

POLICE — COPPER THEFT

632. Ms C.M. ROWE to the Minister for Police:

Before I ask my question, I would like to acknowledge on behalf of the member for Swan Hills the student leaders from Eastern Hills Senior High School who are here today.

I refer to the troubling crime of copper theft and its significant impacts on businesses and the community, particularly those in my electorate of Belmont.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house what is the cost of copper theft to the community?
- (2) Can the minister also outline to the house how the McGowan Labor government is responding to this serious issue?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS replied:

I thank the member for Belmont for that question. I also thank the members for Baldivis and Mount Lawley and others who have made representations to me on this issue.

- (1)–(2) Copper theft has been a growing problem in the Western Australian community. The member for Belmont raised with me quite some months ago issues that were happening in her community with the theft of copper. A significant amount of copper is stolen in our community each year. We know that millions of dollars' worth of copper is traded and a significant portion of that is illegal. By way of example, we know that this year 18 water fountains were stolen from local parks in the City of Cockburn; 900 metres of copper cabling, worth about \$200 000, was stolen from the City of Melville; and bronze and brass sculptures—works of art—have been stolen from various locations. There has also been the theft of water pipes and wires from homes and public utilities and the consequent risk of that. In some instances, something as small as a water meter is taken. This has had a significant impact on lots of householders who have had their water meters and hot water systems stolen. That copper is being sold for as little as \$5 a kilogram. The cost to householders and the cost of delays and additional building projects is huge.

This is not a new problem. This problem has been raised for years. In fact, we know that it was raised by the Master Builders Association with the Leader of the Opposition in 2015 when she was the Minister for Police.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warren–Blackwood, I call you to order for the second time.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The fact of the matter is that members opposite do not like hearing about yet another issue that their incompetent Minister for Police sat on for years and did nothing about. They purport to represent the building industry. They purport to care about householders.

Mr D.T. Redman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warren–Blackwood, you are on two.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: They purport to care about small business, but they sat on their hands and did nothing—absolutely nothing. In 2015, it was raised and raised again. There were articles in the paper and lobbying of the minister, but nothing happened. We know that back then the Master Builders Association said that it would like scrap metal dealers to deal with copper under the legislation so that it would be treated like other second-hand goods. Unlike the former government, we can actually walk and chew gum. I heard some interjections saying, “There’s a COVID pandemic; why aren’t you dealing with that?” We can deal with that and still deliver on all the things that members opposite neglected and did not care about when they were in office.

We have put reforms in place now so that copper and copper alloy will be treated the same as gold and silver. Dealers will need to be licensed. It will be mandatory to keep a record of all transactions and provide them to police. Sellers must identify themselves with 100 points of identification and there are penalties of a fine of up to \$20 000 or 12 months’ imprisonment for a breach of licensing requirements. They are the tough measures that we have put in place, because when a householder’s water meter or hot water system is affected, they have to take time off work, spend hundreds of dollars and do a whole range of things. Members opposite can laugh about it if they like and say that that was not important or it was not a priority, but it was raised time and again with their leader, the former Minister for Police, year in year out from 2015 that we know about, and their government did nothing.

We have regulated. We have moved in there. We have put in place a proper regime so that so many people are not inconvenienced, the community is not penalised, and the cost to people building homes does not go up. I am very proud that the McGowan government can do more than one thing at a time and we can deliver for small businesses, builders and the community.