

RETAIL TRADING HOURS — LABOR PARTY'S POSITION

334. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Premier:

I refer the Premier to the Leader of the Opposition's record-breaking but very welcome backflip on retail trading hours. Will the Premier outline to the house the benefits the government reform policy will provide with regard to greater consumer choice, greater competition and more jobs across metropolitan Perth?

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

I thank the member for the question. Indeed, if I understand what the Leader of the Opposition has said today, I am pleased with what I hope now is a resolution to the trading hours issue—at least for the time being.

At the last state election, the Liberal Party committed to extending weeknight shopping across the Perth metropolitan area. After the election, I met with a wide range of industry groups, including the unions representing people working in the retail sector. Out of that process, agreement was reached, certainly within the Liberal Party, that weeknight shopping across Perth should extend to nine o'clock. Accordingly, almost exactly one year ago, legislation was introduced into this house to extend weeknight trading uniformly across Perth to 9.00 pm Monday to Friday. The Labor Party did not support that at the time, and the legislation has, basically, languished on the notice paper for 12 months. In response to that stalemate, if one likes, the government made a series of decisions to provide greater choice to consumers, including introducing legislation, which passed through this house and is currently before the upper house, to create a special trading precinct or tourism precinct for Joondalup. We also acted to increase the boundaries of both the Perth and Fremantle tourism precincts, and the Minister for Commerce last week introduced such legislation for Armadale and Midland. That process will provide wider choice for both weeknight and Sunday shopping. However, as I have consistently said, it is a second-best solution. It creates anomalies. It creates boundary disputes and the like. We always prefer to have uniform advancement. If I understand the Leader of the Opposition correctly, the Labor Party is now supporting weeknight shopping to 9.00 pm. I am very pleased. I appreciate that change.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I understand that that support will presumably allow for that legislation to now proceed. The people of Perth will be very, very appreciative of the opportunity to do their shopping on the way home from work or to go out and do the shopping while one parent stays at home and looks after the kids. They will have all those advantages of choice.

I understand that the Leader of the Opposition also made reference to some other points; namely, that he wants to see the introduction of a small business commissioner. That issue has been discussed by individual members on both sides of the house, and, indeed, there is merit in that proposition. The government is prepared to work with some amendments to try to establish such a position so that there can be an added layer of protection for small business tenants in shopping centres. The other issue raised was that of white goods or bulky goods and the public demand, and, indeed, the retail sector demand, for those sorts of stores to open. This includes the odd situation of, for example, a Bunnings store being able to trade on a Sunday, whereas a Harvey Norman store cannot trade. It includes issues of definition that can be a little tricky, but, again, I think that they could probably be worked through. I indicate to the opposition that the government, or at least the Liberal Party part of the government, accepts that, and we look forward, in a rare moment of cooperation, to achieve for Perth what about 20 country towns already have. I think that it is a good move. It may restore some faith amongst consumers and families and working people of Perth that ultimately, albeit a year later, there can be some agreement across the house.