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REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT BOARDS

Mr GRIFFITHS (Goyder) (15:32): I appreciate the comments from the Attorney. I want to take a few moments to reflect upon some issues which are affecting the regional development boards, the 13 boards which function in regional South Australia. I will declare that I was previously a board member on two of those boards: the Yorke Regional Development Board and also the Northern Regional Development Board; and I spent some time on one of the committee groups with the then Pirie regional (now Southern Flinders, I think). It has been brought to my attention by the Hon. John Dawkins (the parliamentary secretary to the Liberal leader on regional development) that the funding agreements upon which these boards rely—and I believe that they are five-year funding agreements—expire on 30 June.

These 13 boards operate across the state and they do wonderful work. They offer some valuable opportunity for start-up business advice to people looking for that first chance in life to create their own business and to be in charge of their future; and they provide a lot of important information to people who have an idea of what sort of business they want to run but do not know how to get it going. They provide a lot of support and assistance with training and employment needs, and they certainly help with the development of regional infrastructure, business networking assistance, major project support and the important lobbying that must occur at all levels of government to get as much money as they can in the regions.

These five-year funding agreements, in some cases, actually expired June last year, but a 12 month extension was granted to bring in a common expiry date of 30 June this year. I am told by the Hon. John Dawkins that, during estimates last year, minister Maywald confirmed the fact that, yes, she was supportive of it. At that stage, it was her intention to bring in draft agreements for the consideration of the regional development boards by October 2007, but, here we are, early April 2008, and still no signed agreements in place. It is critical that these agreements be put to the boards as soon as possible and that agreement be reached.

I will relay my own local situation. The District Council of the Copper Coast is a wonderful area in the Goyder electorate which is growing enormously. One community—Moonta, Moonta Bay and Port Hughes—is projected to increase its population from probably 4,500 to 16,000 by 2020. The Copper Coast council has decided, after a five-year hiatus of its not being a member of the regional development board structure, to come back into the fold.

That has been gratefully acknowledged by all players in the area because they recognise the strategic importance of the Copper Coast. They have had a provisional arrangement in place for probably the last six months. However, there is now a bit of frustration from my point of view that we have the one council in the state which was not a member of the regional development board structure but which is prepared to come back in, but the Yorke Regional Development Board and the other 12 boards that assist in the state are frustrated by the fact that they do not have a signed agreement in place. The great risk of not having funding agreements in place is that it puts their local government partners in a position of some uncertainty about what level of financial commitment they must make to the boards for the new financial year.

It also means that staff, who are traditionally employed on relatively short-term contracts (only for the period of the funding agreement, sometimes for as short a period as two years), may not be sure of their future. I have seen minister Maywald open Regional Development SA conferences and speak positively about the future of all the regions. I respect that fact, but I would hope that the minister is able to ensure that draft funding agreements are presented to the boards as soon as possible. There may be some

issues associated with the fact that the Treasurer in the house last week talked about the tightness of the budget as it approaches and the fact that the unfunded superannuation liabilities are causing some difficulty because of negative return on investments and that \$120 million needs to be made up. However, as a person who proudly represents a regional area of South Australia, I believe it is important that these boards get the money they need.

I am further advised that the funding agreements that had been in place have remained quite static for the last 10 years. My hope is that (and I am sure this has the support of the regional development boards and all the people who live in those areas) core funding will be increased, because having more dollars available allows these development boards to be creative in what they can do and provide some real job opportunities in all the areas of the state. Regional South Australia has done it tough. The drought has made it very hard for people, and they need the business advice that the regional development boards can confidently provide to help give job opportunities to young people and to help create those training programs.

It is my hope that minister Maywald will ensure that, as soon as possible (and I hope that it is within a few weeks), draft agreements are presented to the boards and that we have signed funding positions in place to allow them all to have the surety that, as from 1 July 2008, they have a further five years in place, and that they can keep their good staff as they move forward.

Time expired.