

# R4R ad campaign draws criticism

**Warren Hately**

The National Party has set itself up for criticism by spending nearly \$1 million to publicise the benefits of Royalties for Regions.

Augusta's boat harbour features in one of three television advertisements starting this week for the WA Government's new Bigger Picture campaign.

Regional Development Minister and local MLA Terry Redman said regional WA had received "unprecedented investment" since the start of the National Party-designed Royalties program.

"Since 2008, the State Government has invested \$5.6 billion in Royalties for Regions funding into more than 3500 projects across regional WA," he said.

"Research commissioned by the Department of Regional Development showed that despite the significant investment, 86 per cent of people surveyed were not aware of the extent of the Government's investment."

The campaign follows enquiries by the *Times* amid rumours market research showed Royalties for Regions did not have anywhere near the name recognition pollsters wanted.

WA Opposition leader Mark McGowan savaged the Government's spending this week, citing a \$1.5 million cost for highlighting metropolitan projects.

"Once again, the Liberal-National Government is telling everyone else to tighten their belts while they spend like drunken sailors on shameless self-promotion," he said.

"At a time WA is heading for its first Budget deficit in years and State debt is heading towards \$30 billion, it is incredible that the Government sees fit to spend this much taxpayers' money on a campaign to promote itself."

Royalties for Regions was engineered by former Nationals leader Brendon Grylls and was widely

credited with re-inventing the

country-based conservatives as a political force.

Sources told the *Times* there were behind-the-scenes tussles about using Liberal Party blue on the website and adverts rather than the Nationals' preferred Royalties green.

Despite its perceived political value, research by consultants Ipsos showed the program was less well known in the electorate than expected.

Mr Redman said the advertising campaign directed viewers to the Bigger Picture website because research showed people genuinely wanted more information about projects he believed were trans-

forming regional WA. "The Government has a duty to ensure regional communities know how their money is being spent," he said. "People want to know they're part of a plan and this is our chance to tell them that we have a plan for regional WA."

Vasse MLA Libby Mettam said it was important to publicise Government spending.

"This program, which was legislated since 2008, has also been a great boost for local communities and its important regional WA is aware of these projects to encourage more people to engage in these programs into the future," she said.

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