

REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA, GOVERNMENT FUNDING RESTRICTIONS

1023. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Housing and Works:

In Bindoon on Friday the minister said that the wheatbelt had received a large benefit under the previous Government and indicated there was now no money for school buses, roads and regional developments. How can the minister say that the Premier has a passion for regional Western Australia?

Hon TOM STEPHENS replied:

That is an unusual summary of what I said. I was trying to give credit to the National Party members at the function for the work their colleagues had done on behalf of the people of the wheatbelt. I wanted to ensure that their constituents understood that they had received a dramatically disproportionate share of almost every regional development program during the past eight years. I have the statistical data to prove that. I hope the information I gave those voters will be to the benefit of those members at the next election.

Hon Norman Moore: You are giving us that help everywhere.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: The wheatbelt communities did well out of a range of schemes and programs, and I want to ensure that all regional Western Australia benefits in the same way. A range of other regions have substantial infrastructure needs, and we must find ways to offset the previous Government's neglect of those areas during its eight years in office. We will do that in part through the \$75 million development fund, which is new money for regional investment over the next four years.

Hon Murray Criddle: You took \$290 million out of the road fund.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I am sure the minister is trying to bring his answer to a close.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: That is correct. I will use only one scheme to illustrate what I am saying. About 36 per cent of the headworks scheme fund went to the wheatbelt, and the Kimberley received only one per cent. Members can imagine the disparity in costs between headworks in the Kimberley and the wheatbelt.

More strength to the regions. I want them all to do as well with infrastructure funds. We will find ways to build on these programs. Another good example is the leadership program. The Government would like to see that extended beyond organising functions for up-and-coming young Nationals.

Hon Bill Stretch: That is not fair; my daughter went to one of them.

Hon TOM STEPHENS: And one or two Liberals. They should be extended to benefit people throughout regional Western Australia. It is a damn good program and will no doubt produce some damn good Nationals in Western Australia.