

WA's approach to regional wellbeing

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Well, our next speaker this morning is Paul Rosair. He is the Director General of the Department of Regional Development and Lands in Western Australia. He's held the position since the department was established back in July of 2009. He's worked in various roles over his career, including Director of Regional Operations for the Water and Rivers Commission and the Department of Environment. He was also a Director of Business and Regional Operations for the Department of Water before being seconded to the Department of Local Government and Regional Development. So, having worked for over 30 years across the government sector through the State in the portfolios of Environment, Water, Land Management, Indigenous Capacity Building, Corporate Services, and Metro Resource Management, Paul is, indeed, well credentialed to lead the Government's Agenda for Regional Development in Western Australia. As Director of Major Regional Projects with the Department of Local Government and Regional Development, Paul was responsible for the implementation of the State Government's Royalties for Regions Policy, which he now administers, and which so many look from the East with envious eyes over. Having lived and worked in regional Western Australia, he brings to the role of Director General a broad perspective on issues of particular importance to regional WA. This perspective, along with his focus on creating and maintaining strong, productive partnerships, contributes to his success in regional development initiatives at the local and national level. So, to tell us a little bit more about Western Australia's approach to regional wellbeing, please welcome Paul Rosair [applause].

Paul Rosair: Thank you very much. Firstly, while you mentioned an active political party in the West and pointed in my direction, I'm no politician, I'm a public servant, so I need to make that very clear before we start. Regional development in Western Australia is critically important to the health of their communities and without proper regional development, and encouraging jobs and growth and all those social determinants we talked about earlier, the overall health of the community suffers. So it's very important that when we deliver regional development in WA, we focus on the health aspects. I'll talk about the Royalties for Regions Program shortly, but more than 25% of that program is directly investing in health initiatives in the state.

The Department of Regional Development and Lands has a number of responsibilities, but essentially I want to focus today on the administration of the State's Royalties for Regions Program. As mentioned earlier, it was a program initiated in 2008, as a result of the last state election, as an alliance between the National Party and the Liberal Party. Minister Brendon Grylls developed the concept of 25% of royalties from mining in Western Australia going directly back into regional WA, and that program now has budgeted for over \$7 billion of investment in regional WA. It's about developing a number of aspects of regional WA. It's about creating jobs. It's about creating security. It's about creating a higher standard of living in regional WA. It's about health, about education. It's also important to note it's about amenity and culture and human capacity, and all those elements that make up a really vibrant regional community. And you'll see as we go through the program and I take you through some of those elements, the importance of human capacity building and health to a vibrant regional community. Critically important, and, as I said, 25% of the program.

Regional development creates greater wealth and a better standard of living flowing on to improved community wellbeing and ultimately the health of our communities. So you hear about the Royalties for Regions program and you hear about some of the big-ticket items, like the Ord. You hear about the Pilbara cities up in Pilbara. And ultimately, it's about wellbeing and building the health and wellbeing of our regional communities. Critically important, and Rob touched on this earlier, is collaboration across all levels of government. The implementation of our Royalties for Regions program is done with that in mind. We have a Directors General Reference Group from health, education communities, child protection, and others, who sit around the table identifying the priorities of the State. So we're in

accord with the local and the state priorities for regional investment. It's very critical we do that. We also do it in tandem with the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee, made up of primarily the Health Services Directors General, including police, health, education, corrective services, Indigenous affairs, and we make sure that our investment from Royalties for Regions is not duplicated, sitting around that table. There's already inefficiencies in the delivery of some services. I think we counted six parenting programs, being run out of five different departments, currently in Aboriginal communities. So we don't want to add to that problem. We want to make it more efficient and complement the delivery of those programs.

Another initiative under Royalties for Regions in the Indigenous space through the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee, is the development of an Emergency Response Fund. A \$10 million program that has access, through the Affairs Committee, to respond immediately to emergencies in Aboriginal communities. And that could be in health, it could be in education, it could be in water supply. It could be in all sorts of fashions. Too often Aboriginal communities fail and there's a bit of buck-passing happening around the government departments. Access to this \$10 million fund allows the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee to respond immediately, and then go and find the source of those funds through the existing agencies and top that fund up. A very recent example was in Laverton, where the local shop failed on a business front and closed. Access to fruit and vegetables— failed. The Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee was able to invest \$200,000 overnight, and generate the incentive for a business to start up within a couple of weeks and get that shop going again. That was an immediate response, as a result.

There are many programs around the State. Two and a half thousand programs and projects have been delivered since 2008 in the \$7 billion program. And that map tells you of some of the big-picture items that have been delivered. I want to actually concentrate and pick out a few programs that I think have an intimate connection to the health and wellbeing of our regional communities and are providing a direct benefit. If you look around the State there, you've got the Ord-East Kimberley Expansion Project. The first time since 1970 the Ord has been expanded since Stage One, but more importantly it is building jobs and growth and it has worked with the Mirrarong-Gadjerong peoples to develop human capacity and employment and housing opportunities for those groups. So it's an actual social outcome, as well as an investment and growth outcome, and an economic outcome. It's the last partnership with regional WA where the Federal Government signed up, by the Prime Minister at the time, Kevin Rudd, and Premier Barnett, and it leveraged a \$190 million of Commonwealth funding that was invested into community and facilities, health, residential rehabilitation facilities, sobering up centres, remote clinics, health service provider housing, short-stay patient accommodation, and the primary health care facility, some \$20 million in Kununurra. So it complemented that economic development of the Ord with the investment from the Commonwealth into those areas.

Pilbara cities: You may have heard of that. Eighty per cent of royalties in Western Australia come from the Pilbara, and the Pilbara has, over time, been stretched with its infrastructure and services. And so \$1.1 billion of the program has been invested over the last four years to try and address the inequity in the Pilbara in the rest of regional WA. There's an interesting program that we created within the department, known as the Pilbara Cities, and it was done to create twin cities in Karratha and Port Hedland, with some 50,000 people each. But when we looked at it and we thought about it, I mean, how many cities in Australia have been developed and planned properly? And if you really think about it, it's probably Canberra, and people might question the planning around that, but most of the other cities have been fed off ports or, in Kalgoorlie's case, mining. So we had an opportunity there to address this. And we took a novel approach in building a city. It's not about how we attract people to the cities, but really why do people leave regional WA?

We targeted our investment to those areas. Specialist health and allied health services are the major reason people leave the Pilbara. And I have personal experience; my first baby was born there at Nickol(Nickle?) Bay Hospital, the first day it was open, and so, from that point on, the Family Support Services and Health Services led me to leave within 12 months, sometime back, mind you, but definitely

health, education, tertiary and secondary education, the cost of living, housing, housing affordability. Rentals in Karratha are up to \$2,500 a week, and in Port Hedland a four by two rented for \$5,000 twelve months ago. The cost of living is another impediment. And fourthly, amenity, social amenity, culture, the arts, events, cafes, restaurants, they're the other reasons. Obviously, family and the like. But they are the reasons that we invested into the Pilbara. And the fifth one we went through over the last four or five years is it's bloody hot. So a lot of our housing design and a lot of our water parks are addressing that feature. And if you can build a city in Dubai, I'm sure we can do that in the Pilbara.

A number of other investment plans for the Gascoigne in the Midwest are also programs that have been invested in across the State in a similar fashion. The Super Towns Program, an \$85 million program, was to address the population growth in the South of Western Australia and we've identified nine regional cities—or regional communities, regional growth centres. And again, addressing those social determinants of health and wellbeing to create vibrant communities. Infrastructure and buildings are great and we've done a lot of that. We've done a lot of community rec centres. We've done a lot of hospitals and schools, but ultimately the vibrancy of a community is directed towards its people, its capacity, its leadership, and its wellbeing, and our investment in that area is now being focused and targeted.

It was very disappointing going back last local government elections in some of the Wheatbelt communities. We didn't have people stand up for local government wards. Not one person stood up for an election. So we've got to build that leadership and capacity. We've got to make it attractive for people to stay in regional communities. We've got to really want people to be born, live, work, play, and ultimately die in regional communities. That's what makes up the fabric of a regional community. And to have your parents and your grandparents look after the young ones and the grandchildren. I know very well about that. I've two—three granddaughters in the last three years, so I've taken up the cudgel on that. And that's the sort of thing that makes regional communities. So that's the approach we've taken.

One of those other major initiatives down at the bottom there, Southwest Native Title Agreement, is settling the Noongar land claim and through our Lands Division we're looking at Crown Land opportunities and building capacity for Aboriginal groups to be able to develop expertise and economic benefit through the delivery of businesses. Aboriginal tourism is another area where we invest. Funnily enough, 80% of people who visit regional WA, 80% of them say the first thing they want as a visit from regional WA is an Indigenous experience. And so there's a whole market area out there for economic development for Aboriginal groups. And all of these factors build up to wellbeing and the health of the community and health of individuals.

Connecting Communities: I want to touch on a few of the programs and projects. There's two-and-a-half thousand of them, so if anybody wants to see me later I've got some booklets that explain all of them, but we have a number of ones I just wanted to highlight here today, just to show the interesting aspects of wellbeing and how that contributes to the overall health of a community. We have 110 Community Resource Centres around the State, volunteer run, building capacity at the very grass-root level in small townships and remote Aboriginal communities. And they employ trainees. We've got 80 trainees who are employed building that local capacity, partnering with the local businesses, and offering services and building the fabric of the community.

And we're investing some \$80 million through those local community resource networks to complement the local government and then the regional investment right up to State planning at the State level. NGALA operates out of those centres. It's a centre that helps mothers with babies and some 40,000 people—families—a year take advantage of that service, and now that's being rolled out through those centres to regional communities, without them having to travel to the centres. We've got them sitting there, available on Westlink Services and we've got consultancies direct to communities, even remote Aboriginal communities. And that's 40% of families giving birth in Western Australia every year have contact with NGALA. That's one of very many services that we deliver through the program.

The Women's Rural Enrich Program—I'll talk about that a little bit later. And the Westlink Network. Those 110 Community Resource Centres have high-quality, state-of-the-art audio and videoconferencing facilities with those services that can be provided and we've been talking to WA Country Health about delivering some of those health services through that network, out to those remote communities.

One last one on this screen is an initiative of providing pensioners in Regional WA a fuel card. Now it sounds a simple concept, but people in metropolitan Perth, pensioners and seniors, get access to free travel between nine and three every day on the buses and trains, but people in regional WA don't have access to travel facilities and public transport and so we define that benefit to people in Perth to \$500, so each pensioner—age pensioner, disability pensioner, carer support pensioner—in regional WA gets a \$500 fuel card. And you'll be amazed at the social benefit that has provided. We get stories of pensioners crying about the benefit they get from their card. It goes to being able to visit the doctor and the dentist and that sort of thing, to just participating in the family and the community. They go along to a family function, it might be a Christmas function, and they generally have to sit in the back and wait for one of the grandkids to take them home late at night. But now they wave their card around, and their grandkids come running because they know they'll get a tank of petrol to take them home, and they feel part of contributing and it's a fantastic outcome. Those sorts of outcomes you just wouldn't realise until you roll these sorts of programs out.

Another novel one that I think is worth talking about, because we often talk about health and wellbeing, but we don't realise the benefits of investment in all sorts of ways to achieve that. In the Wheatbelt in Western Australia there have been long periods of drought. In fact, we've had four years of 50% rainfall. It's a fairly dire situation. In fact, the Premier was just there the last couple of days, talking with farmers. Back in the 70s, very vibrant communities and very good crop, a very good existence. And we did have actually a lake system before clearing and before salt degradation. I was actually a hydrographer in those days and come from that background. And what those lakes did was more than just the environmental aspects, more than the Indigenous cultural aspects. They provided an outlet for recreational and social outlets. And the communities used to relax in those lakes. They used to water ski, canoe, play, and it provided an outlet. Those lakes have dried up. They've become completely salted and with a lull of rainfall, degraded. So we've embarked on a program to enhance those lake systems back again. We've identified 26 lakes that could be enhanced and we've concentrated on three of those, Lake Towerrinning, Ewlyamartup, and Yallurnie near Corrigin, and we're trying to reengineer those lakes to create them into permanent water bodies and create that sense of wellbeing. And we believe that it has a benefit of mental health—the suicide rates for young men in the regional Wheatbelt of WA is astronomical.

And those sorts of things and the social benefits and we're working with Indigenous groups to try and look at some bush tucker, some interpretive centres. We're looking at—we need an economic driver to recreate those lakes. We can't do it on the back of NRM, Natural Resource Management. We need an economic driver, like an Aged Care Facility down in Katanning, for instance, on the side of the lake, or a chalet golf course at Yealering. All of those sorts of things to add that dimension. And they're sort of part of the program. It's an alternate program that has all different aspects.

A number of other ones I'll just touch on. Edge of Nowhere—some of you may have heard of that. That's a program that is being developed in Western Australia. It's being rolled out to Aboriginal communities and it's building gardens for fresh fruit and vegetables for Aboriginal kids right next to the school. The schools are participating in it. They get free fruit and vegetables. It creates employment for Aboriginal members of the community and it's an outstanding success, and it has a direct health benefit from eating fresh fruit and vegetables every day. I went out there to Warmun recently and it's an outstanding success. And you get these little kids running up, picking the peas, picking the veggies, and eating them raw. They just love it. A very small program, although it is \$1.64 million over four years. In some people's terms that might not be small, but in the scheme of our \$7 billion Royalties for Regions, it's one of our smaller programs, but getting a fantastic outcome.

We're also investing in Men's Regional Health Initiatives, which was basically based in the Wheatbelt. We've expanded our program to regional WA as a \$2.8 million investment. And a Women's Rural Health Program has also been expanded across the State in partnership with WA Country Health and the Women's Health and Family Services. I've pulled out some Direct Health Benefit Initiatives. Those ones I talked about were indirect. But we're really focused about improving social determinants. But I've pulled out some direct intervention into the health space. The Southern Inland Health Initiative is a \$565 million program over four years in concert with the WA Country Health and it's looking at building health facilities across the State. It's looking at providing a five-year health program redesigning delivery of health services in regional WA and working with the subject matter experts, WA Country Health to make sure it targets that investment, not only in primary health, but allied health, mental health, and Indigenous health. So we're pushing that program out in the southern inland areas of the State.

I think the State and Minister Grylls realised that a lot of people were talking about investing in health and a lot of governments had promised that investment, but this is now actually delivering that investment directly through the subject matter experts. There's a number of health campuses around the State that are being upgraded to the Royalties for Regions Program. It's not meant to replace the core funding of health for the building of those campuses, but it's meant to add additional funding above and beyond for those allied and special services components. That's what the Royalties for Regions is about. It's not direct replacement of the Health Investment, it's complementary to that. And so there's a number of different initiatives around the State. I'm happy to talk to anybody about any of those in further detail, either through the Fireside Chat or later.

Again, a number of other investments—the Pilbara Health Partnership: The Pilbara is the largest Regional Centre for Health in, I think, Australia, half a million square kilometres that's got to be serviced. The Royal Flying Doctor Service: We provided \$30 million to assist the Royal Flying Doctor, which was on its knees at the commencement of Royalties for Regions. In fact, it looked like it was going to struggle to be able to support our large and vast State. In that investment, there's also been the purchase of a jet. So everywhere in Western Australia now is only three hours away from Royal Perth Hospital and the new Fiona Stanley Hospital in Perth, which may sound a long time for some of you in Victoria and Tasmania, but three hours from Carnamah to Perth by jet is a massive improvement. There's a number of different other hospitals etc. The Rural Generalist Practice Pathways is a very interesting one—\$8.5 million for graduate doctors and health professionals for housing and investment to get them out there and provide an incentive for them to go in the Bush. Fantastic program, been really successful. And in amongst there there's far more, but that's just a summary of them.

So in closing, I did want to just give you an indication that the investment through the Royalties for Regions Program and the investment of \$7 billion often is portrayed like the big-ticket items, like the Ord infrastructure, recreational centres, buildings, and the like, but in actual fact, it's targeting real community disadvantage, both Indigenous disadvantage and general community disadvantage, and it's addressing those social determinants, and I believe, as a result, it's making massive inroads to the health of WA's communities.

Thank you.