

*Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs — Fifty-eighth Report —
Overview of Petitions 2 June 2021 to 2 December 2021 — Motion*

Resumed from 20 September on the following motion moved by Hon Peter Foster —

That the report be noted.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: The last time we visited the fifty-eighth report, *Overview of petitions 2 June 2021 to 2 December 2021*, I was talking about a specific petition within the report, being petition 15. Before I go there, I will touch on a concern that I had but which I think was unfounded. I was a little concerned about the fact —

[Interruption.]

Hon Martin Aldridge: I want to hear more!

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Honourable members, we seem to have a system glitch. It is the continuation of remarks by Hon Martin Pritchard.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: Thank you, deputy chair; it is always a pleasure to fulfil a member's desire that I speak more!

As I said, the last time I was speaking I was talking about a specific petition, and I will get back to that if I have time. However, I had a general concern about the move to introduce e-petitions because I thought that it might devalue the quality of petitions or the motives behind them. I have actually come to a different view. As a person who has organised petitions in the past in my previous employ, I find that this system probably makes it easier for people who organise petitions and I do not think it gives less value to the people who sign the petitions. The Parliament can be used in a number of ways to highlight issues, and petitions are one of them. I have become a big fan of e-petitions and recognise how important they are.

Before I get back to petition 15, I want to look at petition 27 in the report on Percy Doyle Reserve. That reserve is very close to where I live. I obviously represent the northern suburbs and Percy Doyle Reserve is within Duncraig, which is where I live. A lot of rumours and concerns were going around about the possible selling off of part of that reserve. I think the rumour at the time was that Woolworths was going to purchase it and build there, and there were some concerns about how that might reduce facilities for people around that area, as Percy Doyle Reserve is a very nice facility. The fact that it was raised in a petition —

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: What happened to the power of the shoppies? They are trying to censor you.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: I give the call to Hon Martin Pritchard.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: I again thank members for their consideration. I just want to finish my thought before my age comes upon me and I forget what I was talking about.

This rumour was going around and there had been some discussion by the City of Joondalup. I think there was some thought that it might happen, but the fact that it was raised in a petition highlighted or crystallised the concerns of the City of Joondalup that it was not something that would be accepted by the local community. I think we all worry sometimes about the nimby approach to things, but if they had sold off some of that land in that particular reserve, it would have degraded that area. It would not have been in keeping with what that area provides to the locals. The petition itself crystallised for the city that it was not a good idea. Ultimately, the discussions at council resolved to not make further investigations into it.

A petition does have those opportunities. I have spoken previously about other mechanisms that have been used to make sure we look after our constituents—disallowance motions and those sorts of things. I have always been a big fan of petitions, but having said that, I thought that putting more effort into getting names, spending time at shopping centres, that sort of stuff, might have provided an improved form of petition, but I think e-petitions do exactly the same thing. I think we have to give some weight to the fact that the numbers in petitions will certainly increase. As a person who has tried to organise petitions, it can be horrendous with the time that is involved and the opportunities to come face-to-face with people in the community to get signatures. E-petitions obviously make that a lot easier. For that reason, I think that there will be more signatures on petitions. I do not think that gives them any less value, but I do think we have to be mindful of that or more particularly the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs probably has to be more mindful. I think it takes its role very seriously and this report reflects that with the number of petitions that the committee has managed to resolve in one way or another.

I mentioned when I talked about this report before—people believe that by putting together a petition, even a petition with a lot of signatures, it will result in action. It does not always. I think the committee takes its role very seriously to try to make sure it gets answers from the minister to give resolution to the people who raised the petition. Sometimes petitioners believe that by merely signing a petition and presenting it, there will be some resolution. Again, the resolution may not always be what they anticipate or want. The committee has to weigh up what actions are appropriate to it.

I will get back to the petition that affected where I live—petition 15, about sound mitigation on the Mitchell Freeway. It related to the area between Warwick Road and Hepburn Avenue. The upgrades are on the south side of the freeway. I live on the northern side of the freeway. The petitioner collected 56 signatures, which I thought was a bit disappointing for the principal petitioner given the amount of effort he put in. It was disappointing with regard to the concern and interest about getting sound walls on the northern side. The committee sought a response from the minister. I think the minister's response was appropriate. Any member who lives near the freeway probably has many constituents who would like to have sound walls along that freeway. There would be a tremendous impact on the budget if that were provided. That particular petition demonstrated that there are people within the community who live in that precinct who would like to see a sound wall up, but the lack of more signatures or heightened interest or concerns raised within the community reflects my view. Even though I tabled the petition, I have a different view from the principal petitioner. I probably live the same distance as him from the freeway, and in my personal experience, it is very rare that I can hear the trains or cars, and only when the wind is in a particular position. As I said, sometimes petitions demonstrate the reverse of what the principal petitioner wants. I do not want to judge petitions by the number of signatures, but I think the numbers in that particular petition demonstrated the general lack of concern about the content that he sought support from the people in his community to try and achieve. It demonstrated the reverse of that: that it is not a big concern.

I want to thank the committee for taking that on board. I want to thank the committee for getting a response from the minister. The minister's response was not to express or suggest any lack of concern; the minister's response was about what the requirements were under the commitments given. It is up to the committee to follow that through. I am pleased that it did follow that through and we got a resolution. It was not the resolution that the principal petitioner wanted, but one that I as a representative of the area can go back to the community and explain my position—if they wanted a different result they probably needed to do a bit more work to get a few more signatures and demonstrate to the minister that there was something that needed to be responded to.

Petitions form a very important part of what we do here. I found this particular report very interesting. It was probably more interesting to me than most because a number of the petitions have had an impact around where I live, so I have a living experience of what was being raised and bring that to the fore in talking to constituents about it. Again, thank you for the report.

Hon SHELLEY PAYNE: It gives me great pleasure to stand and speak on this report. I would like to thank Hon Martin Pritchard for his comments recognising the importance of the petition process and saying he enjoyed the report and that it was interesting to him. We do take our role seriously. It is good that the member knows that when petitions are sent in, they result in action. I note the member's comment that sometimes it demonstrates the opposite of what the petitioner wanted, which is quite true in some of the cases. This is the report from when we commenced Parliament; it covers the first six months. I thank my colleagues Hon Peter Foster, who is the chair, and Hon Stephen Pratt, who is the deputy chair and who is out on urgent parliamentary business, and the other members of the committee.

Hon Darren West: He's right there.

Hon SHELLEY PAYNE: Sorry; he is in the chair on very important business!

Hon Darren West: Inconspicuous.

Hon SHELLEY PAYNE: Obviously!

During that time, we finalised 24 petitions, which was great. I always think it is great to look back at these reports because sometimes good progress can be made even after we close these petitions. Some of the issues take a lot of time to resolve. The first petition we received regarded the Pinjarra alumina refinery. That was a petition against the expansion or increased production of the alumina refinery. This is still an ongoing issue today. A lady came to my office last week to talk to me about it and I had an email this week and an email last week about it, so obviously it is an issue that is of high public importance. Alcoa is producing 50 per cent of Australia's alumina at the moment. It has about 4 000 jobs in Western Australia. Alumina was the fourth-largest export commodity in WA by value in 2021. It is very important to the economy. It is a difficult job for the government to balance this. Leaving it in the hands of the Environmental Protection Authority, the petition was closed because of the formal process it is going through at the moment. It is undertaking a full public environmental review with an eight-week public comment period. The process is expected to take three years and will finish, hopefully, sometime next year. That is an interesting process and a good opportunity for the public to have a formal opportunity during that time to make comments on that important decision that will be made.

There were quite a number of other petitions as well. Our second petition dealt with the Dardanup waste and landfill precinct. A lot of people protest against landfills; they do not want them in their backyard. On the other hand, it is important for us to have somewhere to put our waste. Though the government is doing a lot to minimise the waste we have, it is still an issue and something we have to deal with. The petition was closed because, again, the EPA was going through a process assessment on referral of information and there was a four-week public review

period. Just last month, at the end of September, the review process closed with an approval for expansion and the construction and operation of some new cells—9, 10 and 12A—at the Banksia Road landfill in Dardanup. Again, quite a lot of environmental conditions are associated with that expansion. I understand that maybe not everyone will be happy with that, but, obviously, it is a very important and much-needed thing at this time, which is how to deal with our waste before we have any other new modern ways to do it and until we can reduce significantly the waste that we produce as a society.

Petitions 4 and 26 referred to biosecurity levies. I want to note the great work that Hon Jackie Jarvis is doing on reviewing the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act at the moment. Stage 3 of the review is now closed and we are expecting a report shortly. A great opportunity will follow on from this to have more public input into the process and how best we manage biosecurity, as the state government has acknowledged it is a really big issue in our state. I thank everyone at the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development for their work and the minister for all her work since she has taken up her ministerial role.

It is really great to see outcomes with some of the other petitions we dealt with. Quite a few people had issues with speed limits and wanting to reduce speed limits. For example, there was a petition for the speed limit on Chapman Road in Geraldton. This was taken up. We closed the petition because we talked to the local government about raising the issue, so the local government raised it. Main Roads then did an audit and we are pleased that the speed limit has now been reduced as requested. That was a really great outcome. There was also a petition on speed limits in Busselton. The petitioners wanted to reduce the speed limit on Bussell Highway between north of Halls Road and south of Spurr Street. This is great as well. We had another positive resolution with the speed limit being reduced from 110 to 80 kilometres an hour, so I thank Main Roads for the work it did to look at those issues and do the safety audits.

I could go on to a couple of other issues. The building industry has had some criticisms and there was a petition about some concerns with the homebuilding industry and particularly the lack of protection for home owners. I was really pleased to see that Hon Sue Ellery, the Minister for Commerce, rolled out a landmark registrations scheme for building engineers last month. This is great because it will register more than 1 000 engineers in the building sector, which will help deliver safer buildings and greater accountability and strengthen the professional recognition for these workers. This will be rolled out over two years, starting next year. It is really part of a huge reform package that the government is doing to modernise and improve WA's building regulatory framework, particularly in response to the recommendations in *Building confidence: Improving the effectiveness of compliance and enforcement systems for the building and construction industry across Australia* that the government is trying to implement. That is another great outcome that is following on from that petition and following on from the work we have done there as well.

Just in the short time left, I want to mention another petition. Hon Martin Pritchard talked about Percy Doyle Reserve. We received a petition from people concerned about Percy Doyle Reserve being redeveloped. The City of Joondalup is now doing great work with the skate park, the BMX facility, the multipurpose court, nature play elements, climbing frames, picnic areas and spectator spaces. It was really a great outcome for that area. It looks to be between \$4 million and \$5 million investment into the public infrastructure there, which is a really great outcome.

Just in closing, it has been a great opportunity to be on the committee. As we talked about, it has been a really great opportunity to take the concerns of the public and really see whether we can get some good outcomes if they are matters of interest to the public.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I will make a few comments on the fifty-eighth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs. I want to deal with a couple of quick issues—both bouquets and brickbats. Given that we have been in such a positive and cooperative mood this afternoon, I will start with the bouquet, though I am not sure the committee delivered the outcome. “Petition No. 3—Speed limit on Bussell Highway”, which was tabled in May 2021, asked for the speed limit on Bussell Highway, from slightly to the north of Capel from Capel Drive to Spurr Street in the south, to drop from 110 to 80 kilometres an hour. I am not always fan of dropping speed limits but there had been a number of fatal accidents on those intersections and I am happy to report to the house that those speed limits have been dropped. There were two significant speed limit drops. There was that one on Bussell Highway at Capel and also on a section north of Bunbury on South Western Highway, effectively on the southern end of Waterloo around where people who come down to the south come across Hynes Road and Martin-Pelusey Road; the speed limit for that section of South Western Highway was also dropped from 110 kilometres an hour to 80 kilometres an hour in a not dissimilar time frame. I suspect that the Capel speed-limit drop happened not that long after the committee looked at this investigation. Although it slows traffic slightly—all those people going to spend their holidays in the Margaret River, Busselton and Dunsborough region are slowed slightly on the way through—the reality is that with the dualling of the highway, people will ultimately pick up that extra time anyway. That has been a success story for the south west community, and I think that is pretty positive.

The committee did not make a recommendation about slowing the speed limit. The report states —

- 2.20 The Committee resolved to finalise the petition on the basis that a project is underway to improve Bussell Highway through the construction of an additional 17 km of dual carriageway. Once the works are completed, further traffic data will be collected by Main Roads and a decision made about whether any changed traffic conditions are required.

I can tell members that the 17 kilometres of additional dual carriageway are still not completed, but the speed limit was dropped anyway. A campaign was run, and the credit probably goes to the Capel CWA as the driving force for the campaign. It had a little ceremony in which a number of people were thanked for their support—Liberal and Labor members. It was a cross-party support group, and I think the outcome has been much easier. It is a bit safer there, although it is probably still not perfect. The 17 kilometres of dual carriageway did not fix the problem; actually, what the petitioners asked for, which was slowing the speed limit, fixed the problem. That was a good outcome for everybody, so we appreciate that.

That is the bouquet. The brickbats are not for the committee, of course, but for the government about petition 4, which was considered in conjunction with petition 26. In the report, petition 26 is the biosecurity levy imposed on the residents of Boyup Brook. The committee decided to deal with this petition concurrently with petition 4, the biosecurity levy imposed on the residents of Bridgetown–Greenbushes. The combined answer is on page 7 of the report. Basically, in both cases, landowners were somewhat offended—let us say—at having to pay a biosecurity levy.

I do not think that anybody else in the chamber was in Parliament in 2007 when the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act was passed. I was in the other place that shall not be named and was part of the debate many years ago. That bill was introduced by a longstanding and well-respected member of this chamber, Hon Kim Chance, who was the agriculture minister at the time. There is no doubt, however, that the department of agriculture's intent then—as I think it is now—was to handball responsibility for lots of biosecurity work out of its bailiwick and hand it over to landowners. That was absolutely the case. Members might remember that there was once a thing called the Agricultural Protection Board, the APB, which was at arm's length from the department of agriculture. It was an independent board and was tasked with managing biosecurity, particularly what I would call endemic biosecurity, which is not exotic species but species that are currently in the state and probably very difficult to remove but, ideally, should be controlled. The Minister for Emergency Services and I have had long debates about arum lilies, which is a good example. There are plenty of other opportunities. That legislation went through in 2007.

The department of agriculture hated the Agricultural Protection Board. The department spent decades trying to get rid of it so an independent authority would not step on the department's toes and point out where it should be doing other things. The APB's budget and staffing came from the department of agriculture, and the department hated that, so it campaigned for many years over multiple ministers to get rid of the APB. That work started under Monty House, when he was the agriculture minister in the 1990s, and it finally concluded under Terry Redman, who was the minister from 2008. He finally killed off the APB in its entirety, and there was nothing left.

The department of agriculture was supposed to take over that work, but, of course, it had no interest in doing so. It simply wanted to handball that work back. When the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act went through in 2007, the department instigated these biosecurity levies for the first time. The levies were an impost on farmers to pay for the biosecurity that the APB would have done. It was a direct cost shift from government to individual landowners, and that is what makes the people of Boyup Brook, Bridgetown and a pile of other places so angry. I pay a biosecurity levy, and I have always paid it. Why does it make people angry? It makes people angry because it is a cost shift.

Oh! The motion is done.

The DEPUTY CHAIR (Hon Stephen Pratt): It is okay. You can continue.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: They are censoring me, too, Hon Martin Pritchard, and I am not a member of the shoppies. This was a handball.

The DEPUTY CHAIR: Order, member. I will just get some advice.

Consideration of report postponed, pursuant to standing orders.