

Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Levy Act 2007 — Amendments — Adjournment Debate

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [10.20 pm]: My colleague and friend the member for Mandurah, Hon David Templeman, comes up with some wonderful phrases in his contributions to debate in Parliament. The other day he repeatedly used the phrase “dead, stinking cat” when referring to an aspect of the budget. I rise tonight, labouring under some difficulty, as members will hear, to talk about this dead stinking cat, which is the increase in the landfill levy.

Hon Ken Travers, in his contribution to the debate on the Loan Bill, talked about the speeches that we have heard from new members, and the commitment we are hearing from new members right across this chamber to respect the processes of this place and to honour the processes of government. They must be horrified by what they heard in this place today when, at the start of proceedings, the Minister for Environment stood up and announced that the government had cancelled the proposed rise in the landfill levy. It has cancelled next week’s rise and postponed it until 1 January 2010. This is the part I want to draw to the attention of honourable members, because this afternoon we saw a complete act of subterfuge. It was pulling the wool over the eyes of members, and if they cannot see that, they need to go back and have a close look at what was done in this place this afternoon. The minister said in her statement that the government had now received legal advice that —

... it is appropriate that prior to the proposed 300 percent increase in levies taking effect, the passage of the *Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Amendment Bill 2009* should occur first.

Apart from the appalling grammar in that sentence, which I have just read out from the minister’s statement verbatim, let us just understand what it means. Since 14 May, when the government pulled this little stunt on us, I have stood up in this place almost every day and asked the minister to explain to us what she thinks she is trying to do. Every time I have raised it she has come back with statements about our appallingly low level of recycling and our high level of waste going to landfill. I will provide members with a bit of the flavour of this to show that I am not making it up. The minister said, in reply to a question from me on 14 May 2009 —

There is a very real problem in Western Australia in that the levies are far too low ... We believe that an increase in the levies ... will provide a significant opportunity for industries to recycle.

Are members getting the message here? The levies are raised and then the amount of waste going to landfill and the amount of recycling go in what we would call the right direction. We are all supposed to be working here on the policy towards zero landfill by 2020. Everybody is committed to that. Again I quote the minister, on another occasion —

an increased landfill levy will provide an incentive for industry to invest in services in WA to lift its current recycling rate.

As recently as last Thursday afternoon, the minister took up a significant number of pages in the *Hansard* during the Department of Environment and Conservation estimates process in this place talking about what the rise in the landfill levy is supposed to be doing. I quote again, from page E52 —

The PRESIDENT: I think you need to identify the document.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: It is the *Hansard* from the budget estimates in this place on Thursday, 18 June.

The PRESIDENT: I think you need to identify it as the uncorrected *Hansard*.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Thank you very much, Mr President, I take your advice on that. It is the uncorrected *Hansard*. Nevertheless, this is consistent with all the previous statements. The minister said —

It is certainly fair to say that the evidence suggests that an increase in the levy will provide an incentive for people to recycle.

She then goes on to talk about New South Wales. Let us be absolutely clear about this. Two things happened in the budget. Firstly, the government decided to increase the landfill levy by some 300 per cent. It will not have escaped anybody in this chamber that when the Carpenter government, under the minister, David Templeman, put through the waste avoidance and resource recovery bills we talked about incremental increases over the next few years. We knew and we specifically said; we acknowledged, and we brought it to the attention of the Parliament and to the electorate in Western Australia that the levy rates were starting low but would increase. Indeed, there was a schedule of increases going over the next few years. When the minister stood up to announce there would be a 300 per cent increase, we were obviously concerned that it was an impost on Western Australian households. Given all the other imposts that this government has put upon them, we were concerned about that. However, from a philosophical point of view, from a public policy point of view, I do not disagree, nor does anybody on this side of the chamber disagree with the minister’s basic principle that increasing the levy

over a period of time—which is what we were arguing about and the style and manner in which it was done—is not a bad thing. That is the first thing that was done: the increase in the levy.

The second thing that was done was that amendments were flagged to the Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Act 2007. These legislative changes were last week introduced into the other place and presumably will get here sometime in the second half of the year. What is the connection between these two things? I can tell members that there is no connection, because the rate of the landfill levy can be altered by regulation. The government does not need to come into the Parliament and amend the bill to increase the landfill levy. If the minister really believed in what she was doing, there was no reason why she could not have gone ahead with the increase in the landfill levy, sticking to all the rhetoric that she has given us in the past six or so weeks consistent with the basic broad approach that the Labor government adopted when it introduced the bill, and she could have re-looked at the legislation. Instead of that, the minister has collapsed the two things into one another.

There was one element of what the minister has done that I really have to say is quite a remarkable achievement. The minister has managed to put offside every single stakeholder in this debate. There is not one person in Western Australia who thinks that she has done the right thing. Local government is angry because of what they saw as being the government's attempt to turn the landfill levy into a tax; that was the first thing. What has that to do with? Is that to do with increasing the levy by 300 per cent? Of course it is not! All local government is angry about is that the government was going to increase the levy by 300 per cent and then take away 75 per cent of the revenue and put it into running one of its departments. That is what upset local government; and a few other things too, like there being absolutely no money—which we discovered in estimates last week—for policing illegal dumping and no money for cleaning up illegal dumping. The electorate is angry because local government, quite rightly, has turned to its ratepayers and said, "This will cost us a lot of extra money, expect your rates to go up by at least \$24 a week, which is on top of all the other imposts in the budget."

Hon Ken Travers: That is what the government says; local government says it is going to be more than that!

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Indeed, local government says it will be more than that because, of course, families pay visits to tips on other occasions; it is not just the kerbside rubbish collection. Local government is angry and the electorate is angry; householders are angry; the environment groups are angry. What are the environment groups angry about?

Hon Norman Moore: They are always angry you know!

Hon SALLY TALBOT: Oh, no, they are not! What a tired cynical comment that is coming from the Leader of the House. How long has Hon Norman Moore been in government? Nine whole months! My goodness me, the Leader of the House's stamina is pretty low and his tolerance is —

Hon Norman Moore: I guess you do stretch my tolerance.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: The Leader of the House has been here a bit too long, as Hon Kate Doust said.

Local government is angry, the electorate is angry, and the environment movement is angry. What are they angry about? Are they angry about the 300 per cent increase? No, they are not; they are ecstatic about that. They are angry that the government is taking funds away from the Waste Authority. That is what they are angry about. Everybody on the government side has been absolutely silent about what we saw in this chamber today! Did members on this side notice that? Members opposite have all said, "It is probably sensible to wait until the legislation has gone through." The legislation has nothing to do with what the government has cancelled for next week.

Hon Norman Moore: You'd better talk to Mr Travers tonight who explained it in his speech.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I do not know what the government is trying to do.

Hon Norman Moore: She does not understand about levies.

Hon SALLY TALBOT: I understand very well. I suspect that Hon Norman Moore understands very well, too. I watched the faces of members opposite this afternoon after they heard that announcement. They looked as though they had been in government for a couple of decades. They looked very, very miserable.