

*Ministerial Performance — Minister for Environment — Adjournment Debate*

**HON SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [10.21 pm]: I listened with interest to the Address-in-Reply speech by Hon Sue Ellery tonight. I thought it was an excellent speech. I noted that, amongst other things, she took up several issues of concern to her constituents, and it is that theme that I want to take up tonight—the point that she raised about the people in the South Metropolitan Region who are very, very worried by what they have seen this government, and particularly the Minister for Environment, do since 2 February when this government approved the conditions for the transport of lead through Fremantle. I thought that Hon Sue Ellery did a very good job of pointing out exactly why people are worried. They have good reason to be. They look to this government to provide explanations and reassurance and leadership that governments are supposed to provide. What do they find when they look for that? They find nothing. They find ministers who are running away from answering questions in this place—another topic that Hon Sue Ellery covered very comprehensively in her speech. They run away every time we ask them questions. They hide behind weasel words and rhetoric.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney:** That must be the theme that you have been told to follow tonight, I think.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** It is just not possible to get straight answers out of this mob, and that is why I am on my feet now. People are worried because there is a lack of information about how this is going to work. Nowhere was that more clearly demonstrated than during question time today, when the Minister for Environment was asked two questions. The first question that I want to refer to tonight was asked by my colleague Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm. He asked the minister about the \$5 million bond that is supposed to be held, as one of the conditions that she has approved, to secure the implementation of the provisions that she has put in place. It is not a very hard question. What did the minister reply? She asked for the question to be put on notice. For goodness sake! I do not know what is in the briefing notes that the minister brings into this place. Either they are absolutely inadequate or they are not being read before question time.

**Hon Ken Travers:** No. They say to put it on notice because she needs something to remind her of how to do it.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** I thank Hon Ken Travers for his elaboration on that point. That is a third option.

The document setting out all these conditions is only about seven or eight pages long. The Minister for Environment cannot answer a simple question about whether the \$5 million has been received as a bond, where it is being held and what the details of it are. We have had to put those questions on notice because she does not know the answers to them.

I asked her a question today in question time. I was referring to the minister's own words when I asked the question. In response to the urgency motion that was moved in this place last week, she talked about two additional plans that had to be put into place before the lead being mined by Magellan Metals Pty Ltd can leave the mine site. The first plan is the health, hygiene and environment monitoring program, and the second is the emergency response plan. Surely the minister would have had a couple of pieces of paper that would have told her what the plans were about, because we asked questions about those two plans today, particularly after having raised the matter last week in the urgency motion. I asked the minister whether she would table the plans and, if not, why not.

I will explain to the house what the plans are about. In the short document that the minister has signed, to allow the hazardous material to be transported through 22 suburbs, which is double the amount of hazardous waste going out through the port —

**Hon Robyn McSweeney:** Which you agreed to when you were in government.

**Hon SALLY TALBOT:** Hon Robyn McSweeney has been interjecting now for some time. This government is behaving like a very tired government. For the minister to talk about what we might have done if we had won the election is nonsense. The minister does not know what we would have done. She has obviously never read any of the background to this case. If members opposite listened, they could give their colleague advice on how to handle herself tomorrow.

The emergency response plan is half a page long. I will quote only a small bit of it because I do not have much time left. There are four points —

... The Emergency response Plan shall include:

1. emergency response procedures to respond to the release of material containing lead carbonate from the shipping containers at any point between the time the shipping container leaves the mine site and the time it is removed from the State;

2. emergency response procedures to respond to the release of material containing lead carbonate from the sealed bags into the shipping container at any point between the time the shipping container leaves the mine site and the time it is removed from the State;
3. post-incident clean-up sampling to determine the effectiveness of the clean-up;
4. procedures for reporting to the Department of Environment and Conservation, the relevant Local Government Authority.

The other plan that is supposed to be in place, the health, hygiene and environmental monitoring program, shall —

1. detail the baseline and periodic...soil sampling program along the transport route, at the Leonora storage area and at the Port;
2. detail and address monitoring of air-borne lead dust around the bagging machine and in the concentrate storage shed;
3. detail the monitoring of fixed soil sampling, dust deposition and air quality sampling sites and shall include, but not be limited to, having monitoring sites located within the port and adjacent to the transport route so as to provide an early warning of any fugitive dust; and
4. detail the monitoring of lead in the port marine environment.

The minister has responsibility for determining the content of these plans, approving them and making sure that they are implemented. However, today when she was asked a very simple question about where those plans are at, she said she could not say anything about them because they were with her department for assessment. The very document that she signed says that she has responsibility for them. She obviously does not have a clue what is going on.

Hon Sue Ellery covered some of the points that are worrying the community. They are concerned because of the history of this company and because we have had a major regulatory failure involving lead, yet it is to be transported through 22 suburbs. The only way we found that out was by doing our own research. People have not been contacted or informed about the fact that the material will pass by their houses, shops and schools. The proposal doubles the amount of hazardous material being transported through Fremantle. There is no transport of this substance in the United States any more. Do members know why it is not transported by rail any more? It is not transported by rail because no insurance company will provide the insurance because it is not safe.

This minister was asked four times last week—three times in a television interview and once by me in this house—whether the transport of lead through Fremantle was safe. She will not say that it is safe; she will not answer. What will she do in the event of a spillage? Will she turn around and say, “Well, I never told you it was safe.” That is true at the moment; she will not tell us it is safe. She will not tell us why she signed this document letting the transfer of this substance go ahead.

With the benefit of hindsight, reading the history of this company with this substance, it is not good enough just to put checks and balances in place. Those checks and balances have failed in the past. We are getting no assurance whatsoever from this minister that those checks and balances will work in the future. We are looking for vigilance and leadership. The community is looking for a minister as a member of a government who will actually put people’s interests first, and it is simply not getting it. It has every reason to be concerned about this proposal.

In conclusion, this minister is not just a dreadful disappointment both to the conservation community and the community of Western Australia; she is also causing very real serious alarm about her management of these issues.

Question put and passed.

*House adjourned at 10.31 pm*

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