

McGOWAN GOVERNMENT — REGIONS — PERFORMANCE

Motion

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

That this house condemns the out-of-sight, out-of-mind approach of the McGowan Labor government to regional communities, which deserve better than six years of harmful neglect and systematic disenfranchisement from this Labor government.

The Labor government was first elected in 2017. Amongst its very first acts was an unprincipled and disgraceful attack on the children of regional WA when it sought to close the Schools of the Air and shut down residential colleges, such as Moora Residential College. The people of the regions spoke. The people of the regions fought back. In the end, the people of the city supported the people of the regions because they could see the justice of their position. In the end, the government had to backtrack on the Schools of the Air, but it would not backtrack on its decision to close Moora Residential College, no matter how much outrage was expressed by the community or how many questions were asked in this place about the closure of that college and the effect it would have on the children who were at the college. Those children were not from the wealthiest of backgrounds. Children are often sent to government boarding hostels because their families cannot afford to send them to a boarding school in Perth. It is also not convenient for many families to have children in faraway places, such as the metropolitan area. For that reason, Moora filled a very special niche in the residential college network. In fact, some children at the college had station backgrounds and probably would have found it easy to go to Perth, but they fitted into the community in Moora and they loved it there. For no reason other than sheer bloody-mindedness in the end, this government refused to give in, until the coalition government in Canberra came to the rescue and put forward the money that was necessary to rebuild the college. Only then did this government begrudgingly backtrack on its decision and agree to leave the college in place. At the time, it claimed that the college was unnecessary and would have no children living there.

Ms M.J. Davies: Hon Darren West still says that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes. He is one of the members who represents that region—how disgraceful! The last time I visited the college, it actually had capacity problems of a different sort; it did not have space for children who wanted to go there. If we put in place a decent facility, surprisingly enough, families want to send their children there. Anyone who had seen the condition of Moora Residential College prior to that would know why the numbers had been falling. This is what we see so often from the government: if it neglects something long enough, people will leave and it will have a good reason to shut it down. In some ways, that is what has happened to the town of Mullewa ever since Labor has been in office. Years of power supply issues led to a situation in which people had had enough—businesses closed and people left the town. The community hollowed out. As a community hollows out, it becomes an excuse for the government to reduce services, just as it becomes an excuse for banks to reduce services, as we have seen in some towns. This hastens the demise of communities. It is that sort of neglect and carelessness that enrages regional people.

There was an excellent recent example of this approach by the Labor government in its decision to slash regional representation. Within weeks of the government coming to office, it put a bill through the Parliament—a Parliament that it had gained absolute control of—and realised an ambition that the Labor Party had held for well over 100 years. As the Attorney General said in this place, this was an ambition that the Labor Party had held for 120 or 130 years. That is a very long time to wait to strip away regional representation. What a thing to have as a goal—to end the just representation of regional people. But that, apparently, was the goal. Even though the Premier said that it was not on the agenda, it had been on Labor's agenda for well over a hundred years. He did not tell the electorate that before the election. Now we know that the Labor Party, as distinct from the government, although it is all tied within the same body, has put forward a suggestion to the Western Australian Electoral Commission to abolish the seat of North West Central. Effectively, another regional voice would disappear. It is not content with abolishing 18 seats in regional Western Australia; it wants 19 seats to disappear to ensure that when it goes about its job of shutting down towns and industries, there will be fewer champions to speak up for regional Western Australia. Fortunately, there are some voices. That is why we have brought this motion to the house today.

I note the presence of the member for Bunbury, the Minister for Regional Development. He holds a key portfolio for regional Western Australians. When the National Party was last partnered with the Liberal Party in government, that portfolio was one of the most important in the entire cabinet. It was an engine house of change and development in regional WA. What do we hear from it now? Nothing. We do not hear a whisper out of that department. Royalties for regions is as good as forgotten. Local communities have no access to royalties for regions funding, except through the regional economic development grants, which I actually do support. They are a pittance compared with what could be done to enable economic development in the regions, but at least they are something. That is a worthwhile spend of royalties for regions funds, but many of the other things that we have seen this government

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spend royalties for regions funds on over the last six years have been nothing other than the normal business of government. Billions of dollars effectively have been poured back into consolidated revenue or have not been spent. Of course, that goes back into consolidated revenue as well. We know that this government has not had a commitment to regional development or royalties for regions, and that it has not had at its heart a view that regional Western Australians are entitled to a decent standard of living, a decent quality of life or decent amenity in their community.

One community that I want to speak specifically about is Jurien Bay. The Jurien Bay marina should be the centrepiece of Jurien Bay's economic life, but it is a disgrace. At times, it is a cesspit in which thousands of fish, molluscs and all sorts of marine life are exterminated. This happens regularly, in cycles. It sometimes happens multiple times a year. The government says that it believes in equity in the regions. If that were the case, it would be funding a fix for the Jurien Bay marina and would not necessarily be waiting for the federal government to come to the rescue. It has royalties for regions. The Minister for Transport should be talking to the Minister for Regional Development to work out how to make this work. They could find a solution, but that is not happening because this government does not care about the regions. It does not matter that three ALP members represent the Agricultural Region in its final throes, in the last two years of its life as a region, as the government is not listening to them or they are not asking these questions of the government. I do not know which it is, but, either way, the people of Jurien Bay can be assured that there is only one voice that has consistently called for a fix for that marina, and that is the voice of the member for Moore. This issue has been ignored by the government for the last six years. Prior to that, we had in place a working committee that put together all the scientific information needed to make sure we had a sound business case for the development of that marina. What have we seen since? Nothing. No investment. A business case has been prepared, and apparently that is the end of the government's responsibility. It is not seeking to fund the business case; it just writes it. That is not good enough. A business case is not the end product we need. We need a marina taking its place as the centrepiece of the economic life for that area as a much-needed stopover point on the central coast between Dongara and Two Rocks. It is a long stretch without any safe harbour. If Jurien Bay were able to take its proper place, I am sure there would be great economic spin-offs for the area.

Royalties for regions has long funded the Country Age Pension Fuel Card. Again, despite calls made over the years for an increase, there is no increase. Does the government really believe it is no more expensive to drive a car now than it was a number of years ago? It is much more expensive. Distances are no shorter. Fuel consumption is not much better. I do not understand how the government can be so dismissive of the needs of people who rely on the fuel card to do their shopping, to get to medical appointments and to have the assurance they can move from or within their community at a point when they need to.

Another local issue I turn my attention to is health in the midwest. The updates to Geraldton Health Campus were delayed. There is no commitment for an oncology radiation unit at the hospital, despite an earlier offer of federal funding to assist. Most egregious to the people of Moore, although they rely on the Geraldton hospital, is the fact that the Mullewa hospital sits as a plan—a plan that was announced in 2016 and funded by our government before we lost government. Planning commenced. Funding was there. That funding has been static ever since in an account called the primary health care demonstration program. I applaud the successful completion of the much-needed Dongara facility. We announced that as part of the same program as Mullewa. It is very pleasing to see that recently reach practical completion. I applaud those who made that possible, but I note in order for that to happen, even less is left in that primary health care demonstration site account. I think only \$4.3 million is left for Mullewa. I fear Mullewa will never get the hospital it desperately needs. I say again, it is an urgent need in Mullewa.

I have already spoken about the pressure and issues the Mullewa community has faced. It has a district high school desperately in need. The Minister for Education just came into the chamber, so well done on timing there! The Mullewa District High School in my electorate is unique in that for many years the entire cohort was Aboriginal students. That school will be in desperate need of investment and care for years to come. Other schools get money through P&Cs, and local industry might put money into district high schools. As far as I can see, the only entity apart from the government that puts money into the Mullewa District High School—I stand to be corrected—is the member for Moore. There might be others, but I am not aware of them. A look at that district high school is needed to see what can be done to improve outcomes for the students.

Mr P.J. Rundle: He's gone.

Mr R.S. LOVE: There you go. Thankfully, the shadow minister is still here to listen, and I am sure he will continue to take up the case.

I spoke earlier about power for Mullewa, but that is a widespread issue in the midwest. Power reliability in many communities I represent—Dongara, Northampton, Port Gregory, Perenjori, and pretty well all the communities up and down the midwest and along the wheatbelt coast—have shocking power reliability, which has not been addressed by this government. I get the same promises that the government will silicone the lines or reinforce this and that,

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but every year there is the same woeful power outage outcomes. Thankfully, those outages are more transparent now, as they are published and we can see those areas that are underperforming, but unfortunately most of them are in my electorate. That is a sad thing to have to say. That, Minister for Regional Development, creates a barrier to regional development. It is a barrier to industry setting up in the area. It is a barrier to people settling in the area. People come to my office and say, “We’ve had enough, we’re leaving, we’re selling, and we’re going away.” That is not an outcome we would like to continue.

In addition, the main transmission lines in the midwest desperately need to be examined. I note that \$126 million is allocated in the budget to examine the transmission lines in the south west interconnected system area, but when we have an opportunity to talk to Western Power during the estimates committee hearings about how that will roll out, I will seek clarity on what that might mean for the midwest. I will ask about the need to plan not only for the reinforcement of what exists there, but also the expansion of industry into the future. Many projects are looking at developing in that area, and there will be a huge need for increased power in the midwest. If it is not made available, the opportunity that presents to the region may well disappear.

Also disappearing is some of the coastline in the electorate of Moore. Erosion is a real issue in many coastal hotspots up and down the coast. I see a little bit of funding in the budget to assist local governments, but I wonder at what point we get down to the hard decisions about big funding items to address coastal erosion, instead of planning and studying it. There will come a time when more than just a plan for a plan will be needed.

I mentioned in the budget reply I gave earlier the situation for residents affected by cyclone Seroja. That has been a matter of great concern since the event in April two years ago. People still desperately need assistance, but the funding mechanisms announced, a record of over \$100 million, obviously has not hit the mark or the right target. There is no willingness to discuss that to see what can be done to change the parameters so that the money can be used. I know communities are being offered money towards projects of up to \$500 000 in each shire affected. Two lumps are applied to Northampton because it has the two major communities affected. However, that is not the scale of assistance some of those towns need.

There is also the matter of the lack of a proper emergency shelter anywhere outside Dongara in the north of my electorate. Imagine the reaction of people in Kalbarri being told that they had to evacuate before the cyclone hit and Dongara was the only safe place to go. It was the same for people from Perenjori and all over. It is a very long way to go for some level of safety. It begs the question: what is being done to ensure resilience in the midwest by providing more points of safety for people? In the view of the state government, that may be a local government responsibility, but I beg to differ: it is a matter for the state government to be examining and working on to ensure that that is addressed, because it will be a terribly difficult issue in the future.

I want to say something about the way this government operates. The situation in the Seroja-hit areas led to a response from the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, as the lead organisation in many ways working with local government to assist local communities. There are a couple of issues with that. It meant that the coordinator was, in fact, a public servant. What was needed for a coordinator in that emergency response was not a public servant but someone who can step outside that role and start to really knock heads together when things are not working. Public servants cannot do that. They might be diligent, but they do not have the ability to step out of it and have a red-hot go with government departments to try to get a resolution when things are not working. When I look around the affected area, I see many members of the community who may have been good voices for that.

Another issue that faces members of the National Party—me as the local member for Moore and my colleagues in the upper house who represent the Agricultural Region—in dealing with this is that we are more or less banned from talking to Department of Fire and Emergency Services employees, and not just its employees. All volunteers who are registered under DFES are warned off talking to their members.

Mr P.J. Rundle: They don’t want to give them any compensation.

Ms M.J. Davies: Which they all think is slightly ridiculous, given we go to the pub, play sport and do everything else with them on a daily basis.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is utterly ridiculous, but it interferes with and impedes our ability to represent our community. That might be a cynical attempt by the government to make it more attractive to vote for a Labor person at the next election, but what it actually does is interfere with the rights of the people of Moore and the Agricultural Region to have good representation that can work in an informed way. The only way to get information is to go through the minister and then, at some point in the future, weeks down the track, we might get a briefing. Other government members are able to stroll into the DFES sites, chat and share information, but not the member for Moore; he is banned. I have been told that at one event, the launch of a program at Mingenew, the organisers had summoned all the shire presidents from the area to attend one day. Then, when they found out that the member for Moore was coming, they cancelled the event! The shire presidents all showed up but there was nothing to attend.

Mr P.J. Rundle: The member for Kalgoorlie’s in strife for an unauthorised visit as well, I gather.

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Mr R.S. LOVE: Right. Then they put out a press release, and that was it. It was a press release and nothing else. Hang on a minute; the member for Roe has distracted me with his valuable interjections. I do not need members of my own party interjecting on my speeches, thank you!

Another way that manifests is when government funds things like fire stations in towns, the local member is not invited to the opening. Numerous times fire stations have been opened—in Coondle, the latest one in Northampton, and all over the place. When we say to people that we were not invited, they say, “We didn’t know.” They were involved in doing the guest lists, but they were apparently told by DFES that it is all about the volunteers and they are not to invite the pollies. That is what is happening, and I think it is about time to call it out.

We have been calling on the ministers about this for years. I remember Hon Fran Logan and Hon Terry Redman having a good old ding-dong ad nauseam about this whole issue. That flowed on to Minister Whitby and now to Minister Dawson, but nothing has changed. Obviously, it is something in the culture of the organisation and in the culture of the minister. Perhaps it is just the Labor government in general. I do not know, but I am putting on the record my dissatisfaction with it. It is not something that I, as a minister, would ever impose on the other side if the positions were reversed. In fact, when we were in government, I used to feel a bit of sympathy for Hon Darren West, and I would tell him sometimes when things were on to make sure that he did know.

Ms M.J. Davies: Just to interrupt, Leader of the Opposition, I remember doing the opening of the Collie pool and inviting Mick Murray to stand next to me and help cut the ribbon as the local member.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That does not happen now. Not with this mob.

Ms M.J. Davies: No; more fool me. It seemed like the right thing to do.

Mr R.S. LOVE: We are learning. If we were the sort of people who were vindictive, we would be doing those things to Labor members the next time around, but we are not vindictive and we will probably not because we are nice people on this side of the house. Unlike you lot, we would not be doing that because we recognise that members have been elected to represent their communities, and that is an important thing. They should be able to do that, and that should not be interfered with by something that the government decides to do.

I have talked about cyclone Seroja and the issues there. I think I have covered most of the issues I wanted to talk about. I mentioned in my budget reply how the Western Power connections are an issue, and I know the member for Vasse is also interested in this. Later on, the member for Geraldton might be able to explain to the house what is going on with those units in Geraldton that cannot be connected to Western Power and are sitting vacant and causing a bit of a problem in her patch at the moment. I have spoken about the businesses in Moore that are unable to get power connection, and it is threatening their entire business plans. Western Power might think it is okay for a business to wait 15 months to be connected when it already has a powerline running in front of it, and the government might think it is okay, but I do not. If that needs some investment or someone to be given some direction, I suggest that be given to ensure that communities are not waiting for not just months but sometimes years to get connection to power. That is not at all appropriate.

I note the time and that this is a somewhat shortened private members’ business. With that, I will conclude my contribution. I am sure other members want to outline some of this Labor government’s neglect over the last six years. I could probably talk for the rest of the evening on those matters, but I will let others have a go because I am sure they want to do the same.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party) [4.26 pm]: I rise to contribute to this debate on the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition —

That this house condemns the out-of-sight, out-of-mind approach of the McGowan Labor government to regional communities, which deserve better than six years of harmful neglect and systematic disenfranchisement from this Labor government.

It is only there for budget breakfasts and sod-turns. It is quite a mouthful! The McGowan government’s lack of vision and support for regional WA was on full display in this year’s state budget. The budget was riddled with missed opportunities at a time when this government is enjoying the biggest boom this state has ever experienced. Just to name a few examples, there is no funding for the expansion of the Busselton Margaret River Airport terminal, no funding for the redevelopment of Margaret River Hospital and delayed works for Peel Health Campus. It highlighted this government’s out-of-sight, out-of-mind attitude to people living in regional areas.

Recognising regional Western Australians’ perception of the Premier and his government, it was fascinating to see him and his ministers scamper off to the regions immediately after handing down the budget. The Premier went to Bunbury, and the Deputy Premier probably took a private jet to Geraldton. The Minister for Health was seen in Kalgoorlie, and the Minister for Housing in Margaret River. I sincerely hope that the housing minister had some

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good news for the people of Margaret River, given the significant housing challenges that electorate and people right across the state are feeling.

My colleague already noted the Premier's and the government's actions to rip regional representation, effectively 19 seats, out of Parliament. Removing regional representation was something that this government and this Premier stated in Albany was not on the agenda in the lead-up to the election. The Premier has taken the opportunity and his mandate to govern to do something quite different, which is to rush through legislation to do just that straight after the election. Of course, WA Labor proposed to rip out an additional seat, the seat of North West Central. That highlights this Labor government's approach to the regions. It does not want to hear more voices for regional WA in this Parliament, and it wants to see less. We have seen that through this government's actions on so-called electoral reform and its moves to remove another regional seat. We see in this budget the government's lacklustre approach to regional WA and the demands of our regional communities. As the Leader of the Opposition and opposition members have said, the budget illustrates many broken promises and missed opportunities across regional WA. Given the extraordinary wealth experienced on the back of the resources boom and the GST fix that was made under the former federal coalition government, there was a great opportunity to show vision and invest in a new terminal at Busselton Margaret River Airport, but the government has never supported that project. The community fought very hard to ensure the airport's expansion to accommodate interstate and international flights. The project was committed to under the Liberal-National government with joint funding between the Department of Transport and royalties for regions. The project had vision for this state and opportunities for the region. We have seen from freedom of information documents that the former Minister for Regional Development expressed her plans to unpick the project in communications with her own department. The expansion plans were delayed for a significant number of months and the go-alposts continued to change.

Jetstar has shown more confidence than the government has in the flights that have happened and the capacity at the airport. Jetstar has illustrated more confidence in the route than the state government has. Not only has Jetstar supported flights on Mondays, Wednesday and Saturdays, but also it expanded the number of flights by putting on additional flights during the Easter holidays. It has also shown interest in flights to Sydney going forward.

The number of regular passengers together with the fly-in fly-out passengers has meant that the number of passengers going through this terminal has significantly increased from 25 000 pre-pandemic to more than 100 000 this year, which is stretching the airport's capacity. Regular passenger flights are competing with FIFO flights, which represents significant issues at the terminal. It is a real concern to see visitors from Melbourne literally sitting on the ground in the terminal because there is not enough seating at the terminal and to see flights delayed by hours because of capacity issues, but those are not concerns of this government. Again, this represents a missed opportunity.

Margaret River Hospital represents another missed opportunity. Certainly, the member for Central Wheatbelt, the former Leader of the Opposition, and the opposition support investment in Margaret River Hospital. Not only do we support it; indeed, the WA Country Health Service sees it as a priority. Unfortunately, it is not a priority of this government.

Ms M.J. Davies: They don't listen—we know that.

Ms L. METTAM: We know that the government does not listen.

A senior doctor said that working in the emergency department of Margaret River Hospital is soul-destroying for health workers and doctors because of the increased number of diversions from the hospital due to challenging issues and the need for priority upgrades to the hospital, which were recognised more than two years ago. Again, nothing has been committed. This lack of commitment to invest in the hospital is at odds with the government's commitment to support junior nurses in regional areas. It will not provide basic upgrades to the facility.

I have spoken in this place about the Karratha step-up, step-down mental health facility, which was announced and re-announced in 13 media statements between September 2017 and May last year. I look forward to seeing a commitment to a step-up, step-down facility in Karratha and to one in Broome, because there were 13 media statements about this investment but still there is no step-up, step-down facility.

There have been ongoing challenges at Peel Health Campus. The community has been campaigning for upgrades to this facility since 2018. A commitment was made in 2020, but this budget contains only a re-announcement of the \$152 million redevelopment, which has happened for the third year running. There is no real clarity about when the project will be delivered. The hospital is set to shift from Ramsay Health Care into public hands in 2024. There are real concerns about the hospital's ability to attract and retain staff. We have seen significant ambulance ramping at this hospital, but that has only been an issue under this government. Prior to 2017, ambulance ramping at the hospital was largely negligible. Peel Health Campus, similar to many other hospitals around the state, has been plagued with challenges under the McGowan Labor government. It is fair to ask: where is the clear commitment from

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this government to deliver upgrades to the hospital in a meaningful time frame, given the re-announcements about this investment?

I turn to the midwest. Earlier this year, I had the privilege of travelling to Geraldton with my colleague from the other place Hon Steve Martin to meet with many business owners, local organisations and community leaders to discuss the issues in Geraldton and its surrounding areas. The region has been left worse off since Labor came to power six years ago. During the 2017 election, one of the Labor Party's key commitments for the midwest was the redevelopment of Geraldton Health Campus. It promised an expanded emergency department, a new intensive care unit, new integrated mental health services and several other expansions.

A member interjected.

Ms L. Dalton: It has a bloody good car park!

Ms L. METTAM: I understand it is of high quality!

As is their form, six years on, members opposite have only managed to deliver a new—good quality!—car park. This total failure is a demonstration of not only the government's neglect for the regions, but also its inability to deliver key health infrastructure projects in regional WA and its inability to deliver on its promises.

Another key issue raised by local businesses in the region is reliable power and energy supply, and the constant, often lengthy outages in the midwest that are devastating to the local community. I spoke to Alex from AJ's Beach Cafe. He faces significant setbacks every time there are outages. The cafe has to throw out food, shut its doors and, unfortunately, tell its staff that they have to go home for the day. We heard that his story was in no way unique. We heard stories from restaurants, welders, pubs, builders and local shops that had all been hit by the uncertainty of whether they would be able to keep the lights on. I note the Minister for Energy's response to this was to get off the grid and buy a generator, which is very disappointing. Businesses owners and families across the midwest need assurances as well. I am hearing about Western Power issues in my electorate and across the state. Only yesterday, I spoke to a developer who has 20 projects in completion that are being held up because of the backlog and inefficiencies within Western Power to manage connections. The blowout in design works has grown from 12 weeks to over 12 months. Members of the Liberal Party and other members in this place have raised that, and we will continue to do so. It is a significant issue.

I note that the social housing units in Geraldton have about a five-month wait for Western Power connections to units that would otherwise be occupied by people who desperately need to be housed. I was not going to focus on housing issues, but, quite clearly, they are significant across this state and have been felt in the regions as well. We know the government's record on social housing, whereby we have seen stock go backwards. We have seen a significant reduction in the commencement of new projects, with a 40-year low earlier this year, exacerbated by a desperate game of catch-up when it comes to ensuring that we have the skills required for the industry. One of the first decisions this government made when it came to office was to change the state's skills list. It removed those from the building industry, apparently not wanting to attract them. That policy has since been reversed and this government has proposed that tradespeople from overseas utilise shared accommodation so that they can construct houses here, which just highlights just how desperate the situation has become.

Other members want to speak, so I will use all my time. Many challenges face regional WA and getting access to affordable health care is one of them. I have touched on a number of issues across the electorate. Obviously, we welcome HECS-HELP incentives for regional healthcare workers. We hope that goes far enough. There is a shortage of midwives and obstetric services in regional WA and the situation is absolutely dire. It has led to there being fewer services provided by this government in the regions, so pregnant women have had no choice but to make that 1 000-kilometre roundtrip to Perth to give birth, which is highly concerning. We have seen this in the lack of investment in our hospitals and the lack of priorities for other hospital projects. I touched on Geraldton, and I understand that the only priority for Mullewa Hospital and Margaret River Hospital is for car parks, and that is about it. We also need to see more investment in early intervention support in our regions. As a regional member, I am familiar with the cost of travel and accommodation. Perth cannot be the only option for our residents in regional WA who seek specialist support and health care.

Our regions have played a major role in delivering the \$19 billion in surpluses this government has enjoyed since 2017, and the \$11 billion that has been forecast, but they are neglected and forgotten under this government. It is a budget of empty promises. WA's budget position continues to improve, but outcomes for Western Australians across the board continue to decline. In the regions, communities in Margaret River, Geraldton, Broome, Karratha and others have a fair question to ask: how is it that WA's budget position improves and this government is ignoring us?

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt) [4.46 pm]: I am very happy to rise and support the Leader of the Opposition in this motion —

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That this house condemns the out-of-sight, out-of-mind approach of the McGowan Labor government to regional communities, which deserve better than six years of harmful neglect and systemic disenfranchisement from this Labor government.

This is a serious motion. I have just given my response to the Treasurer's budget speech, for those who were in the chamber, and talked about my electorate specifically. Earlier in the day I listened to the Leader of the Opposition when he talked about this government's record on regional communities. It was quite the list. If someone is in a legitimate industry that is regulated and supported, which they have made significant investment in, but they are in the regions, they can just be dismissed or set aside and this Labor government will put a mark next to their name. That is everybody involved in the native forestry industry, the rock lobster industry, the supply chain for the live export industry and the finfish project. That is an absolute disgrace.

I had some dealings with the person who had developed the finfish project, prior to Huon coming on board, and when it happened, a monumental amount of work had been done. It is a difficult industry. My father, who was also a member of Parliament, spent a lot of time dealing with the aquaculture industry. He was part of the Aquaculture Development Council and the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council. I know that we are yet to really unlock the aquaculture sector's potential, not for want of trying, but we certainly do not throw out projects with long-term investment that have built long-term connections with scientists, the department and industry. That was all washed aside because this government wanted to make a big announcement with one of its government funds, and what happened? It has fallen apart.

That is reminiscent of what happened in Albany when we saw a project that had been designed by the previous government to enable the testing of wave power in Albany and so there was a role for government to play in creating an opportunity for those who had the technology to test it. That is the role that government should play—to provide the enabling infrastructure, instead of picking winners. We saw this government pick a winner, Carnegie, which had some dubious links to the then Minister for Regional Development, and we saw that fall apart at great expense to the taxpayers.

In this government's six years in office, we have already seen a tax on the native forestry industry and everybody involved in it. They were left reeling when the changes were first introduced by a Labor government some years back. There was a tax on the rock lobster industry, but, thankfully, it fought back and the community said, "Get your hands off." The Premier's response today about the live export industry was utterly disgraceful. He is not aware of what his federal colleagues are doing, so clearly he is not engaging with the federal government on any matter of substance, because if he was, he would have known that seminars had been organised—not well, I might add—to consult, or at least to tick a box. He then went on to show some disrespect to the industry with another initiative announced by his government.

The member for Roe, who, as a sheep producer himself, is far more well versed than I am in matters to do with the sheep-producing industry, may be able to correct me, but constituents have called me and said that they do not want the e-tags. They are not interested in the e-tags. It will be another expense for an industry that is already under pressure. Setting aside the point that the member for Roe was trying to make, which is that there will not be any ears to tag because this government is decimating the flock in Western Australia, the industry is actually not interested in the e-tag technology as far as I can understand. It will add another burden to an industry that is already under pressure and has diminished significantly under the watch of this minister and the previous minister.

It is the same argument that we made when the rock lobster industry was under attack. It is an enormously successful industry with significant investment from industry and private sector individuals to develop markets and trade partnerships. This government rolls into town and says, "We'll have a bit of that." The way that it is treating industries that already exist is disgraceful. We talk so much about diversifying our economy. A couple of weeks ago, I was at the Wheatbelt Futures Forum hosted by the Wheatbelt Business Network and the Northam Chamber of Commerce. Congratulations to them for pulling together an amazing day. One of the questions that was asked was: although we talk about all these new amazing opportunities we have for our region, particularly in renewable energy and projects that are on the horizon, why are we diminishing an already existing industry that creates jobs and supports families and communities? It seems to me that that is something that this government is very good at doing—attacking existing industries.

I have talked about the renewable energy project and the Carnegie debacle, which cost taxpayers significant amounts of dollars. There is also another example in play right at this moment in the midwest, in the member for Moore's electorate. A critical mineral project is in limbo while the government romances a hydrogen project that may or may not happen—sometime in the never-never. These are businesses that have a track record of investing but they simply cannot get an answer from government. Because they are not the darlings of this current government in terms of what they need to deliver and what they would like to do, it seems that they have been lost somewhere in government departments, without receiving any attention, and it is getting pretty desperate.

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Before I go on to what has happened with the regional development policy, there are other examples closer to home that I want to raise in this debate. Flowing on from the attack on aquaculture, members will know that my electorate bounds on the national park in the eastern wheatbelt. The Eastern Wheatbelt Biosecurity Group employs a dogger, because dogs are the biggest risk for the diminishing sheep flock out there. One of the reasons that the federal government said that it was not going to the eastern wheatbelt for its seminars was that there were no sheep in the eastern wheatbelt—again, that is Labor showing its ignorance. A dogger is employed by the Eastern Wheatbelt Biosecurity Group to manage the dogs coming from crown land onto the agricultural estate along the barrier fence. The dogger has been told that they are not to set traps back from the state barrier fence and they cannot shoot along that fence. What an utterly ridiculous position! The government is putting our agricultural sector at threat once again. It shows that this government has no interest in agriculture in our regions or in economies that are sustaining and supporting our state and national economies.

There is another issue missing from this budget that I know the member for Moore would have raised had he had time—that is, the complete lack of understanding of how emergency services and safety works. I heard the Minister for Police talking on radio this week about the golden hour of picking a patient up from a regional location in a helicopter or an ambulance and making sure that they were at a hospital in the regions. He understands that that is important, but there is no funding in the budget for the midwest rescue helicopter and no funding for essential infrastructure that would support and save lives in the midwest.

That is a list that did not take me very long to write down. We have an entire budget that is framed around these big announcements. I am sure that the Minister for Regional Development will stand and talk about the regional development program that he is in charge of, the regional development commissions and royalties for regions and say that it is all there in the budget! For the benefit of *Hansard*, that is sarcasm; it is not me endorsing what this government has done with that. What we have seen this government do with its regional development policy is a centralisation of decision-making. I fail to understand what the role of our development commissions is other than to check the box for the regional economic development grants, which is a small portion of the royalties for regions funds. That is not to cast aspersions on the individuals within those development commissions. They are good people, as are the board members, who come from our community, but they are not charged with any degree of responsibility. That has happened under this government's watch. Most people now have no idea of the pathway to royalties for regions or how they can access the funds, and that is because it is filled with what we call cost substitutions, which is the government using royalties for regions to deliver business-as-usual funding. That could be TAFE or education assistance subsidies. These are all really important things, we are not disputing that, but they are things that the government should be doing. Royalties for regions was not designed for business as usual. It was designed to recognise that it is harder to do business in regional communities and that sometimes we need to support our departments to think outside the square and to deliver solutions that are unique for each of the regions in this state. Health services or education services or infrastructure cannot be delivered in the wheatbelt in the same way as they can be delivered in the Kimberley. That is why the development commissions are important. That is why royalties for regions gave government the flexibility to address these challenges. Unfortunately, the government has shifted normal, everyday, business-as-usual funding and claimed it as an investment in the regions. I heard the Minister for Water and the Premier say with some glee that the government is continuing to deliver the subsidies that equalise water and power bills across Western Australia. Rightly it should. Every government since Jesus was a boy has done that. That is not something that royalties for regions should be paying for it. It should come from consolidated revenue or from own-source revenue from those entities to deliver that equity. That is exactly what governments should do. No, the government does not get a gold star for doing something that actually every government—Labor and Liberal—National—has done previously.

What the government is doing by not having a proper regional development program that is grassroots and regionally focused is short-changing those communities. I have seen it. I have seen what happened the moment the tap got turned off. People stopped thinking about how they could be creative and deliver projects and partner with government. Unfortunately, it takes a while for that kind of thinking to ramp up. When we first started in 2008, from a very low base, we had to create the Department of Regional Development, because it did not exist; we had to empower the redevelopment commissions; and then we had to change the mindset of the regional communities that had been ignored and sidelined for so long under the previous Labor government that they had to relearn how to think expansively.

Royalties for regions was a small proportion of the budget. We never claimed it would fix every problem but it had some intangible outcomes, which were to create aspiration and the opportunity for people to engage in being the masters of their destinies in their region. Since this government has come to power, I have seen that dissipate. It is not that there are not good people and good projects happening, but there are less than could have been expected if the government had continued to embrace royalties for regions in the way it was designed. No-one is saying it needed to be run the way it was in 2008, 2013 or 2017; it was designed to evolve to support and assist our communities, and also to send signals to government departments that we wanted them to think differently about how to do service delivery.

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The Southern Inland Health Initiative is an example of that, and I have spoken about that program on a number of occasions. It took a number of goes for the Department of Health to come back to us with the program, which turned out to need over half a billion of investment. It took a number of goes for the Department of Health to come back to us without its laundry list of asks that normally go to Treasury as part of the budget washout. That was not changing the dynamic in those regions; it was not changing or addressing long-term challenges of securing a doctor or working to build an allied health team, which is so important for the primary health care that our communities deserve. It was not dealing with the fact that we had multiple small hospitals that, as I and many on our side of government saw, had been let to suffer a death of a thousand cuts until they had become irreparable, and then the government would say it was quite expensive to run the Wyalkatchem district hospital or to uphold the Mukinbudin nursing post and to let them go and just invest in what government saw as an easier pathway, which was centralised health services, and not worry about delivering health care to those communities. Goodness me, am I thankful that we fought and challenged the department to think differently about how it could deliver those services. There was that opportunity in every department. Since then, we have not seen anything like that kind of conversation in our communities, and that is very disappointing. It is an opportunity lost and an opportunity cost for our communities. I firmly believe in decentralised decision-making. It comes with risks because not everyone will have the same view. If we give decision-makers who are further away from government the opportunity to come up with ideas, perhaps some of them will not succeed, but it will engage more people in the conversation. At this point, I am very clear that the decisions are made by the Premier; the Treasurer. According to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the wheatbelt is pretty close to Perth, so never mind about having a wheatbelt development commission.

Mr P.J. Rundle: Southern Cross is only a four or five-hour drive!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That is unbelievable!

A perfect example of what we are talking about was the answer from the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to my question today. It comes from the top! A minister could say: please think about how we ensure that we use everything, whether it is community resource centres, prioritising local decision-makers or delivering those services on the ground with input from the locals. I hear that from members across the chamber on a regular basis. We do not see that happening in our communities under the current regional development program. I could not tell members what the regional development program of this government is. It is picking winners and making people feel like they should be grateful for getting any attention at all. That is not how to take a long-term view of developing our state.

I am disappointed that in six years this government continues with that trend of sidelining some amazing opportunities in our regions. Decentralisation of government is so important in a state as big of Western Australia, and every regional member will say that if a dollar is given to a local community, to a local stakeholder group, they will spend it far better, because they will have ownership, they will stretch it, they will leverage it and they will take pride in delivering the project. I saw it again and again. I see it too little from this government because it has pulled all its decision-makers back into Perth and major regional centres.

The member for North West Central is the perfect example, because Carnarvon is a regional centre that is remote, and all of its major decision-makers, bar maybe a couple of departments, are in Geraldton. That is not good enough. The Gascoyne is an important part of our state. To say its regional centre is Geraldton is not right. We should be advocating, as should all regional members, to have senior decision-makers based close to the communities they are making decisions about. Then, we would not see this list of poor decisions by this government in its six years. We are in for a rocky ride for the next couple of years. I go back to what I said in my contribution to the budget debate, which is that the conversations I am having my electorate are becoming more pointed about the behaviour and agenda of this government, and not in a positive way.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.05 pm]: I also rise to support the Leader of the Opposition's motion, which states —

That this house condemns the out-of-sight, out-of-mind approach of this McGowan Labor government to regional communities, which deserve better than six years of harmful neglect and systematic disenfranchisement from this Labor government.

Some of the points brought up today have been excellent. The members for Moore, Central Wheatbelt and Vasse have summed things up very well. I would like to run over a couple of those things. The number one sign of disdain for our regional communities was when Minister Quigley and the Premier stepped in here after the last election. They could not get a lack of regional representation and removing 18 regional seats from Legislative Council on the agenda fast enough. The Premier was in Albany prior to the election and Daniel Mercer was interviewing him. He asked the Premier seven times whether that was on the agenda and the Premier said, "No, it is not on the agenda." Then, straight after the election Minister Quigley came in here proudly. He was working on that legislation and could not get it out there fast enough. That sums it up, along with the submission from the WA Labor Party saying

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it supported minimal change but that it wanted to remove one regional seat. That is quite amazing. Obviously, the removal of one regional seat is minimal change according to the Labor Party and this government, but it is not minimal change for the people of Western Australia, the people of regional Western Australia or the people of North West Central. It is incredibly disappointing. As I said, that points to the disdain that this government has for regional people. We know that 60 to 70 per cent of the state's income is generated in the regions, but then a minuscule amount goes back out to the regions, and the government is now trying to reduce regional representation as well. I look back at what I call the glory days of royalties for regions, which is when royalties for regions made a difference. As the Minister for Regional Development knows, I was the chairman of the Great Southern Development Commission and he was the CEO of the South West Development Commission. As the member for Central Wheatbelt said, when we went to those meetings, we had local decision-making and projects that made a difference to our communities. I remember one of the first projects that was talked about when the nine regional development commissions got together was the \$22 million foreshore development in Esperance. That development was fantastic. It was the best spend I have seen for a long time. Esperance also received \$20-odd million for the hospital, \$14 million for the residential college next to the high school and \$10 million for Esperance Primary School. I was standing next to Hon Terry Redman at the old Esperance stadium when he announced \$7 million for a new Esperance stadium. It is a fantastic facility for the people of Esperance that was funded by royalties for regions. What happened? I must admit we did get an invitation to the opening of the stadium the night before the event. This is what the member for Moore was talking about. We announced and funded the new stadium, and we got an invitation to the opening the night before the event. The minister well knew we could not make it down there. It is nine hours away. That is the sort of stuff that this government has done and is still doing.

Another example is the \$24 million for the TAFE. In 2016, I was once again with Hon Terry Redman and Hon Liza Harvey to announce a fantastic project. It was a fantastic spend of funds from both royalties for regions and the training portfolio. That is what it is all about: local decision-making and good-quality spending of royalties for regions funds. The minister well knows that because he was at the coalface as well, putting up his hand for good projects in the south west in his role at the South West Development Commission.

Mr R.S. Love: And that one in the wheatbelt.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes. He was there. Of course, Hon Darren West was also there as chair of the wheatbelt commission. Government members are well aware of how it works. They are well aware of royalties for regions and the good work that it did.

As the member for Moore said, the Schools of the Air and Moora Residential College are examples of the trend that this government set. Hon Sue Ellery had in her mind that we needed some sort of college in the inner city to replace Perth Modern School. A protest on the front steps of Parliament House by Hon Kim Beazley and former Governor Malcolm McCusker and the like got that decision changed and Perth Modern School stayed where it belongs. That is one example. People from all over the state and every suburb in Perth complained about the Schools of the Air decision, so the government had to backflip on that one. Finally, there was the Moora Residential College decision. As the member for Moore said, it took the federal coalition government coming in with \$10 million to turn the mind of the minister on that as well. This is what the government tries to do—that is, cut first, consult later. That is the motto of this government, and regional people have had enough of it.

Last night in my contribution to the budget second reading debate I referred to a letter about the budget by A. Morovich of Winthrop published in *The West Australian* under the headline, “Crumbs and a concert not enough”. He writes —

The masses seem to fall for it every time, so I suppose it's a tragic human flaw.

The latest examples are Mark McGowan's \$400 for power bills and a concert at Optus Stadium.

...

How quickly is attention diverted away from the shambles in our hospitals, ambulance ramping, the homeless, nearly \$600 million on useless RAT tests, crime rates, prisons and food prices?

...

We've basically been sold on a measly \$400, instead of calling this arrogant Premier out on all his failings.

It's sometimes hard to know whether to get angry at the leader or the people.

I think A. Morovich sums it up pretty well, to be honest. This is exactly the sort of stuff that is coming through in regional areas, and regional people feel the same way. It was summed up today when I asked the Premier about the live export sector. He wants questions on the budget. That is fine. Last week, he accused me of not asking enough questions because I had not asked one for three weeks. I have not asked one for five weeks on live export. Today, the Premier got up and said that I am asking too many questions. I ask a question every week. Which way does he want it? I am trying to stand up for not only WA sheep growers, but also people in the supply chain. We

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have transporters, shearers and pellet companies with turnovers of tens of millions of dollars. It is not just sheep farmers; it is the wool industry and all the associated industries. Yes, I will stand up and ask the Premier questions. If I have to, I will ask him every week because he is not standing up for WA.

As I said last week when I asked a question, if it were about the GST share, he would be all over it. The Premier has his \$1.6 million in the budget for extra advisers in Treasury to somehow defend the GST share, but he will not stand up for regional WA or the live export industry. At the same time, he has allocated \$22.2 million in the budget for the electronic ear tagging system. The Premier will oversee the demise of the WA sheep flock. We have already seen confidence drop out of the market and the price drop by \$40 to \$50. People are saying that they will not mate their ewes and they are selling their sheep and going into cropping. The critical mass of the WA merino sheep flock is 13 million to 14 million self-replacing, and the Premier along with his Minister for Agriculture and Food is seeing the demise of the WA sheep flock while putting \$22.2 million in the budget for the electronic ear tagging system. It beggars belief, to be honest.

The Premier displays arrogance when we ask questions. He has absolutely no idea. He was not at the town hall meetings at which hundreds of people and farmers turned up with barely any notice at all because they are worried about their livelihoods. What is wrong with that? They are worried about their future, and the Premier sits in this chamber arrogantly dismissing them as if they do not count at all. But he does not mind the income from regional WA—that is, the mining royalties and agricultural income. It is disingenuous.

We have also seen assaults on the likes of the lobster industry. The government said, “Let’s take 17 per cent.” That one did not last too long, as the member for Central Wheatbelt pointed out. The industry fought back. We saw the assault on the forestry industry and those families and communities in the south west. The government has cut loose not only those communities, but also the member for Warren–Blackwood. The people of Warren–Blackwood in the communities of Nannup, Pemberton and Manjimup will not forget.

I want to focus on some of the things happening in my shadow portfolio of education. It is good to see the Minister for Education in the chamber listening intently. I am concerned about our regional areas. Interestingly, the State School Teachers’ Union of WA sent Hon Carmen Lawrence and her team to look at what is wrong with the WA education system. It is quite concerning. Interestingly, they have received all sorts of feedback from stunned principals, teachers, families and staff about many issues going on in their schools. I am sure the minister will take note of the report by the State School Teachers’ Union when it comes back. I am certainly concerned about paediatric consultations and autism assessments that are holding back over 17 000 students. A teacher I was talking to the other day has a class with eight or nine students who cannot read and write and over five students who have undiagnosed conditions and serious behavioural problems. That teacher is in only their second year of teaching. Trying to balance work in a classroom when students have those undiagnosed conditions is very difficult.

I want to mention the fantastic work our education assistants do. As members know, education assistants are very important. At some of the support education units, EAs are changing nappies on 16-year-old students. I would appreciate it if the minister could look at their pay scale because, quite frankly, the amount our education assistants are paid for some of the work they do does not measure up. I know that they might not have a three or four-year university degree, but they are vital to classrooms around the state, not just in the regions.

I want to mention also the two-year wait for assessment for many undiagnosed children. I hoped the Minister for Training would be here. The TAFE system is struggling for lecturers, especially industry-trained lecturers. It is a real challenge and something that the minister needs to focus on. It is probably exacerbated in regional areas where there are labour shortages, but getting industry-trained people to train our apprentices is becoming a real challenge. In some cases, apprentices are left high and dry without the opportunity to finish their course. I know that announcements have been made about buildings and other things, but it is essential to have a lecturer so the students can take the opportunity to finish off the training and apprenticeship.

I turn to my favourite subject, the Esperance Senior High School. The Premier was down there last year. What happened? The ABC interviewed him. What is the biggest issue in Esperance? It is Esperance Senior High School. The Premier said he was not aware of it. He went and had a bit of a look. That did not come to much. As I said yesterday, I do not begrudge funding, but funnily enough there are two high schools that were built in the 1970s—Rockingham and Safety Bay senior high schools. I am sure they need upgrades as well. There is \$100 million in the budget, but nothing to be found for the Esperance Senior High School. This morning I heard both the chair of the school board and the chair of the P&C on ABC radio talking about how upset they were that there is not even \$50 000 for the master plan. As we know, the previous minister said to the Esperance community, “Not a problem. You can do a master plan—just fund it yourself.” Thanks very much—\$50 000. It is state government infrastructure. It is quite unbelievable.

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I have faith in our new minister. I know he will be down in Esperance soon. I know he will show the care and attention that our Esperance community deserves. I know the people of Esperance are relying on him as well because it is such an important issue.

There are many other things I could talk about. One issue that also seemed to disappear off the map with the Minister for Regional Development was the early childhood hub in Katanning. The amount needed was \$5.8 million. I remember going to the first meeting with a couple of parents who had young children. We went to the infrastructure manager at the Department of Education and we were told, “Yep, that’s great—royalties for regions; it’s a good project.” What happened? A new minister came in and said, “Sorry, take that off the burner. We are not interested. We have Challis in Armadale.” I agree that Challis Community Primary School is great. The new minister wanted to model it on that. Here we are six years later and that empty site is still there. An amount of \$5.8 million will not buy anything similar in this day and age.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Another matter is the research project, also in Katanning. I think \$2.5 million was allocated to that by the previous minister. It is one of those carbon projects that the previous minister seemed to really like. We cannot find that in the budget papers. I will be curious to see what comes out of the woodwork over the next week or so in the estimates process.

We heard today about the Katanning early childhood hub. There was \$10 million for the upgrade in the RFR budget for the Busselton Margaret River Airport, but it seems to have disappeared into thin air. As the member for Vasse said, people are sitting on the ground at the airport. It is becoming a very important airport for Western Australia and we need the Minister for Regional Development to come to the fore.

As the member for Geraldton confirmed, it is a good car park at the Geraldton hospital—we are all impressed with it—but we want to see the rest of the hospital. For six years, coming into its seventh year, this government has been nowhere to be found. As I said, 60 to 70 per cent of the state’s income comes from the regions. Let us see a bit of return on investment. Let us see the return to local decision-making and the use of royalties for regions the way it was designed.

MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Regional Development) [5.26 pm]: Over the past couple of weeks, whether it is question time or private members’ business, I have become increasingly depressed with the negativity, whingeing and whining that comes from the opposition. It is interesting, because when I go out into regional WA —

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I listened to the Leader of the Opposition in silence. I expect him to be quiet and I am not accepting interjections, Deputy Speaker. I have had to sit through complaints, whingeing and spin. Even today, we heard in question time a fundamental misunderstanding about how the state budget is constructed and how it is rolled out and the opposition is going out to the electorates and putting those views out as fact. It is misleading the electorates. It is very sad to see. We would not have seen that from previous members of the National Party, such as Hon Hendy Cowan and Dr Hilda Turnbull, the former member for Collie. This negativity is not doing members opposite any good in the electorate. It is out there. I get feedback all the time about the whingeing, whining and complaining and the lack of positivity about the future.

I went out on three budget briefings. I accompanied the Premier to Bunbury and I went to Exmouth and Newman. These were positive engagements with people—businesspeople and community people. They had ideas. They wanted to converse. They wanted to understand the state budget. It was a pleasure to talk with them about how this government has worked to achieve an operating surplus, what that means for the everyday expenditure of government, and how we manage that from how we book our revenues and the gains we get out of our revenues, and how we reinvest that into regional WA and into Western Australia as a whole to make Western Australia a better place. Every dollar of the surplus is invested into regional Western Australia and the metropolitan area. It does not matter where; it is about taking Western Australia forward. The other part that goes into it is reducing debt, and we have reduced debt significantly. That is about a legacy for the future. Those people in the regions were very keen to hear how much we have saved in interest repayments—dead money.

I was very pleased with the reception we received in Bunbury, Exmouth and Newman, and I was very pleased with the quality of engagement. I have had feedback from other ministers. I know that Minister Buti has been out there talking directly with people and gaining firsthand information, and the feedback I have been getting has been very positive indeed.

There have been a few references in this motion to a withdrawal of regional representation. I do not want to go back to that argument, because we have thrashed it out, but it is not a withdrawal of regional representation. There is no withdrawal. There will be 37 members of the Legislative Council representing Western Australia, and it will be designed to address some of the inequities that currently exist in regional WA. It is a fact that today, a vote in

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Kalgoorlie is worth three and a half times a vote in Albany. A vote in Kalgoorlie is worth one and a half times a vote in Esperance. I bet members opposite do not say that to the people down in Esperance!

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Members opposite know very well that decisions on electoral boundaries for this place and the other place are made in accordance with the law, and the Electoral Commission will undertake that review. It has sought views from people. Currently, there are about 5 000 or 6 000 electors in North West Central who voted at the last election. I do not know what the Electoral Commission will do with that, but it will certainly follow it through. That is a matter for the Electoral Commission, and members opposite know that. They put it out there that the Labor Party is doing it. The Labor Party put forward a view, as has the Liberal and National Parties. That reflects their views.

I want to go back to the issue of regional representation. At its heart, regional representation is really about the ability of members to build a relationship with their communities. It is about understanding needs and aspirations. We talked about aspirations earlier. It is about working with government to achieve outcomes, but it is equally about working with communities to see what can be done locally and to help support them. That is what regional representation is. That is the work that regional members do. We have 11 regional members in the Legislative Assembly and nine in the Legislative Council and they are out there doing that work every day. I will leave some time for regional members to talk about what that work means in practice—going out, talking to people and working with the government. I do not want to single anybody out, but, as an example, I was in Newman with the member for Pilbara, Kevin Michel, and it was really interesting to see that member's engagement with the community. He was talking with people; he knew their names and their issues and he was representing them strongly. When he is in this place, he is knocking on every minister's door, representing his electorate. Do members know how often I have had a request from members opposite? I think it is about two or three times. It is so seldom. The member for Roe was quoted in the *Albany Advertiser* talking about the landslide issue in Mira Mar that has caused so much angst for people there, and he was going to fight for them. He was going to take it up with government. I have not had one call from the member.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: He was going to raise it in question time. He is going to raise it in estimates. He did not even raise it today! That is the difference. Members opposite go out and talk the talk. They talk to the media and are happy to do a hands-on-hips picture in the *Albany Advertiser*, but the member for Roe does not have the guts to ring me up or stop me in the corridor and ask me what is happening. In fact, I think the only request I have had from the member for Roe—we have worked together in the past; I do not really like to take it up with him—is to arrange an appointment with someone I really admire and respect, Tuck Waldron, to talk about seniors' accommodation. That was a great conversation. There we have the difference. Members opposite are happy to go out and find the issues and use them to criticise the government in the media and whinge and whine, whereas here we have people who actually want to go out and make a difference to their electorates and communities and feel the passion. They live in their communities. They are part of their communities.

I heard a few comments about the grand old days of royalties for regions. Yes, the member for Roe and I shared some fairly robust conversations about royalties for regions, but I want to go back to a couple of points. It was not all roses. There were two treasuries. As a public servant, there were times when I was told that I could not talk to a Liberal minister because of the angst that existed between the National Party, which had access to one treasury, and the Liberal Party, which had had its central departments assets stripped by the budget and financial management of the previous government. There was enormous tension, and I know, because ministers told me, that National Party members would walk out of cabinet. There is this notion of support and collaboration, but it was just a straight fight between the Liberals and the Nationals. Interestingly, I heard the Leader of the Opposition today talk about the future National–Liberal government. I do not know that there is much space for the Liberals in that space.

I remember the fight we had—it was not a fight that I had; it was a fight that the members in the southern regions had—to get access to a dedicated fund for the southern regions. The northern regions such as Kimberley and Gascoyne all had a particular allocation under royalties for regions. It was not until the local members, particularly in the National Party, took up the issue and said “We need a dedicated fund” that there was a dedicated fund for the southern regions. In fact, I remember standing next to a former minister who told me that there would not be a cent coming into the south west, because the focus was on the north west. That fight existed. It was not smooth with members saying, “We're all in it together; let's bring the regions forward”; it was a fight. There was a fight within the development commissions, because the whole royalties for regions administration pitched region against region, development commission against development commission, and it was pure competition to get the money. It did not

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necessarily generate the best projects, and it certainly did not generate them in a way in which central agencies were able to support them into the long term. That is why we had the Langoulant report that identified many shortcomings.

Then we talked about the delegation of decision-making. I remember the report by Hon Wendy Duncan. I remember that the National Party created a centralised department for regional development. Where was it based? It was based in Perth. I remember the Duncan report said that we should not have nine development commissions in the region; they should all be reporting to one regional development commission for regional Western Australia. That is not delegated decision making.

I remember there was talk about substitution of funding and about royalties for regions taking money. I remember that the Western Australian Regional Development Trust had a very special member. Yes—the member for Roe was a member of the Regional Development Trust at one time. I remember the report that came out. It asked: How can you use royalties for regions to fund the development commissions that were previously funded by consolidated revenue? How can you fund a central department that should have been funded by consolidated revenue? There were a number of other examples. The trust singled out roads and bridges. It is all there in the trust report, with the member for Roe's name firmly attached to it. That is the hypocrisy in this debate.

I have to keep an eye on the time, because I know there are some very learned contributions to come, but I will say that regional development commissions are at the front end of regional development. My experience of regional development under the National Party was a department, a regional development council and a regional development trust all vying for control of regional development. In my view, it is about improving the lives of people in regional Western Australia. Regional development commissions are at the front edge of that because they understand their regions, they know what interventions need to be made, they know how to diversify the economic base, they know what needs to be done in public and community infrastructure, they know what the infrastructure needs are, and they know how to build vibrant communities. That is what regional development stands for—improving the lives of people in regional Western Australia and contributing to the growth of Western Australia. It is not about royalties for regions in the glory days; it is not about a regional development minister being able to put their hand up and say, “I control the money.” It is far more sophisticated to work with other ministers in other portfolios and influence and shape the agenda of those portfolios and how they deliver to regional Western Australia. That is the main game and I have to say that it has been embraced by the chairs and CEOs of the regional development commissions. That is what they have said to me and I will be building on that empowerment and working with every minister to make sure that they understand from the regional development commissions the important priorities for moving forward. So far I have had very positive responses from every minister, so I am looking forward to that.

I would like to have talked a little more, but I will give some time to my colleagues. With regard to Busselton Margaret River Airport, I want to acknowledge the work of Nick Belyea, the chair of the South West Development Commission. He is often overlooked, but were it not for his work, Jetstar would not be there. That was the difference; he did the hard yards to make that happen. The member for Vasse has conveniently overlooked the fact that the South West Development Commission is collaborating with the City of Busselton on what the next stage of the development of that airport should be. It might not just be a building; that is all the opposition runs to—“Build a building!” It might be about improvements in how we actually use what we have, and it may well be capital works to make those improvements a reality. But that is a business case, and it will not just be a case of, “Here's \$10 million or \$15 million.”

The member for Vasse also conveniently overlooks all the work the department and the development commission are doing to support Busselton jetty. I was so pleased to get a letter from the chair of the Busselton jetty committee, thanking me for the work that is taking place. This notion that nothing is happening out there is rubbish.

With regard to the Geraldton finfish nursery, I am sure I am going to get some questions during the estimates hearings on this, but if the opposition expects me to build a finfish nursery with no offtake agreement with an aquaculture operator, that is a white elephant; I am not going to do that. I will work to find the investments in aquaculture that will make a difference. I will work to make a difference in aquaculture, but I will not build something without an offtake agreement, and there are reasons for that, including change of ownership and change of priorities, and I have also had local feedback about the viability of finfish in that area. But we will continue to work with the Geraldton community to look at that aquaculture zone and find the investments that will go with it.

In respect of Carnarvon, all I can say is: stop running down the town. It is a lovely place. It has challenges and it has issues, but there are people there who love that town, and all they hear from the opposition is whingeing. I love regional Western Australia and I know it has challenges. I know there is a heap of work to do, but members opposite could not fix up every issue in regional Western Australia when they were in office; we will do our best, and it will be a continuing journey of development in regional Western Australia, but, fundamentally, it is about improving the lives of the people who live in our regions.

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MS A.E. KENT (Kalgoorlie) [5.42 pm]: I rise today to speak against the motion about an out-of-sight, out-of-mind approach to regional communities. I am the proud parliamentary representative for the electorate of Kalgoorlie. It is a massive electorate of more than 550 000 square kilometres. I have lived in this electorate for almost two decades, and I think I am experienced to talk about what is important to regional communities.

I want to talk a bit about the previous Liberal–National government’s royalties for regions program. I have heard a lot about it today and I have read a lot about it over the years. History has shown that the mismanagement of the old royalties for regions contributed to the \$40 billion debt that the Labor government was left with. It lost Western Australia its AAA credit rating and cost us billions of dollars in interest.

If anyone has not read the Langoullant report, I really encourage them to do so. The *Special inquiry into government programs and projects: Final report*, completed by former Under Treasurer John Langoullant, provided a scathing assessment of the former Liberal–National government’s management of the state in leading WA to a string of large deficits and a debt bill north of almost \$40 billion. The report highlights incompetence on a grand scale and that royalties for regions had been operating in an ad hoc, kneejerk way, with poor planning, a lack of accountability and a rush to get the money out the door. An analysis of major government projects put under the microscope shows that the then state government had no overall plan for spending and approved billions of dollars of projects without any business cases to support them. Large buckets of royalties for regions money were allocated to high-level and relatively undefined objectives, such as the Pilbara Revitalisation program. Funding was allocated from these buckets to build stadiums and other pieces of infrastructure without proper planning, with inadequate government structures and under the management of local government bodies that were not equipped to manage multimillion-dollar projects. Often, those same local governments were not funded to maintain the asset at the end of the project.

During the submissions for the report, the previous CEO of the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder was interviewed. He said about the royalties for regions funding of the Ray Finlayson Sporting Complex —

“Another project was the Ray Finlayson Centre. A \$16 million project. Did we need it? Probably not. We had quality sporting fields already. But because there is a lot of money there, it had to be spent.”

“Out-of-sight, out-of-mind”—seriously?

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Ms A.E. KENT: Has the member been there lately? Have you seen the damage and the disrepair of the turf because of poor management? I encourage the member to go there and see the mess it is in.

Our significant regional investment continues in the 2023–24 state budget, with \$11.2 billion committed to the regions to deliver important projects —

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Ms A.E. KENT: Yes, John Walker did say that. I did not interject on the member.

Our significant regional investment continues in the 2023–24 state budget, with \$11.2 billion committed to the regions to deliver important projects and improve lives across the state. The state government is also providing \$4 billion in royalties for regions expenditure over the next four years towards initiatives that will strengthen regional communities and ensure that services will remain close to where people live.

Let me now talk about some of the fantastic investments. I heard that Brendon Grylls spoke positively about regional capped airfares today. There is more than \$20 million in the 2023–24 budget for regional capped airfares to allow residents to pay no more than \$400 return. Since 1 July last year, more than 14 600 flights have been booked at this price in the goldfields; it has been wonderfully embraced. The cost of airfares is extraordinarily high in my electorate, and for so many people, making airfares affordable means so much. For some it means regular medical appointments in Perth; for others, it is unexpected family emergencies or just trying to run a small business.

There are more things happening in my electorate. There is \$5 million for a new basketball stadium, and thousands of goldfields residents are ecstatic about this project. The tender has just been provided to a local builder, and it is full steam ahead. There is \$600 000 for a large-scale nature playground at the Karlkurla Bushland Park. This is a massive commitment. It will be completed before the end of the year to provide recreational activities for the community of Kalgoorlie–Boulder. The state government will also provide \$2.1 million for a Kalgoorlie–Boulder youth precinct. The precinct will unify Kingsbury Park and Lord Forrest into a central, youth-focused precinct called the Kingsbury Hub.

The government will also provide \$10 million for a TAFE trades workshop; \$7 million for the Joe Lord Core Library upgrade; \$12.5 million for a step-up, step-down facility; \$6.4 million for an MRI scanner at Kalgoorlie Health Campus; more than \$11 million for a family and domestic violence hub; \$1.7 million for a permanent GP at the Goldfields Women’s Health Care Centre; and almost \$300 000 to 16 different sporting groups. I could keep going.

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Over the last six years, the McGowan Labor government has invested more funding into regional Western Australia than any other government in history. It has also invested millions of dollars into health, schools, police and justice services throughout regional Western Australia. It has also managed to get the state's finances under control after years of reckless spending by the previous Liberal–National government. We have refocused royalties for regions to deliver job-creating projects, help diversify regional economies and provide the major infrastructure that regional communities really need.

Along with more spending in regional communities, we now have more representatives from regional Western Australia in this house. Let me name them: the member for Albany, the member for Bunbury, the member for Collie–Preston, the member for Dawesville, the member for Geraldton, the member for Kimberley, the member for Mandurah, the member for Murray–Wellington and the member for Warren–Blackwood. That is a lot of us. We are all working very hard for our communities—and they know it.

Let us look at how much attention the government is giving to the Kalgoorlie electorate, apart from the millions and millions of dollars being invested there. The Deputy Premier was in Kalgoorlie yesterday to attend the Regional Tourism Awards and conference. The Minister for Health on Friday attended Kalgoorlie for a budget breakfast. Two weeks ago, the Minister for Health launched Youth Week. Where was it? That is right; it was in Kalgoorlie–Boulder. The Premier and the entire cabinet will go to Kalgoorlie–Boulder and the goldfields in four weeks to hold community cabinet meetings and spend two days in the region. So, no, the government is not neglecting the regions. We are the party for all Western Australians. The interests of regional communities will continue to be a priority for all those wonderful regional MPs who are out there working very hard every day for their constituents.

MS J.L. HANNS (Collie–Preston — Parliamentary Secretary) [5.50 pm]: Noting the time, I rise to make a short but hopefully very sweet contribution to this motion, which I vehemently oppose in terms of my electorate and, more broadly, regional Western Australia.

I like to criticise opposition members when they come into this chamber using language that is disingenuous to them as people because I have found them to be pretty reasonable people when I have had one-on-one conversations with them. It is ridiculous to suggest that the government has an out-of-sight, out-of-mind approach to regional Western Australia. Regional members of Parliament sit in this chamber, and most of them are from the Labor Party. I absolutely call out opposition members for suggesting that regional WA is out of sight and out of mind. Never before has regional representation been better than it has during this term of the McGowan Labor government. Opposition members said that we do not care about the regions; I am here to say they are wrong. The member for Kalgoorlie stole my thunder: I was going to rattle off the names of regional Labor members who sit in this chamber, but I do not need to name them because I can look around the chamber and say hello to my colleagues from regional Western Australia.

I understand that the member for Cottesloe is very unwell with COVID. I have had COVID; I send my sincere sympathies to him and hope he is feeling much better. Hopefully, he is watching or he might read *Hansard* —

Mr P. Papalia: Hopefully, not; I hope he is resting.

Ms J.L. HANNS: He might be resting, but I want to remind him of the time that he stood in this chamber—several of us were here when he made the statement—and said that he was going to call out the member for Kimberley because she was going to fight like “chi-chuana” for her community. His statement was the subject of some jest in the chamber because he could not pronounce “Chihuahua”. None of us could work out what he was talking about until he said it three or four times. My point to the member for Cottesloe—I hope he feels better soon—is that the member for Kimberley has fought like a Chihuahua, and then some, for her community in regional WA. Opposition members should not come in here and tell us that we do not care about regional Western Australia. We do.

I am here to highlight some of the ways in which we work collaboratively with ministers, as Minister Punch outlined about regional development. Some of us have gained a reputation in our communities for fighting like a “chi-chuana” for our communities. I was at an event on the weekend at which somebody pulled me aside. I know that they do not vote Labor so it was really interesting that they had pulled me aside. They said, “Jodie, you’re getting a reputation for yourself.” I thought that this could be a problem; I was not quite sure what they meant. It was outside Collie. It is interesting to think how people view you and your work on behalf of regional WA. They said, “You’re getting a reputation for being the person who can get things done in our community.” I was really proud of that because, just like the member for Kimberley, I fight like a Chihuahua for my community. I know that every single regional Labor member does the same.

I highlight some of the amazing things happening in my part of the south west of Western Australia. I refer to Minister Punch’s important role as Minister for Regional Development and to what he said about regional development commissions, which was outstanding. I highlight the South West Development Commission in my region and the

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work it does in my community. There are development commissions right across regional Western Australia, so I know that the members for Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Kimberley will have similar stories to tell. I want to highlight the purpose of regional development commissions and provide some examples of things supported in my area.

The fantastic regional economic development grants program was rolled out by this government. Its purpose is to fund projects that support jobs, expand and diversify industry, develop skills, increase business productivity and attract new investment in the regions. I cannot think of a better aim for regional communities. To date, more than \$31.9 million has been allocated to that program in support of regional Western Australia—let alone all the other ways that this government supports regional WA. I remind everybody that round 6 applications for the RED grant close on 30 June. If members know anybody in their region who has a business initiative or a way to expand industry and jobs in their community, encourage them to apply.

In October 2021, I was not the member for Collie–Preston. I was hoping the member for—gosh, now I am struggling—Kingsley would be in the chamber at the moment. She spoke this week about the revheads in her family, not to be confused with the redheads in her family! On behalf of the member for Warren–Blackwood, I give a shout-out to Vee Two Australia, which is an amazing manufacturer of classic motorcycles. It was established in Nannup, Western Australia. Under the second round of the RED grants, it received \$113 000 to increase its production to meet world demand for Ducati motorcycle parts. That happened in regional Western Australia and this government helped that business step up and expand its operations.

More recently, after I became the member for Collie–Preston, another amazing opportunity was announced in December last year. Aquafarms, which operates Capel Marron Farm in my electorate, received \$147 000 towards opening an interactive agritourism facility at the marron farm. The minister and I visited the facility, where we were shown its plans by two amazing young men who are changing the aquaculture industry for the better. The development will include a hospitality venue and tourism experience, and this will all be centred around iconic WA marron. I am sure that Mick Murray will be a frequent visitor.

Samson’s Paddock is an amazing restaurant in the member for Cottesloe’s electorate. It was given \$100 000 to renovate the first floor of the historic Railway Hotel in Donnybrook. It is moving part of its operations to Donnybrook. This funding will allow it to create 15 premium hotel rooms and diversify the whole region’s accommodation offerings. On top of that, the project will, as part of a wider redevelopment, establish a brewery, distillery and restaurant—incredible opportunities to support growth in the regions around this very important tourism operation.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Ms J.L. HANNS: Thank you, member. It is a fabulous project. I think the pub will be named “Donny” after Donnybrook, hailing back to its Scottish origins. They are really lovely people, so I am very pleased that they were able to receive —

Ms M.J. Davies: I concur.

Ms J.L. HANNS: Excellent.

Tony Jenour owns Evedon Lakeside Retreat, a tourist operation in what has been classified as Burekup, on the border of the Ferguson Valley. I am hesitating and making sure I have my geography right.

Mr P. Papalia: Ferguson Valley is Burekup.

Ms J.L. HANNS: Is it Burekup? Okay. The Burekup local would know.

Mr P. Papalia: Yes. It would probably say Ferguson Valley, for marketing purposes.

Ms J.L. HANNS: It possibly would. Burekup is up and coming; the minister knows that. It is the home of the Papalia family—correct. I actually doorknocked the minister’s dad during the election campaign.

Mr P. Papalia: I know; he told me.

Ms J.L. HANNS: I remember that.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.