

PROFESSIONAL COMBAT SPORTS AMENDMENT BILL 2007

Second Reading

MR T.R. SPRIGG (Murdoch) [4.00 pm]: I move -

That the bill be now read a second time.

Recently, a promoter sought permission to stage what was described as a mixed martial arts event, or Australian King of the Cage Tournament, to be held at the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre on Friday, 5 October 2007. That type of event has also become known as cage fighting, to use the common vernacular. I was first alerted to the fact that this promoter was chasing permission to stage this event when I read an article by Ronan O'Connell in *The West Australian* of Friday, 31 August. The article was on page 7. Sometimes, when we read the paper and an article is down the track a bit, our attention is not always drawn to it. However, I could not fail to notice this article on page 7, because it was accompanied by a photo of a strong-bodied person who was leaning over the top of another person who looked as though he was begging for mercy.

Mr M.J. Birney: He was! It was like a bout between you and the Minister for Sport!

Mr T.R. SPRIGG: It appears from that photo that blood is coming out of the fellow on the ground. A cage is surrounding them. When we see a photo like that, our attention has to be drawn to it. My attention was certainly drawn to it. The subheading of the article is, "They punch, kick, knee and choke each other until one fighter submits or is too injured to defend himself". When I read that, I thought, "What is happening here?" I then read on further, and I came to the comment that the Professional Combat Sports Commission would be deciding the following week whether to approve this tournament, which is scheduled for 5 October. I put that to one side a bit and thought, "Oh well, no thinking person is ever going to approve that. This isn't going to happen in our town. I will just wait for the decision to come out. We probably won't hear anything more about it, and it will be terrific if we don't".

However, I did become a bit proactive, because I had seen the photo, and I thought that was pretty good education, but I wanted to know more about what cage fighting is all about. So, I did some research on the Internet, as we all do these days, with the help of my electorate office staff and research people, and I discovered that cage fighting events have been held in the United States of America for about 10 or 12 years now. I discovered also that cage fighting has virtually no rules. That would not be hard to understand, if the opponents are allowed to punch, kick, knee and choke each other. It does not mention gouging. It is said that that might be prevented. However, I should add that these people do not wear proper boxing gloves. Boxing gloves help to minimise the damage that may be inflicted, because they are padded. The gloves that are used in cage fighting are not padded. Also, the fingers are exposed, which makes gouging a real possibility in these bouts. The popularity of cage fighting has grown in the United States. It has been put on cable television and it has quite a following. I also found out that it was banned in the state of New York in 1997, and it has also been banned in the states of Pennsylvania and Ohio. Many European countries have also banned this particular form of sport. I use the word "sport" advisedly, because this could not be perceived to be a sport. No thinking person would consider this to be a sport.

As I have said, the promoter of this event had sought approval from the Professional Combat Sports Commission, which is a statutory body set up under the Professional Combat Sports Act 1987, and after some consideration, apparently, by that particular commission, the promoter was given a licence to stage the event. I thought that was a strange decision, given what this so-called sport is all about. I had actually taken the time to read the act, and I thought, "Well, this is not going to happen, because the Minister for Sport and Recreation will intervene. He does not want this to happen, and he will say to his commissioners that they have made a blue; we are not going to let this happen; and we do not want this in our society." However, blow me down; I was wrong. When we came to Parliament last week - I think it was on the Tuesday - the Minister for Sport and Recreation read out a brief ministerial statement, in which he said that he was powerless to stop this thuggery and gratuitous violence, this cage-fighting event, from happening, and had taken legal advice on the matter. The article states that opponents can be choked, kneed, kicked and punched into submission, and bouts are stopped only when a competitor submits or is knocked out, or the referee steps in. The photo says it all. I was dismayed when I heard about the decision that had been made by the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

I would like to mention some of the comments that have been made in the article, and that have been made since, by bodies such as the Australian Medical Association. AMA state president, Geoff Dobb, has described the sport as disgusting, savage and sickening. He has said also that it places competitors at massive risk of life-threatening injury. However, our Minister for Sport and Recreation has condoned this event.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: I have not. You know that is untrue.

Extract from Hansard

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Mr T.R. SPRIGG: That is what the Australian Medical Association has said. The minister will get his chance.

When these types of events occur, the police on the beat are always fearful that the violence will spill over into the street. Often, the violence is fuelled by alcohol and testosterone, particularly among the young people who tend to go to these events. We cannot forget the death of the young man outside the Coolbellup Hotel after the last Danny Green fight. When we discussed this matter in a grievance last week, the minister challenged me and said, "Well, you want to stop all boxing, then, do you?" We do not want to stop all boxing. Boxing is staged under Marquis of Queensberry rules. Would the minister have any idea about that? The minister would not even know what those rules are!

Mr J.C. Kobelke: So why did you use that example, then?

Mr T.R. SPRIGG: Boxing under those rules is like a kindergarten picnic compared with cage fighting, from what I have seen.

The minister does not understand how well regulated boxing is with medics, referees and so on. I had a call from Wayne Loxley, a boxing promoter who is tied up with Danny Green. He said that he agreed with what we were doing with cage fighting. He said that it was reprehensible and should not be happening. He said he could not believe that the government was letting it happen. However, he said that he wanted to alert me to the fact that if a redneck minister were in charge, he might want to stop the Green machine, the Danny Green fights, title fights and so on. I think he had a point. The comment was made, however, that it would need to be a redneck minister who did not understand that boxing, a traditional Olympic sport, is so well regulated by medics and referees that it could not happen. I assured him that when the government changes in a year or so, we would not move to stop any genuine boxing matches involving Danny Green or anyone else.

Mr J.E. McGrath: Is there a referee in this type of boxing?

Mr T.R. SPRIGG: There is a referee but he is not in the cage.

Mr J.E. McGrath: How does he referee?

Mr T.R. SPRIGG: I am not sure, but it is not refereed as boxing is. In boxing, if somebody is unable to defend himself, under the Marquis of Queensberry rules the referee will stop the fight so that he cannot get badly injured. This does not happen with cage fighting. Any thinking person in the community would be opposed to what can only be described as gratuitous violence. It appeals to a very small percentage of people, mainly those who have witnessed it on television. I had one person contact me who said that he had watched it on Foxtel and that he did not reckon it was too bad. He was the only person who contacted me with that view. However, several dozen people have contacted me and suggested that what we are doing to try to stop the bout happening on 5 October is correct.

The Professional Combat Sports Act 1987 was gazetted to control professional combat sports and for other and incidental purposes, including the establishment of the Professional Combat Sports Commission comprising eight members and to establish rules regarding the registration of contestants, medical requirements for events and bouts and the licensing of events. In general terms, that is what the Professional Combat Sports Act 1987 was designed to do. I have no issue with the fact that act has been set up and those are its objectives. Section 9 of the act states -

The Commission is subject to the control and direction of the Minister, and is responsible to the Minister for the administration of this Act.

Having received advice, we believe that under that clause alone the Minister for Sport and Recreation had the ability to overrule the decision by the commission to stage this fight but he chose not to. He alluded to the fact when we debated grievances last week when he said that it would have destroyed the confidence that people have in the commission and the people who are appointed to do the job. I put it to you, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr A.P. O’Gorman), destroying the confidence of those commissioners of the Professional Combat Sports Commission would be a small price to pay to stop this event happening. The minister claims that he is unable to intervene as a result of legal advice. We put the proposition that, because this event is being held in a government-owned building, the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre - we have not been able to put our hands on the lease agreement, unfortunately - the owner of the building would have some say and some control over events that could be held in the building. We have been debating the prostitution bill, so we might note that a Sexpo Perth event has been held there. I suppose such events will become more common when the Prostitution Amendment Bill has been passed. However, I would think that the minister and the government have some control over events that are to be held at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre. In any case, governments are elected to govern. As people in the community do not want this event, it is up to the minister and the government to stop it. The minister should not hide behind dubious legal advice -

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Mr P.B. Watson: Dubious legal advice?

Mr T.R. SPRIGG: That is the way it has been put to me. As the member for Albany knows, if people go to one lawyer, they will get one opinion and if they go to another lawyer, they will get another opinion. If they go to a third one, they will get yet another opinion.

Mr P.B. Watson: Are you going to put up the money they will sue you for? You have plenty, have you?

Mr T.R. SPRIGG: I will come to that in a minute. The minister should not hide behind dubious legal advice. He could have used his powers under section 9 of the act. I suspect the minister might have been put off by the potential threat of compensation for the promoter or something like that. I do not know if that was ever mentioned. I would like the minister to talk about that when he responds. I have heard ticket sales advertised on the radio and I think they are advertised on the Internet as well. I put it to him that, even if compensation of a few thousand dollars had to be paid to the promoter, because it is a bit late to call it off and he has spent some dollars, the community would not care one iota, especially given the \$2.3 billion budget surplus announced today. If it cost a few thousand dollars to pay the promoter to go away and get out of this town and not come back, I put it to the minister that it would be money well spent. The community would make no complaint, even though it would be taxpayers' money, because the community does not want this exhibition of lowbrow, inhuman combat, which is one of the best ways I can describe it.

Mr P.B. Watson: I saw some footage on the television the other night of you kicking someone from behind. Is that the same sort of combat that you are talking about?

Mr T.R. SPRIGG: Had the member had a decent look, he would have seen the football. He probably could not see it because he is blind.

Mr P.B. Watson: You were behind as usual.

The ACTING SPEAKER: It is not appropriate that the member for Albany should interject. I think the member for Murdoch is trying to get his point across on this bill. We should give him the opportunity to do that.

Mr T.R. SPRIGG: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I might mention the time when an East Fremantle player sat the member for Albany on his chair. I think he probably deserved it.

Because of government inaction, it is necessary to bring in the Professional Sports Amendment Bill 2007, which effectively gives the Minister for Sport and Recreation right of veto of decisions reached by the Professional Combat Sports Commission. Proposed section 9A of the act is set out in clause 4 under the heading "Minister may give directions" and reads -

- (1) The Minister may give directions in writing to the Commission with respect to its functions and powers, either generally or with respect to a particular matter, and the Commission shall give effect to any such direction.
- (2) The text of any direction given under subsection (1) shall be included in the annual report submitted by the accountable authority of the Commission under Part 5 of the *Financial Management Act 2006*.

I suspect that the government will not agree to this. I think that the minister will get up to say that this clause does not do the trick. The experts have told us that there are plenty of precedents for this. The first is in the Court Security and Custodial Services Act 1999, which was amended on 12 July this year. Section 28 of the act reads -

Minister may give directions

- (1) The Minister may give directions to the CEO with respect to the performance of the CEO's functions under this Act, either generally or in relation to a particular matter.
- (2) Where practicable, the Minister is to consult with the chief judicial officer of a court before giving directions to the CEO about court security and court custodial services affecting the court.
- (3) The subject matter of any direction given under subsection (1) is to be included in the annual report submitted by the accountable authority . . .

Section 7 of the Lotteries Commission Act 1999 reads -

Directions by the Minister

- (1) Subject to subsection (2), the Minister may give directions in writing -

I stress that it is in writing -

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to the Commission with respect to its functions and powers, either generally or with respect to a particular matter, and the Commission shall give effect to any such direction.

- (2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), the Minister shall not give directions to the Commission with respect to the distribution of moneys under sections 22 and 24.

Subsection (3) states that the direction will be included in the annual report of the body.

I now go to the Disability Services Act 1993. The following amendment to section 20 was gazetted on 13 March 2007 -

Minister may give directions

- (1) The Minister may give directions in writing to the Commission with respect to the performance of its functions, either generally or in relation to a particular matter, and the Commission must give effect to any such direction.

Any such directions are reported within the annual report of the body. I put it to the minister that the proposed amendment is very similar in nature to the sections in those three acts: the Court Security and Custodial Services Act 1999, the Lotteries Commission Act 1990 and the Disability Services Act 1993. All the amendments have been gazetted in recent times, so they must be fresh in the minds of people on the other side; that is, the government. The proposed section would give the minister the power to do what we hope he will do, which is to stop the event on 5 October from happening.

Through various media organisations and in his ministerial statement the minister said that he does not like this, that it is abhorrent, that it should not happen and that he will never let it happen again. However, he kept on saying that he is powerless to stop the event on 5 October. In the grievance debate last week we suggested three ways in which he could stop it. I am not sure how much negotiation has since happened. The minister spoke about ordering the Department of Sport and Recreation to give him some urgent advice. I would be interested to know what that urgent advice is. There has been over a week in which to give that advice. There is a heap of public servants that should have had some time to devote to this matter. I would be very interested to know what the advice from the Department of Sport and Recreation to the minister has been regarding this event. The minister said that if he could stop it, he would. We have said that we reckon he can use these various ways, one of which is to legislate. I said at the time that if he did not bring in some legislation, I would. Here it is. Unlike members on that side, we keep our promises. This is the piece of legislation that can do the trick for us and stop this event on 5 October from happening.

I suspect that because the minister is disingenuous, he will probably not accept this legislation. He probably thinks that it should be him bringing it in and that is why he will not accept it. I will point out to him what will be the outcome if he does not agree with this legislation and the event goes ahead on 5 October. I will be there with him and I will watch what happens in the ring. I will see exactly what the minister does about it. We will see exactly what will happen if the minister rejects this bill. It is obvious - we have mentioned this so many times - that the government is weak on drugs. We have known that for a long time. Some of the problems we have in society are a result of that weakness. The government is weak on organised crime; it does not seem to want to do much about it. By the way, anecdotally, the government has suggested that bikie groups may well be involved as promoters of this event. There are lots of issues with law and order, as we know. The government does not seem to get on top of that. I got some statistics the other day about my electorate of Murdoch. The crime statistics have gone up despite the fact that the minister will always get up and do the old smoke and mirrors trick and try to put a positive spin on things that are happening. As I mentioned, the government is weak on law and order. We all know that there are not enough police on the streets. There are 250 too few police at this stage. The government will need every policeman on duty that night around the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre because there will be plenty of violence and plenty of testosterone - I guarantee it. There is likely to be some violence. As I mentioned, if the minister talks to his senior people -

Mr P.B. Watson: So if people go to the speedway, they go out and speed afterwards?

Mr M.J. Cowper: Too right they do!

Mr T.R. SPRIGG: Ask a policeman over there and ask one here; they will tell the member. They will tell the member that police panic when they see these events happening as well.

One of the other things that the minister said was that he was worried that this event could be driven underground if it was not given a licence. I must tell him that I think that is a pretty weak excuse. There are regulatory authorities such as the police and so on. Surely an event like this could not be driven underground and people not know where it was occurring and not see it happening. Arrests would need to be made to make sure it was stopped.

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I have mentioned that the government is soft on drugs and weak on violence. It is weak on organised crime by not attacking the bikie gangs. It is weak on law and order. There are not enough police on the streets. The government is now going soft on violence. We never ever thought that could happen. I know the minister has made a few excuses before and he will probably get up and make them again, but none of them wash. He has to accept this bill for what it is worth and the way it was presented. He has to pass this bill now and then take it to his friends in the upper house and get them to pass it tomorrow. He can then stop this event from happening on 5 October. The medical fraternity, the police and the community do not want it. It is in the hands of the minister.

Declaration as Urgent

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe) [4.25 pm]: Mr Speaker -

Point of Order

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I draw the attention of the Chair to standing order 168, which I believe does not allow debate to continue on this bill.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am not intending to debate the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.P. O’Gorman): There is no point of order.

Debate Resumed

Mr C.J. BARNETT: On behalf of the member for Murdoch, I move -

That the Professional Combat Sports Amendment Bill 2007 be considered an urgent bill.

The reason I move this is simply that it is an urgent bill. The cage-fighting event is due to take place on 5 October, which is very soon. In fact, it is next week. I think all members, when asked, have expressed disgust at this event. The idea of combatants in a cage essentially fighting it out in an almost gladiatorial way is a somewhat modern version of old blood sports. It is abhorrent; it is held in disgust by members of the community from all walks of life. The minister has said that he would stop it if he could. I and others have always had the view that he could stop it. He has argued that he has had legal advice from the State Solicitor that he cannot do anything about it. That may be, in a sense, a legal position, but as someone who was a minister for eight years I know very well that if he as the minister, or the Premier as the Premier, had simply stated publicly that it is not acceptable to Western Australia and that it will not be condoned and it will not be allowed, this event would be cancelled by now. That is all it takes - call it leadership. That is what was required; do not go to the State Solicitor and ask his permission as to whether the minister can do anything about it. As a minister, one acts and shows leadership and lays down what one thinks one’s responsibilities are and what the standards should be. Out of frustration from the failure of the Premier and the minister to act to stop this appalling event from taking place, the member for Murdoch, to his credit, has gone away and had drafted a very simple bill to formally give the minister the power to direct the Professional Combat Sports Commission so that there can be absolutely no doubt that he can act, and can act through the provisions of the - hopefully - amended legislation. There would be no dispute at all. Either way, I hope that the government will agree - at a minimum - to having this treated as an urgent bill so that at least there can be some debate. The minister will have the opportunity to get up and say why he does not - or perhaps why he does - support this legislation. He perhaps might even say that he accepts the point, that he genuinely wants to stop the cage fighting from taking place, that he will take it on board and draft his own legislation because he thinks that is the way it should be done, that he might want to make some changes, and that he will cooperate with us. We are giving the minister the opportunity to act as a minister - legally - if that is the avenue he wants. However, he could have acted without resorting to legal requirements.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: Illegally.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No, the minister and the Premier could simply assert the position of the state. Had they done that, this debate would not be taking place now. If the minister wants to go through the legal avenue, which is the alternative, and if he wants to bring in his own amendment, he should do so. He should bring it in today or tomorrow and we will deal with it, and our members in the upper house will cooperate. This is all about whether the minister, the government and the Premier are genuine in stopping this event. If they are, we are giving the government, without any doubt at all, the capacity to stop it. That is what the member for Murdoch seeks. That is why I urge members to support this motion to make the Professional Combat Sports Amendment Bill an urgent bill. If it is not treated as an urgent bill, it is clear that this government, this Premier and this minister do not regard it as an urgent situation. This is not the most difficult issue to confront a government; it must be one of the easiest issues. It is about an unacceptable, bloodbath sporting contest of some sort of gladiatorial nature that is abhorrent to the community and to all the organisations and people mentioned by the member for Murdoch, but this government will not act. We are saying that the Parliament will provide whatever powers the government needs to act. The member for Murdoch thinks this is the way to do that. It the minister

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has a better way, that is fine. We are saying that we will give the government the powers to act right now. If the government does not accept that, it will be clear to me and to the public that the government is not genuine in opposing this event.

MR J.C. KOBELKE (Balcatta - Leader of the House) [4.30 pm]: The government will not accept that this be declared an urgent bill, and I will briefly give the reasons for that. The bill introduced by the member will not achieve what he purports it will. It cannot be used to stop this particular event, which, clearly, I find abhorrent as do, generally, the other members in the house. The fact is that the Professional Combat Sports Commission has issued a permit for this event. The powers under legislation of the commission give a very broad interpretation of what constitutes a combat sport. There is nothing in the bill covering gimmicks such as cages or other things that should be a guide for the commission to not issue a permit. However, with the permit having been issued, this bill would enable the minister to direct the commission. As a result of this legislation, the minister of the day would be able to direct the commission as he or she may wish. However, that will not enable the permit to be withdrawn because the act does not have the power to enable a permit to be withdrawn. Therefore, giving the power to the minister to direct the commission will not affect the permit. There is also potentially a downside to this, in that, as I have already indicated, there is a very broad definition of combat sports. A number of those sports have been recognised for 100 years or so. In fact, boxing is an Olympic sport. As the member himself suggested, we could go further than we want to in that this bill could impact directly on boxing by causing it to be prohibited. I am not saying that we want to go that far, but if we do, I will do so only after I have consulted the Professional Combat Sports Commission and the industry generally - boxing, wrestling, the various martial arts - so that when we bring in something it will not impact negatively on those combat sports. The member for Cottesloe believes that we can just do things illegally - it does not matter what the act says, get out and do it regardless of the law. That is how the opposition may wish to work. Clearly, based on the drafting of this bill, the opposition does not have much idea of how the law works and how a government should uphold the rule of law and make sure it acts within the law and that we have appropriate laws. That clearly is not the way the Liberal opposition wishes to go. The opposition believes that, because there is consensus that something should not happen - I believe there is within this chamber - we should dictate an outcome regardless of the law. The law governing combat sport in this state is, I think, among the strongest in Australia, if not the strongest. However, it clearly contains deficiencies. I have grave concerns that, even if rules were laid down within this permit, those conditions could be enforced. We must look further than just limiting the basis on which a permit can be issued for an event that is a combat sport and the potential role of the minister to direct. Do we in any way limit that power to the minister or do we leave it open so that any minister in the future can make decisions in a subjective way that will close down combat sport events, whether they be boxing, wrestling, karate or whatever?

Mr C.J. Barnett: Don't be silly.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: That is the power that the opposition is seeking to provide in this bill. The member for Cottesloe is being totally disingenuous. He says on one hand that the government should do whatever it likes, and when we point out that the opposition's amendment would allow the minister of the day to make subjective judgements that override the Professional Combat Sports Commission and decide that an event will not happen and direct the commission to not allow it, he says, "Oh, that won't happen." We certainly want to pass improved legislation to make sure we control events that are categorised as combat sports. I do not believe this is in that category. I believe it is a gimmick event that involves overt violence and attracts a group of people who want to see a bloodied face and a limitation of the rules to allow a level of aggression. I believe it is not acceptable and, potentially, will raise health issues for the contestants. We want to get rid of that in a way that will not undermine boxing and other recognised combat sports but that will give direction from the Parliament if a minister is to have those powers. This bill does not in any way curtail the powers of the minister. It seems strange that so often that is a tack for giving powers to the minister. This bill is a knee-jerk reaction from the Liberal opposition, which is not serious about dealing with this very important issue.

MR M.J. COWPER (Murray) [4.35 pm]: I was not going to speak on this bill but the member for Albany asked whether we should ban speedway events because the police fear there will be crazy drivers as a result. The answer is simply, yes. It is a well-known fact that when the speedway is operating, the police are present for protection.

Mr P.B. Watson: Do you want to ban speedways?

Mr M.J. COWPER: When there is a large contingent of young men getting together anywhere, whether it be at a football club or another event, there is always a concern for a licensee or the local police sergeant -

Mr P.B. Watson: You want to ban speedways.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I did not say that; the member knows that. It just goes to show what limited capacity he has for understanding this important issue. The very first caged fight was held in Texas in 2003. The worst

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types of events we tend to follow in Australia probably come from America. A promoter has seen cage fighting as an opportunity to make money out of other people's misfortune. The minister referred earlier to how it will affect martial arts participants, boxers and people involved all those sorts of disciplines. I call them disciplines because I have done a bit of boxing and participated in martial arts in my time. They are sports that require self-discipline and self-control. The event we are talking about now involves people fighting without rules in a 30-foot cage.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: That is not true. My concern is that they will not stay by the rules, but there are rules.

Mr M.J. COWPER: The next stage in America will involve two weight divisions - cruiserweight and middleweight. They are now involving women in the sport. Does the Leader of the House think this type of event will benefit our community?

Mr J.C. Kobelke: No.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Does he think a couple of women in a cage beating the living suitcase out of each other will be acceptable to the people of Western Australia? The answer is no. As the Minister for Police, where will he find the resources to enable the police to go out on the road to deal with this situation? Young men in particular, boofheads fired up with testosterone, and a few Jim Beams thrown in, go along to these silly one-off situations, which make them think it is all right to go around belting people. We already have enough problems now with idiots who have drugs in their system whacking people. This situation needs to be nipped in the bud. This bill is urgent. If we do not nip this type of event in the bud right now, the holding of them will eat away at our standards, and the boundaries of acceptability will continue to be pushed out. This is not acceptable to the people of Western Australia. The police do not have the resources to deal with it. We are in this place to govern for the people of Western Australia.

Mr P.B. Watson: Would you ban it on TV?

Mr M.J. COWPER: Would I ban cage fighting?

Mr P.B. Watson: Yes.

Mr M.J. COWPER: There are no rules. If there are no rules, it is not a sport. It is an event without discipline; so it is an event that we should never entertain holding. Members should log on to the website to see the type of event that it is. There are even DVDs available promoting this terrible stuff. Members opposite should look at it and make a value judgement in their own right and ask themselves whether their constituents want to see this, whether it be paid for on the web or freely available on the Internet, particularly where our young people can latch onto it, and see what happens. If members opposite are interested in their grandchildren learning about discipline they should enrol them in a boxing clinic where they will learn discipline, hard work and fitness. What really disappoints me is that the participants in cage fighting have a background in these disciplines. The participants in martial arts, from Asia in particular, develop a sense of control and self-discipline. I cannot understand how they have let themselves go to become involved in cage fighting. The only thing I can suggest is that it will attract the low-life elements of our community - drug dealers and pushers, and all the other people who will be swooping upon the opportunities it presents. This event is opportunistic; it will make money for certain individuals at the cost of someone else's misery.

MR T. BUSWELL (Vasse - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.39 pm]: I support the motion moved by the member for Cottesloe. It is important to understand what the motion entails. Do members know what the member for Cottesloe has asked under standing order 168(2)? He has asked for 20 minutes to debate the member for Murdoch's bill. That is all.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: That's what we've got.

Mr T. BUSWELL: Twenty minutes of the chamber's time to debate the bill. If the bill is declared urgent, we can debate it for a period of time not exceeding 20 minutes.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: That's what we're doing. The 20 minutes has been granted.

Mr T. BUSWELL: Right. All the opposition wants is an opportunity to debate the bill put before the house by the member for Murdoch. The Minister for Sport and Recreation is trying to wriggle out of it on a technicality, and I think he is doing so because he does not want to vote against the member for Murdoch's bill. That is exactly what it is. He would rather vote down the member for Murdoch's right to come to this place -

Mr P.B. Watson: He's already spoken for 20 minutes.

Mr T. BUSWELL: Yes, but the minister is trying to avoid having to vote against the bill. That is what it is all about. He is using this cute little technicality to wriggle and worm his way out of having to vote against the member for Murdoch's bill. He is doing that for the reason that he knows the member for Murdoch is absolutely

Mr Trevor Sprigg; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John Kobelke; Acting Speaker; Mr Murray Cowper; Mr Troy Buswell;
Mr John McGrath

right, and that he is wrong. He does not want to vote against it for the reason that when there is a problem at this brutal cage-fighting event in a couple of weeks, and the finger of blame is pointed at him, he will not want to have to say that he had a chance to stop it but refused to take it. He is using this technicality to wriggle out of it. If he had any courage whatsoever, he would allow the debate to run its full course and he would vote on it. He would, of course, instruct all government members to vote against it, because the government has been caught out. When this matter first came to public attention in Western Australia, regardless of the technicalities and the minister's claims of unlawfulness, he should have said, in a loud, clearly understood voice, that he and the government did not support it. He did not do that.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: I did.

Mr T. BUSWELL: He did not.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: I did.

Mr T. BUSWELL: He did not. He is pathetic. He scurried off and hid behind some technicality. What would one expect from a badminton player? That is what he did. That is the problem; he scurried off and hid. He did not have the guts to stand up and show proper leadership.

The issue is that when the vote is taken - the house will divide on this matter, because the government will not let the member for Murdoch's bill be debated - the government will either support or not support cage fighting. That is basically what it is. I put it to the -

Mr J.C. Kobelke: The motion is about declaring it an urgent bill. That's what we're dealing with.

Mr T. BUSWELL: Yes, declaring it an urgent bill so we can debate it in the house in order to stop cage fighting.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: This won't do it.

Mr T. BUSWELL: Yes, it will.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: It won't.

Mr T. BUSWELL: How does the minister know? He has not explored it. He just sat there and asserted that without having the courage to sit down and work through the detail of the bill. That is the minister's problem; he is weak. He is absolutely weak. Every government member will vote for cage fighting. That is pathetic. The minister has done this because he will not stand up to the issue. He knows damn well that if he had stood up as a minister of the Crown and said loudly and clearly that he did not want this activity in Western Australia, he could have moved heaven and earth to make it happen. He could have stopped it and he did not. The member for Murdoch - I take my hat off to him - has pursued this issue; the minister has been caught with his pants down. That is why he is running around, trying to use these cute little technicalities to avoid debating the bill. Let us put the bill on the table and debate it properly. If there are problems, as the minister has insinuated, he should bring them forward in consideration in detail. Heaven forbid, he might even come up with some amendments to make the bill work, and within an hour or so we could end up with a bill that will stop the cage fight. However, he is denying the house that opportunity. He is denying the member for Murdoch the opportunity to pursue this issue for the reason that he knows the member is right. He has been caught out, and I hope above everything else that nothing goes astray when this event takes place. If it does, the finger of blame will point squarely at the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Today, as he knows, he has an opportunity to stop this event from happening, and he has turned his back on that opportunity.

MR J.E. McGRATH (South Perth) [4.44 pm]: I also support the member for Cottesloe's motion. When this issue was first raised in a newspaper article, I was called by two people from the boxing industry. One was a former Olympic fighter and the other has been involved in boxing for about 50 years. They were absolutely appalled. They said, "You guys have got to do something about this. This should not be allowed to go ahead." These people are well aware of combat sports. I personally support boxing; I think it is well regulated and is a good sport for young people to get into if they so desire. However, cage fighting goes against Australian people's standards for combat sport. There is a lot of concern in the community and people have spoken against it publicly and in large numbers. It is incumbent upon us to treat this as an urgent bill.

Question put and a division taken with the following result -

Extract from Hansard
[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 26 September 2007]
p5833b-5841a

Mr Trevor Sprigg; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr John Kobelke; Acting Speaker; Mr Murray Cowper; Mr Troy Buswell;
Mr John McGrath

Ayes (24)

Mr C.J. Barnett	Mr M.J. Cowper	Mr R.F. Johnson	Dr S.C. Thomas
Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr J.E. McGrath	Mr M.W. Trenorden
Mr M.J. Birney	Mr B.J. Grylls	Mr P.D. Omodei	Ms S.E. Walker
Mr T.R. Buswell	Dr K.D. Hames	Mr D.T. Redman	Mr G.A. Woodhams
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Ms K. Hodson-Thomas	Mr A.J. Simpson	Dr J.M. Woollard
Dr E. Constable	Dr G.G. Jacobs	Mr G. Snook	Mr T.R. Sprigg (<i>Teller</i>)

Noes (27)

Mr P.W. Andrews	Mr R.C. Kucera	Mrs C.A. Martin	Mrs M.H. Roberts
Mr A.J. Carpenter	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr M.P. Murray	Mr T.G. Stephens
Dr J.M. Edwards	Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan	Mr P. Papalia	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mrs D.J. Guise	Mr J.A. McGinty	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr P.B. Watson
Mrs J. Hughes	Mr M. McGowan	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr M.P. Whitely
Mr J.N. Hyde	Ms S.M. McHale	Ms J.A. Radisich	Mr S.R. Hill (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mr A.D. McRae	Mr E.S. Ripper	

Pair

Mr T.K. Waldron

Mr B.S. Wyatt

Question thus negatived.

Second Reading Resumed

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr J.C. Kobelke (Leader of the House)**.