

Division 14: Gascoyne Development Commission, \$1 515 000 —

Ms L.L. Baker, Chairman.

Mr B.J. Grylls, Minister for Regional Development.

Mr P.B. Rosair, Director General, Department of Regional Development and Lands.

Mr A.D. Kerr, Manager, Financial Services, Department of Regional Development and Lands

Mr S. Yule, Chief Executive Officer.

Ms A. Dann, Principal Policy Adviser, Office of the Minister for Regional Development.

Mrs J. Sounness, Principal Policy Adviser, Office of the Minister for Regional Development.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The question is that the appropriation for division 14 be recommended. I give the first question to the member for Kalgoorlie

Mr J.J.M. BOWLER: The Gascoyne Development Commission is by far the smallest development commission. There have been rumblings in the past that it would be split between the Pilbara to the north and the Mid West to the south. What are the minister's thoughts on that?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: The member for Kalgoorlie is right; that discussion has been had before. The Gascoyne covers a wide area and it has a big job to deliver on its development plan and revitalisation. Some of the bigger challenges are being publicised in Carnarvon, with some challenging community circumstances. As I see it, the growth of tourism on that Ningaloo coast is still untapped. The development commission review, chaired by Hon Wendy Duncan, had a look at this, and I am happy to say that there is no recommendation to amalgamate any development commissions. The member is right; the Gascoyne Development Commission is one of the smaller development commissions, but it has been there for a long time. Whenever we go down that path of boundaries, we spend a lot of time fighting about boundaries and no time trying to advance economic and social development in the community. I would much rather spend my time advancing economic and social development, so the Gascoyne Development Commission is safe.

Mr M. McGOWAN: For clarification, are we going to deal with the Gascoyne Development Commission first, then Goldfields-Esperance and so forth, and try to go through all of them?

The CHAIRMAN: Correct.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: We have about five minutes on each.

Mr M. McGOWAN: We will have to be reasonably swift considering we are going on to the WA Land Information Authority in an hour.

The CHAIRMAN: Correct.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I refer to the minister's answer to the question just asked on the Gascoyne Development Commission. The minister referred to the report by Hon Wendy Duncan that was handed down either early this year or late last year, at a cost of \$200 000-odd, as I recall. It contained some recommendations on the establishment of a central office and the moving of some powers and authority to that central office away from the development commissions. The minister has not made a decision on that. Can the minister advise us when he will be making a decision and whether he will be endorsing the recommendations in that report?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: The government is currently considering that report. I have framed, essentially, the government's response to that report to take to cabinet. Any changes will be the province of the Premier in his responsibility for public sector management. Now that the budget progress is out of the way, we will progress that through cabinet and, hopefully, be able to go public with the government's response to that review in the next couple of months. I thank Hon Wendy Duncan for the work that she did in looking at regional development. It was important, given the quantum of expenditure and the focus that has been put on regional development, to take a look at how we might undertake regional development better. The development commissions are front and centre of that. We look forward to providing a government response in the near future.

[4.20 pm]

Mr M. McGOWAN: Does the minister endorse the report?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: It is up to the government to endorse the report. I will take that to cabinet shortly.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The minister received the report; does he think its recommendations are worthwhile?

Chairman; Mr John Bowler; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Vincent Catania

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: They are definitely worthwhile. It is a very good report that I thought canvassed some very good issues.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I refer to the Gascoyne Development Commission on page 218. Some of the answer was given under the flood mitigation program in Carnarvon. The concern from the community is that if it goes ahead, what programs will be put back. There has been talk of \$17 million for the airport being put back, along with others. It is my understanding it is one or the other.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Good question, member for Collie–Preston. Essentially, the Gascoyne development plan prioritised areas of investment under the Gascoyne revitalisation fund. Subsequent to that plan being presented to me, the flood occurred. I have asked the Gascoyne Development Commission and the community, given what has occurred, whether they would like to have another look at their funding priorities for that. They have said yes, but they have not yet come to me formally. I expect them to do that in the near future. I do not know what they are looking at pushing back, only that one of the benefits of local decision making is that that will be their call. If they would like to put some of that Gascoyne revitalisation fund into flood mitigation, that means something else that would have been funded will be pushed back.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I refer to the first and possibly the second dot points on page 218. The minister quickly touched on it about the revitalisation plan for the Gascoyne. It is about local decision making. It is great to see that the locals are realising that and prioritising some of the things they need to do such as spending on flood mitigation. I think the member for Collie–Preston is right in touching on some of those things that the community is now thinking about, and, hopefully, will be ratified very shortly. We often forget about the other town that was affected in the flood. I think the minister and I have been out several times to Gascoyne Junction where it was devastated, as was the pastoral industry around there. We often forget about the lives that have been affected there. What is occurring in the Gascoyne revitalisation fund to assist the people of Gascoyne Junction and the Shire of Upper Gascoyne?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Thank you, member. Essentially, Gascoyne Junction was washed away in the flood. We have been very happy to quickly respond to that by partnering with the council to rebuild the community infrastructure. With the loss of the pub the community lost a community meeting point; it lost the supermarket, which was part of the hotel complex; it lost the accommodation; and the caravan park was flattened. There was not much left in community structure. We moved quickly with the support of the Gascoyne revitalisation plan steering committee to commit \$3 million of funding to Gascoyne Junction, so it could begin to plan and rebuild the community infrastructure so that the community had a shop to go to, a place to meet and accommodation for people who travel through the town. The member is right, too often the damage caused at Gascoyne Junction was not talked about. The McTaggarts, who live close by, had much devastation to their property and were lucky to get through the night perched on top of their rainwater tank as the floodwaters rose. We hope that infrastructure will be up and running with the rebuilding of Gascoyne Junction. We will not be too far behind with Carnarvon.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I realise time is of the essence, Madam Chairman, so I will ask a brief question and seek a brief answer. We are dealing with the amount set aside for regional development at Gascoyne. I note in the past that the minister has put out a number of press releases about the Coral Bay seasonal accommodation. I have a picture here of a sign with the minister in front of it. Has construction commenced; when is it due to be completed; when was it initially expected to be completed; and has the cost increased on the original budgeted amount?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Thank you, member for Rockingham. Seasonal staff accommodation in Coral Bay has been a disaster for a long time. People servicing the tourism industry were living in substandard conditions that, essentially, the shire had to turn a blind eye to, otherwise Coral Bay would have been shut down. We have progressed through a tender to have National Lifestyle Villages as the preferred tenderer for that project. Final due diligence on that project is being undertaken and soon construction will be underway on 58 rooms in a village to house up to 70 people. Yes, it is behind time. We would have liked it to be built sooner, but there are no budgetary implications to its being behind time. We had hoped to be able to bring that on for this year's tourist season, but it seems unlikely that we will be able to do that. Although there are no implications for the budget, certainly there are implications for the delivery time line. Again, that project has been a very difficult one for government to have a solution for. I hope that at the end of this build, the opportunity will be available for those workers who are living in what is called "little Kenya" to move out; for the council to enforce building regulations in that area; and for those seasonal workers to live in proper accommodation.

Mr M. McGOWAN: When was it announced that it would be completed; when will it be completed; and what will be the total cost?

[4.30 pm]

Chairman; Mr John Bowler; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Vincent Catania

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Again, we hoped that we would have been able to have that project available for this year's tourist season, which is probably now. Construction has not started so we are probably a tourist season behind.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Is the minister suggesting that it is a year behind schedule?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, I am trying to stick to your own timetable, so I will put the question.

The appropriation was recommended.