

NEWMAN–NULLAGINE ROAD — SAFETY

583. Hon JON FORD to the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the letter sent to me by the minister in which he sought to further clarify his response to questions of safety relating to the Newman–Nullagine road, in which he stated that there were no sections of the route that are considered to be particularly hazardous. Given that there has recently been another multiple fatality on this road, will the minister undertake to personally drive this road to assess its condition?

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN replied:

The letter I wrote to the honourable member was based on the professional advice of Main Roads WA, because this is a state road. That was the basis of my advice. I do not believe that Main Roads has changed the advice given to me, which formed the basis of my response to the member, so I stand by that advice. The letter also contained further advice, as I am sure the member would freely acknowledge, and I think it is worth mentioning that when phrases such as the one referred to by the member are employed, they have to be clearly understood by the reader and by anyone else to whom they are repeated. This road, in common with the vast majority of public roads in Western Australia, is largely an unsealed road; in fact, about 126 000 of the 180 000 kilometres of public roads in Western Australia are unsealed. There is no suggestion or implication in that description of the condition of the road that it is a perfect road, constructed to the highest standards, finished with a seal and in the sort of condition in which anyone could drive along it for 300 kilometres in perfect safety. That is not what is meant by that letter, if the member had read the terms of the letter properly. What was the term the member used?

Hon Jon Ford: There are no sections of the route that are considered to be particularly hazardous.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: That is right. Using terms such as the one that was used on that occasion—I thank the member for repeating it—does not mean that there are not implicit dangers in driving on any section of road, anywhere. I think my letter might also have carried the proviso that it is important that drivers, wherever they may be, on this road on any other road, drive to the conditions that prevail at that time—whether it is night or day, good visibility or poor, wet or dry, sealed or unsealed, curved or straight, heavy traffic or no traffic, or in the presence of dust. It is in that context that the line referred to by the member was given. That does not in any way indicate that an accident or crash could not happen on the road, it does not indicate that we do not think the road could be better, and it most certainly does not indicate that motorist safety is not our prime concern; I want to make that absolutely clear.

I have driven on this road in the past; I do not know when I will be up there next, but I will let the member know when I am going, and we may well drive that road together. I am not refusing, so the member should not think that I am refusing or declining his offer; I am just saying that I am not immediately about to accept it.

Finally, I will say something about the other part of the member's question, which is a very important part, and implicit to the member's question. In common with all members, I am regretful whenever an accident or crash occurs, and I was greatly saddened, as I am sure the member was, by the report of that recent tragedy. I have not yet seen the full report—I do not think it is yet available—of the inquiry that always happens when there is a road fatality, so I will not prejudge or seek to discuss whether a substantial cause of that accident was, in fact, the condition of the road or some other cause. Out of sensitivity to that process and to the bereaved, I will not comment on that aspect any further.