



funding we have ever had. Devilish details to be determined.

Imaginary pitchforks were hastily being stashed in conference bags as Minister MacTiernan sealed the deal by announcing an increase in the traineeship grant program from \$30,000 to \$35,000 per trainee.

In return for her government's investment, the Minister urged that CRCs be 'Agents of Change', and work at delivering value to our communities through the CRC program. Fair enough.

The next speaker was the Managing Director of the DOME Café Group, Nigel Oakley. DOME, it seems, is doing many of the things CRCs should be doing, including offering meeting rooms, surveying the community, inviting in the tired, poor and huddled masses. A DOME in Geraldton is apparently the home of WA's largest community knitting group.

He encouraged us to fill in the gap: Our CRC is the only CRC that \_\_\_\_\_. DOME filled in their blank with the help of hired anthropologists, who concluded that DOME did not sell 'café culture cool'; it instead sold 'welcome and comfort.'

Futurist, Gilan Perera, drew our attention to occupations of the future including a Youtube channel, Charli's Crafty Kitchen, started by an 8 year old Queenslander and now earning well over \$140,000 per month. As I thought about Gilan's ideas, I realised that I should take more seriously a half baked idea I had been working on to create a podcasting studio for Northcliffe residents.

A fully baked version of the idea would be a small flexible studio with microphones, cameras, green screen, attractive backdrop/sound absorbing curtains, and editing software all set up and ready to go. This would allow conducting interviews and oral history recordings, audio/video recording, video-conferences and vanity projects. Northcliffe residents could broadcast their genius to the internet. One really good idea per conference is all it takes to make it feel worthwhile. I sat back, replete.

Sundowner drinks at the Farmer's Home Hotel were sedate. I remember when CRC conference evenings were hard drinking affairs. By CRC standards I am now considered to be a long hauler and this is one of many things which has changed in my 11 years coming to these events.

I had some adventures amongst the Perth traffic jams on my way home, and fairly randomly discovered an underground coffee roastery housed in a suburban garden shed. According to the professionals, this was the cool antithesis of DOME but really it was too Australian to be cool. My mobile phone died. Without Google Maps I had to flee back to the bush and at 8:30pm I rolled into the low lying smoke haze of a cold Northcliffe night.

Thanks to the committee of the Northcliffe CRC for supporting my attendance of this conference.

*Graham Evans*

## Wheatbelt Cool

I took the inland route from Northcliffe via Pingelly and York. It was like driving from Winter into Summer. Fields of yellow canola, sunshine on young wheat, and the hours flashed past as my sinister audio book got stranger and stranger:

*"What if somehow I'm crawling blind and headfirst into my own sick heart, the void made manifest?"*  
(*The Cipher* by Kathe Koja)

The combined effect of being alone for hours in my air-conditioned pod, and listening to *The Cipher*, tuned me into the absence lurking within the inland sunshine, shining all the time, so far from home, outside my windows.

I stepped out into a surprisingly harsh wheatbelt noon hour in Narrogin and found an efficient, non-talkative barber to prune back my Covid hair. In a small detour 90 minutes later I took photographs at York's picturesque cemetery.

The Duke's Inn in Northam, my destination, was slightly above average. The bistro garden was balmy and the beer was good. When the inland evening chill came in I retreated to my 1 window hotel room and spent 20 minutes attempting and failing to connect to the wifi.

The next day the Agents of Change conference kicked off with a Welcome to Country by Respected Elder Deborah Moody. Her Noongar was nasal-resonant, and conjured for me images of intimate belonging with the land:

*"Nidja Noongar Boodjar noonook djinanginy..."*

Looking over the room full of harried CRC Managers, MC Elizabeth Brennan said 83 CRCs were represented. She announced the Hon. Alannah MacTiernan MLC as the 'Minister for everything important', and the Minister's acute brain stepped up to the podium. Opening the event, the brain gave a little chuckle and riffed off the idea that CRCs had got a bit anxious in the preceding weeks when the word 'consolidation' had accidentally crept into one of the conference documents. We assumed this good humour meant the idea of closing/consolidating CRCs was NOT on the agenda.

Later we were assured that our funding was not in question, and the government would look at signing 5 year funding agreements with CRCs when our current contracts expired in June 2022. For those who win their service tenders in 2022, this will be the most secure

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday 10am to 5pm • Thursday, Friday 10 am to 6pm