member of Parliament and a farmer, too. How can the member draw those comparisons? It is really appalling. That is the tone I am hearing from the Nationals WA.

Several members interjected.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I very rarely interjected. Acting Speaker, I would like them to listen in silence, please, and take it.

**Mr R.S. Love:** With respect —

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent):** Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am commenting on a statement the member made. This is not the National Party that I remember when Hendy Cowan was leader and the party actually had some principles. Now it can pull out any argument from anywhere and make things up.

I have a few comments to make about the previous government and its performance in the agriculture sector. They are very interesting comments. First of all, during the former government's period, there were four agricultural ministers, one of whom I cannot even remember, Hon Mark Lewis. In 2015, *The West Australian* reported a long list of failures, including big cuts at the then Department of Agriculture and Food in WA. I remember those cuts. I remember the then government trying to backfill those cuts with contract staff funded through royalties for regions. The former government ripped permanent public servants out of ag, with all their knowledge and experience—the farming community out there remembers it—and replaced them with short-term contracts funded through royalties for regions. I remember it. I was there. The former government refused to reactivate the police department's stock squad to crack down on livestock theft. It foiled the James Price Point port development, against the wishes of live exporters and some grain traders. It made half-hearted attempts to deal with packs of wild dogs mauling sheep. There was the debacle over the management of the grain freight rail lines in the wheatbelt and inaction on tenure reform that was needed to promote investment in pastoral leases. That was the judgement of *The West Australian* during the former government's time in office. The Pastoralists and Graziers Association and WAFarmers said that when the government was not sitting on its hands on issues, it was dipping into the pockets of farmers. It goes on. The opposition's record on agriculture is pretty poor. I was there. I saw the decimation of the Department of Agriculture and Food. This government has gone back and refilled the positions at the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development to restore its capability in the fisheries sector.

I have a lot of respect for our sheep farmers. I was listening to *WA Country Hour* the other day and heard the farmers who came to Perth with their mutton, barbecued it and supported the homeless. I think it was a very strong statement about the price of mutton that they were experiencing. I had a look through the ABC and saw a very good analysis that talks about the price crash nationally. The problem with the member for Roe's analysis is that he equates the price crash to a single issue—the loss of confidence in the live sheep trade. Very clearly, he is putting that into the rhetoric he is putting forward, but analysts and livestock agents say there are many contributing factors behind the price crash, including a global backlog of meat in cold stores, limited kill capacity at abattoirs, sheep being sold off in dry areas like northern New South Wales and uncertainty about the drier conditions ahead. These are complex issues. There are not single-issue fixes for them. If Minister Watt changed his view tomorrow or the federal government changed its view tomorrow, it would not take away the fact that we have a drying climate and an oversupply and overstocking of seven years-plus of mutton ewes. They are the issues. These are the price fluctuations and variations in conditions that the Premier spoke about in question time. That is the difference between the opposition's views and our views. We look at the complexity of the issues, we are trying to address them in a sensible, data-driven way, and we consult.

Member for North West Central, there are nine development commissions out there consulting with communities and feeding back issues to not only me, but also other ministers. Has the member visited the development commission?

**Ms M. Beard:** Yes, I know it well, minister.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am very pleased that the member has because they are great resources for local engagement. That is why I have made sure they are at the front of the decision-making in the regional development portfolio. They are the people on the ground, and they are here to support every other minister in the chamber.

**Mr R.S. Love:** Is that a standing invitation for the member for North West Central to visit her local development commission, because she might not feel welcome there under your direction?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The member for North West Central can get information about the region from a regional development commission.

**Mr R.S. Love:** Can she visit them?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am telling the member what I am saying.

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**Ms M. Beard:** So I cannot visit them.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I am telling you what I am saying. I want to come back to —

**Mr R.S. Love:** What are you saying? Can she consult with them and visit them?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Make an appointment, as per the normal process. Contact my office, and we will arrange the process. That is exactly what we do. The member said she visited the development commission. I do not think we have had a query through my office, I might add.

**Ms M. Beard:** I speak to them on the street.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** There you go! I did say that regional members walk down the street and meet people. That is what living in regional Western Australia is like, and I have not forgotten that.

I want to talk briefly about the forest industry. I have spent a long time around the forest industry. I was there during the period when the Court government started to close down the forest industry, and I attended the cabinet subcommittee meetings. I stood next to Hon Paul Omodei when he told workers that they were about to lose their jobs. I stood next to Hon Cheryl Edwardes. That was back in 1998, 1999 and 2000. This industry struggled all through that period. That is why the state government, through its strategy to protect old-growth forest, put in place investment security guarantees. As a consequence of changing native forest parameters, the industry was gradually becoming unsustainable. Climate change is here with us. The size of logs is changing. Do the maths on the ability to invest back into capital to make those industries profitable at the scale that they were operating: it is not sustainable.

The forest management plan is coming up for renewal. That is the point at which we will change the parameters of what the forward view will be like. That is what is happening. It is a process and it has been around for a long time. I have been all the way through it. I was there when Hon Dr Steve Thomas was a policy officer for Hon Terry Redman. I remember it. If the member really wants me to start talking about those issues and what his government did and did not do, I invite him to keep going. I am certainly very happy to talk about the Liberal Party's level of investment in the softwood plantation industry. It was forecast back in 2008, 2009 and 2010 that we were going to have problems with softwood plantations.

I have the graphs that show the level of investment by the Gallop government. It was very significant. The minute that the Liberal–National government came into office, it dropped off all the way through. I think about 300 hectares were planted in 2015–2016. It failed to invest in softwood because the cost of it was outstripping the Liberal–National government's very poor budget management. That was the issue. We now face a crisis in the softwood industry that we are trying to address.

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

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The member ran his farm up in Dongara when I was dealing with this issue.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent):** Leader of the Opposition!

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

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The issue was the member's inaction. He should not try to rewrite history. He needs to spend some time in the Parliamentary Library to do his research, and he will find it all laid out there.

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

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** I know why the CEO of the Forest Products Commission resigned back in 2015 and why some of the board members walked out. It was because of the softwood plantation issue. We have seen a decline in the ability to harvest out of native forests, and we have seen the community's view about what we are doing in our native forests. Is the member's policy to bring back logging in the native forest sector? Will he bring it back and harvest native forests?

Several members interjected.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** So he is going to harvest —

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

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister, are you taking interjections?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Having heard that, I am just commenting that their policy is about going back into native forest logging. That is what I am hearing. The member is going to back into native timber logging. I hope the Minister for Environment has made note of that.

I am going to move on to fisheries. I will only need two minutes. We talked about consultation. I received advice based on science to reduce the total catch of those demersal species to 375 tonnes. The member either does not believe the science or does not believe the judgement of the people who provided me the advice.

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**Mr P.J. Rundle:** Murray Watt made decisions not based on science—just based on animal activists.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** No, the member asked about fisheries.

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

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** The peak industry bodies said that we had to reduce the total catch to 375 tonnes. That is irrefutable and everybody agrees. We consulted the Marine Tourism Association of Western Australia, which consulted charter operators, particularly those working with demersal fish. We consulted extensively with Recfishwest and the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council. I want to know from the member whether, given that there is a limit of 375 tonnes, which the science has said to me is a sustainable catch level, he wants to reallocate that limit and take from the commercial sector that supplies the fish and chip shops, restaurants and hotels? Does he want to take from them and allocate it to the charter sector or the recreational sector? Is that the member's solution? Does he want to take more from the recreational sector and give it to the charter or commercial sector? Does he want to reduce the charter sector and support the rec sector or the commercial sector? Those are the choices. There are no degrees of freedom unless the member is prepared to abandon sustainability.

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

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Acting Speaker, I cannot even hear myself with the Leader of the Opposition parroting away in the background.

**Mr R.S. Love:** You are asking me the questions. I will shut up if you stop asking me questions.

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** No. They were rhetorical questions. That is the issue. The member either does that or abandons the sustainability principle and goes beyond 375 tonnes. It is easy for the member or Hon Colin de Grussa to stand on the steps of Parliament House and say woe is us without looking at the detail of the issue. If the member wants to come to have a proper discussion and a briefing with me on the demersal fishery, he is welcome to ask me for that and I will provide it.

**MR R.R. WHITBY (Baldivis — Minister for Environment)** [5.35 pm]: I appreciate having the opportunity to respond.

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

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Leader of the Opposition. I hope the Acting Speaker will note that I have sat quietly, silently listening for the entirety of this debate, so I expect the same in return from the opposition members.

I am grateful for this opportunity because it allows me to get some more detail out publicly that I was unable to get out during question time. I think there is some more detail that the opposition may, or perhaps may not, want to hear. It is the detail and I will relay it to the member for Roe.

I begin by saying that the claim that this government is out of touch and unaware of what is going on in rural and regional Western Australia is just not true. The Labor Party is the major party of rural and regional Western Australia. We have more members representing rural and regional Western Australians than any other party. Opposition members might want to contemplate why that is. Our regional members are very in touch with their communities, and they know that there is always a range of views on a range of topics, as there is in the metropolitan area.

The member for North West Central made a good comment—it was a good one—when she said that we need to make sure that we speak to a range of people. I would apply that logic to members opposite because I think they sometimes have a go-to person here and there and they do not get the full range of concerns in rural and regional Western Australia. I think there are a range of views on all the issues that have been discussed today. There is not just one view; there is a range of views and priorities in regional areas. People on the land and farmers do it tough. It is a seasonal business. There are great seasons, such as those we have had in the last couple of years in terms of record crops in the wheat industry, and this year it is not going to be so great. I understand the challenges that go on on the land.

The point I want to make is that a government represents all Western Australians. It is not just the preserve or prerogative of a government member to pursue the interests of certain Western Australia who live in certain areas. We represent all Western Australians to the very best of our ability. In doing so, we account for and take in views from everywhere. Comment was made earlier today about submissions to the south coast marine park process and whether we heard views from people outside Western Australia. Yes, we do. We hear the views of people in metropolitan areas and up in north. We believe that everyone has the right to contribute and make comment. We take a very careful view of analysing those comments and feedback, but we also directly engage with people in the regions who will be impacted by our policies. It is often said that there was no accounting for the concerns of the fisheries industry or recreational fishers in the establishment of the south coast marine park.

There was a comment about a conservation organisation. I was asked a question at question time that I did not understand, and it suggested there was funding for me. I did not quite understand that. Perhaps when the

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Attorney General's legislation goes through, members will be able to find out whether there was any funding to me, but I can assure them there was not. The point was made that this all-powerful institution had control of the system. I let the member for Roe know that between the community reference committee's fifth and sixth meeting, in consultation with commercial and recreational fishers, additional amendments were made to the proposed drafting zone scheme to provide further increased access for commercial and recreational fishing. An area of an extra 118 000 hectares and around 147 kilometres of coastline was removed from the original areas of sanctuary zones. A significant change has been made to those zones in consultation during the process. Five proposed sanctuary zones have now been removed completely, 11 have been significantly amended, and a further nine have also undergone amendments. I do not know how a conservation organisation that has control of the process could allow that to happen. Clearly, our response through the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, working with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development in consultation with recreational and commercial fishers, has seen major changes in those zones. The process is still alive; it still has a long way to go. As I explained earlier, the next step is a public consultation process. The member for Roe; recreational and commercial fishers; traditional owners, who are often forgotten but have an important input for this process; people in the community; recreational users; surfers; and people who have an interest in conservation and the environment all have an opportunity to contribute to the process and make further comments, and we will welcome that.

The concern proffered by a small number of people about this marine park is that somehow it will devastate companies or it will somehow wipe out industries. That is just not true. There was an unfortunate and very misleading quote in today's *The West Australian* from Hon Colin de Grussa, who claimed that the south coast marine park would wipe out industry there. That is just not true. He also said that the indicative plans for public comment are overdue. Again, that is not true. The government has made a commitment to go out to public comment after it has concluded its consultation with industry and received feedback from traditional owners, a process I have just talked about. Hon Colin de Grussa also said that the area has a sustainable managed fishery and that we do not need a marine park. That is a clear misunderstanding of what marine parks are all about. A marine park is not about focusing on individual fish stocks—that is a matter for the fisheries portfolio. Marine parks are focused on the ecosystem of an area of the ocean in its entirety. They are about preserving unique biodiversity. We have amazing environmental values in the area of the south coast marine park. Hon Colin de Grussa said that Esperance would have no commercial fishing operations. These are just dramatic myths.

Several members interjected.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** These are the cheap shots, the puerile comments, that are based on nothing at all that members of the Nationals WA have —

Several members interjected.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** The National Party is saying something so dramatic and blatantly wrong—that is, that Esperance will have no commercial fishing operations. That is not qualified or explained. It is just plain wrong—full stop. It is wrong; no wonder there are people and families who are anxious and have concerns, even about their mental health. The National Party raises this issue and wonders where that comes from. It wonders why people are upset and concerned. I give the National Party those comments in the newspaper this morning as exhibit A. That is why people are concerned; no wonder they are. That comment is completely outrageous. The Nationals claim to represent the regions, but they are stoking fear and anxiety in local communities. A majority of the marine park—in fact, the large majority of any marine park—will remain accessible to commercial and recreational fishing activities. That is a fact—full stop. That is how they work. The vast majority of marine parks are open to commercial and recreational fishing. That is a fact, and that will be the case with this one.

**Mr R.S. Love:** Except all the good fishing spots.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** No, no. I have just explained to the member.

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

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** I will not take the member's interruptions, but I go back to my earlier point about the consultation with commercial and recreational fishers and how we dramatically changed a large number of sanctuary zones. That process is continuing. Rather than shout out myths in this place, I urge the Nationals to work with their communities and make sure people have their views known in the public comment process.

The other thing is that the member for Roe and Hon Colin de Grussa have not asked me for a briefing. This is an issue they have brought to Parliament. I am happy to give them a briefing and detail, but it is just not happening.

I will let members know about another marine park. I want to leave some time for the honourable member for Collie–Preston.

**Ms J.L. Hanns:** Honourable?

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** She is honourable in my eyes! Sorry; I have boosted her!

I give the example of Ningaloo Marine Park. The same fearmongering that it would annihilate the local industry and wipe people out happened when that was being created. According to a 2020 report from Deloitte, it is estimated that 218 000 people visit the Ningaloo coast each year and spend about 1.3 million nights there, while there were about 61 000 day trips. Ningaloo is estimated to have supported more than 1 000 full-time jobs in 2018–19, with employment concentrated in tourism and related industries. The south coast marine park will have huge benefits for the south coast. It will have huge benefits for Esperance. It will open up new industries. It will create new employment opportunities for First Nations people. It will create new opportunities for tourism and fishing adventures. It will elevate the premium quality of the area because it will become world known as one of the most significant marine parks on the planet, a rival to the Great Barrier Reef and Ningaloo itself. It will create visitation. There will be opportunities. There will be continuing recreational and commercial fishing, and there will be other opportunities as well.

I want to give members an idea of what Western Australians think of marine parks, because we are here to represent Western Australians. I refer to a YouGov poll. YouGov is a respected polling institution. It did not talk to latte sippers in Sydney and Melbourne; it spoke to Western Australians. It found that 86 per cent of Western Australians, including 84 per cent who identify as recreational fishers, support the creation of a network of fully protected marine sanctuaries in the coastal waters off our south coast. Nine out of 10 Western Australians polled believe that marine sanctuaries are a good idea. Here is the best bit: the greatest support for marine sanctuaries—92 per cent—came from people who identify as recreational fishers. Only three per cent of Western Australians thought marine sanctuaries were a bad idea. I guess I am looking at the three per cent. Am I? It kind of equates to the results of the polling conducted by the Nationals WA on a statewide basis. It is kind of about right. More recreational fishers than average Western Australians think they are a good idea. That is because they identify with the issues that we are all facing and want to have a sustainable environment. They want to be able to fish tomorrow and they value the unique marine environment.

I will leave some time for the almost honourable member for Collie–Preston!

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Parliamentary secretary.

**Mr R.R. WHITBY:** Indeed. I will leave members with this thought: the world is changing. Climate change is real. Great challenges are ahead for our state. Farmers are at the front line and will be hit first. They will be hit in more ways than other Western Australians will. This is about working together, learning new approaches, and valuing and protecting our environment.

Our government is keen to protect our marine and terrestrial environments. The way forward is to invest in climate adaptation, new technology and renewable energy, and create policies that will deliver amazing opportunities in Western Australia. Most of those opportunities that relate to renewable energy will be available to regional Western Australians. All the jobs and investment will be in the regions. This is an opportunity to embrace. We will support our traditional legacy industries throughout the state. Agriculture is critical to the welfare of our country and our state. We will continue to support all regional Western Australians. Rather than engage in scaremongering about a marine park that is about protecting a unique natural environment and enhancing opportunities for everyone, the opposition should come on board, arrive in 2023 and start to adapt and support what the vast majority of Western Australians want, which is a sustainable Western Australia with opportunities, jobs and prosperity. The way the Nationals members carry on in here shows that they are not open to change. They are all about attacking and attacking. I will hand over to the member.

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

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition! I call the parliamentary secretary and member for Collie–Preston.

**MS J.L. HANNS (Collie–Preston — Parliamentary Secretary)** [5.53 pm]: I would like to start by saying that I am honourable by nature but not by name. That is why people make the mistake of calling me honourable sometimes.

I will really wish I had more time because I have so much I could talk about.

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** Blame the minister.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** No; it is just that the opposition took a bit longer than we would have liked. We have a lot of things that we would love to have on the record from this government's perspective.

I want to preface my remarks by saying that I grew up on a dairy farm in Yarloop. I am very committed to farming in Western Australia. I am so committed that my laptop advertises Donnybrook Butchers. My husband is a keen fisherman. I have an understanding and appreciation of all these issues.

Today I really want to focus on how we can transform and grow regional communities. Collie is an exceptional example. That will be the purpose of my contribution today. I want to contrast that with the fact that my brother

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worked for BHP in Ravensthorpe in the early 2000s. When he was working for BHP, he lived in Perth and commuted down to Ravensthorpe. He was one of the 1 800 people who lost their jobs as a result of the closure of the mine in Ravensthorpe. He literally got on the plane, ready to start his swing. When he got there, they said that they were closing. The workers had time to clean out their lockers. My brother was put back on the plane to Perth to tell his wife and young family that he had lost his job. This government is committed to not doing that to communities. Collie is the perfect example of how that will not happen on our watch.

I contrast that with the gloom and doom of the opposition. Some days I feel really dejected about members of the opposition howling down regional Western Australia when they should be celebrating the great communities that they live in and the great work and investment of the McGowan and Cook Labor governments. If we listened to the rhetoric from the opposition when we announced the closure of the coal-fired power stations that the state government owns, given all the criticism that Hon Dr Steve Thomas levels at this government around supporting the Collie community, we would expect to see tumbleweeds rolling down the streets of Collie and everyone kicking the can down the road, wondering what is happening and where to from here.

I want to put some information on the record. The opposition is doing its absolute best to undermine confidence in my community. I have data and information that shows the complete opposite. We would think that the announcement of the closure of the coal-fired power station would have been disastrous for Collie. In fact, the closure will be staged so that the government has time to work with the community and ensure that jobs and opportunities come online in line with the phases of the closure. That means that job opportunities will ramp up in coming years. The large-scale closures have not happened yet, so the jobs that we are working towards have not been created, but they are absolutely in the planning stage right now. Surprisingly to the opposition, there are more jobs in Collie right now than there were before the announcement of the retirement of the coal-fired power station. I can absolutely attest to the fact that that is because of this state government's efforts to attract new industries aligned to the skills of the existing workforce, my husband included.

We are investing \$662 million into Collie and diversifying the economy to make sure that Collie thrives well into the future. I am talking about Collie. Collie is incredibly important. I live there, so I love the place. There is an intrinsic link between the economy in Collie and that of the greater south west region. I know that the minister and the member for Bunbury completely understand that very important link. By securing Collie's future, we are also securing the future of the south west of Western Australia. Last time I looked, that was in the regions. As a direct result of the state government funding many programs, the fact is that more than 450 ongoing and short-term jobs have been created in Collie to date. Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that the total number of jobs in Collie grew from 4 493 in 2016 to 4 774 in 2021. That data is out of date. We have seen an increase of 6.25 per cent. I can tell members that that trajectory has continued. In line with that, the median house price in Collie has risen. I think the last statistic showed a 55 per cent increase in housing prices in Collie. The Collie Visitor Centre experienced a record number of visitors in 2022—up by 73 per cent from pre-pandemic levels. The one thing that has changed between prior to the pandemic and now that has affected visitor levels is the massive investment in tourism in Collie. That was the first step in a process. What could we do reasonably easy and at reasonably low cost to really kick off visitation to Collie? It was absolutely the Wellington Dam mural, the associated mural trails and the \$10 million worth of trail investments that have gone into Collie. The spin-off effect of those things has really contributed to the local economy of the south west. The things that we are doing and the investment in Collie have a broader impact across the south west economy. As I said, I could talk forever about that, but I have a limited amount of time.

The minister previously mentioned the tier 3 rail system. I thought he would place on record the fact that the government has gone into partnership with Talison Lithium to re-establish the tier 3 rail line between the Greenbushes mine and Bunbury port.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

*Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm*