

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

HON KIM CHANCE (Agricultural - Leader of the House) [4.59 pm]: I move -

That the house do now adjourn.

Local Government - Adjournment Debate

HON ROBYN McSWEENEY (South West) [5.00 pm]: In February, I was pleased to be made the shadow Minister for Local Government. Having been on the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes for two terms from May 1991 to May 1997, which is some six years, I do not come into the portfolio without any experience. I was also on the advisory committee for the South West Development Commission for a number of years and have been very involved with local government issues throughout the area.

I recently went to the library and looked at the annual reports of the development commission for the years that I was on the advisory committee. My work covered many areas that are still relevant today. One of the projects I am particularly proud of is the telecentres. I was involved with that project at the ground level. Telecentres were set up in Bridgetown, Greenbushes and Boyup Brook. They all started around the same time. I also credit the communities that came on board. The telecentres are now an integral part of those small communities. Throughout my years in local government, I met many dedicated councillors. Hon Bruce Donaldson was the first local government association president in Western Australia. In many ways, it is more difficult being involved with local government than with state government. Often there is a bunfight when community members do not agree on a particular issue. However, at the state government level, people are more shielded because they are in Parliament.

I look forward to continuing my association with the friends I have made in local government. I also look forward to visiting many of the 144 councils throughout Western Australia. It will take some time, but it is my intention to visit as many as I can. I have already visited a number of city councils to gain an understanding of their issues. Many country councils face the same issues as city councils; and, as I said, I have been involved with them for many years. I am not a city person, and I am not fully aware of city council issues. However, I have a great willingness to learn. From what I have heard, city councils are just as parochial as country councils. Indeed, "amalgamation" is a dirty word to most councils. I do not believe in forced amalgamations; they must be done with the goodwill of whatever councils are involved.

Last month, I attended the launch of the Systemic Sustainability Study, which is being financed by the Western Australian Local Government Association. The panel includes Professor Greg Craven, the executive director of the John Curtin Institute of Public Policy; Professor Fiona Haslam McKenzie, the director of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute; and Mr George McCullagh, the principal of Cressida Consulting, which provides management advice to the public and private sector. I will be very interested to see what they come up with. I do not think that I am an orphan in that respect. For many years, local government has been the poor relation of state and federal government; however, it is expected by state and federal government to carry increasing responsibility for infrastructure requirements and social issues. Social issues have come to the fore in recent years. The government is about to release its own report on local government and structural and electoral reform. That too will be very interesting. Local governments are very critical of the process and believe that the former Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, John Bowler, did not have sufficient time or resources to make good recommendations on the future of councils. Local councils are very much in fear of forced amalgamations.

Hon Bruce Donaldson and I flew to Bruce Rock last month to visit its local council. It is an amazing council. The shire president showed us around the town, of which he is extremely proud. In a town of 1 200 people, the council takes responsibility for building doctors' residents and surgery facilities and then leases those premises. I believe it has been able to attract a dentist. It has also built workshops for tradespeople and then leased them back. It has been extremely proactive. The lawn amphitheatre is magnificent and the town streetscape is a pleasure to look at. Hon Kim Chance was also in Bruce Rock that day. The government has listed Bruce Rock as a site for contaminated waste.

Hon Kim Chance: Not the government.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: It is there, and if that is the choice, the government will rubberstamp it. Those people are not particularly happy that their area is being considered and, after visiting the site, neither am I. Hon Bruce Donaldson and I heard Hon Kim Chance say to the crowd that had gathered that he would not approve the site if the townspeople did not want it. The crowd was very vocal in not wanting it.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: We enjoyed the social side afterwards.

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: We certainly did. We all had a very nice time.

Hon Kim Chance: I thank Hon Bruce Donaldson for leading the cheer squadron!

Hon ROBYN McSWEENEY: I was not being disparaging about Hon Kim Chance. We enjoyed ourselves afterwards, as most politicians do when they visit local governments around the state.

I turn from Bruce Rock to disadvantaged Kwinana. The Town of Kwinana is planning a begging mission to Canberra. Its councillors say that the state government is not listening and not pleading their case. They have Norm Marlborough as the member for Peel and Fran Logan as the member for Cockburn. The councillors do not believe that they are doing enough for the area. They believe that the state Labor government has failed them. Three councillors will travel to Canberra to talk about the level of unemployment in the area, which is more than that of the Perth metropolitan area. On 26 March they will meet federal government ministers to plead the case for their region. I believe that the two local members need to take heed of that. More than 54 per cent of Kwinana's population receives less than \$21 000 annually. Those councillors want something done with the area. One must wonder what local members are doing in Kwinana if this is a Labor government and local people cannot get anything for their area.

I am travelling to all local governments and many local governments are coming to me and describing the issues in their area. My intention is to be a very active shadow minister and to bring those issues into the chamber. By doing that, I believe that the government will realise that country regions need infrastructure. I can bring into this chamber any issues that city and regional councils have, and we can then get some infrastructure for these communities. This will make everyone aware of what is out in the country regions, because those regions are extremely important. I will be travelling around the city and the regions.

Lake McLarty - Adjournment Debate

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [5.09 pm]: I use this opportunity to draw the attention of the house to the most magnificent lake that I was privileged to be able to visit last Friday in my electorate. It is Lake McLarty, about which people know remarkably little considering that it is one of the most significant wetland areas in the southernmost part of the state. I was invited to Lake McLarty by the Peel Preservation Group. The occasion of the visit was to see part of the work that the group has been undertaking following the decision in 2004 to include Lake McLarty as one of the 10 priority shorebird sites selected across Australia for a range of community-driven shorebird conservation projects. The project was funded by the Natural Heritage Trust and coordinated by the World Wildlife Fund Australia. The project will run over four years.

The people who set up the project had the extraordinarily good sense to choose Mr Bill Rutherford as the local project officer. Bill played a significant part in the ceremony that I was privileged to attend on the shores of Lake McLarty. Lake McLarty is part of the Peel-Yalgorup wetland system, which as many members would know is listed under the Ramsar Convention as a wetland of national significance. I was invited by the Peel Preservation Group, specifically by Coral Richards, whose passion for the local environment in the Mandurah region is matched only by her passion for the arts. Coral organised the hire of a bus that then picked up a couple of Murray shire councillors, and we all ended up by the shores of Lake McLarty last Friday. The proceedings on the shores of Lake McLarty were coordinated by Nancy Fardin and Judy Trenbath from the Peel Preservation Group. We also heard from Mr Murray Love, the senior operations officer from the Department of Conservation and Land Management office in Mandurah, and Mr Bob Pond, the aptly-named manager of the Peel Waterways Centre. Bill Rutherford gave us a small taste of his complete and utter passion for the project and the area in general. His enthusiasm was highly infectious.

The 40 people who gathered on the shores of Lake McLarty included a couple of local residents, some of whose memories went back many decades to the time when Lake McLarty was covered in what lay people like me call bullrushes. I think there is a Latin name for them. The bullrushes were about two metres high. Several decades ago, the local farmers allowed their cattle to stray into this area, and over the years the cattle gradually and systematically demolished the bullrushes by eating them. It is as a result of that change to the vegetation in the area that it has become such an important wetland. Members will be interested to know that in order to be classed as a wetland of international importance, there should be in excess of 20 000 birds in the wetland at any one time. The project has already produced a stunningly good report called "Birds of Lake McLarty". According to the report, on 25 February 1996 there were 26 690 waterbirds at the site, on 23 February 1997 there were 34 104, and on 25 January 1998 there were 30 177.

The history of Lake McLarty raises an interesting question; namely, how does an area qualify to be classed as a natural conservation area? The nature of the vegetation and wildlife in the Lake McLarty area has changed significantly over the years. Therefore, Lake McLarty is a good example of the fact that our conservation practices need to take into account changes of this kind. We need to carefully read and understand the reason that these changes have taken place, and when we have an area like Lake McLarty, which is clearly rich in this very unusual and highly valuable type of wildlife conservation, we should do everything possible to protect the wellbeing of the wildlife that inhabits that area. I am talking about not only the waterbirds, but also the

invertebrates upon which the waterbirds feed. It is just as important to protect them as it is the waterbirds. Western Australia used to have two other wetlands in this general area - Lake Forrestdale and Thomsons Lake. Unfortunately, as a result of the development of the catchment areas, both those areas are now effectively defunct as waterbird habitats. I add my voice to the pleas of the Peel Preservation Group, and other groups in that area, that we avoid making the same mistake at Lake McLarty. I am told that is not likely to happen, because had the laws of today been in place when the catchment areas around Lake Forrestdale and Thomsons Lake were developed, that development would not have been allowed to happen. There is every reason for optimism in that regard.

I also pay tribute to the work done in the area by the students of the Pinjarra Senior High School and their coordinator. They were a vital part of the revegetation project on the western shore of Lake McLarty. That was part of the area we looked at last Friday, and it is very impressive. I will finish by noting that two very significant people were missing from the gathering on the shores of Lake McLarty last Friday. One was Kim Wilson, who did an enormous amount of work putting the revegetation project into effect. I understand that she put a lot of time and energy into collecting the appropriate seeds from around the area and making sure that the revegetation was carried out with the appropriate plants. The other person I especially want to acknowledge is Josephine Te Puni, who tragically died last November. I had been a member of this house for only a matter of days when Jo appeared on my doorstep down in Mandurah and spent some time talking me through the whole Lake McLarty project, which was one of her very special passions in life. The preservation and conservation of this area that is now going on, and our taking this important and significant area very seriously, are marks of the enormous contribution that Josephine Te Puni made to the local environment of the Peel region.

Ngurrawaana Community - Adjournment Debate

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral) [5.17 pm]: I will comment on question 33, which I asked yesterday, and the question I asked today, relating to a community I was asked to visit some 110 kilometres south of Karratha, a distance it took me two hours to drive. It is the Ngurrawaana community, of some 40 adults and 23 school-aged children. Somebody outside the community asked me to attend to an issue that had been going on for some time; that is, accommodation for the principal of the school. The school was commissioned only last year. It is a transportable, but it is a very modern school and adequate for its purposes. However, it is totally inappropriate to build a school in a remote area without providing adequate housing for the teachers. It sets up the school to fail. In fact, one can argue whether the school should be there at all. I will not go down that path, but the school is there, and it is adequate. It has an excellent principal, whose wife is there with him, along with other staff who have come to work there. It is achieving what I believe is necessary for creating some hope for Aboriginal children; that is, an education. The settlement is a dry camp. Anyone who did go to town, and took two hours to get home again, would be dry by the time he got back. The school is very lucky because the principal is a manual arts teacher. The manual arts room at the school has everything. This is something that young Aboriginal people can relate to, and will help them to go on to further study for apprenticeships in the mining industry. Both Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton have large programs operating in that area. I have also sighted a letter. The Minister for Education and Training is well aware of this issue. I asked a question yesterday, and it is all very well to say that the government will include this in a budget, but by the time it goes to tender etc we might have lost this school teacher.

Today I raised a question about the remote area power system. I have photographs with me that I will table at the end of my spiel, with the permission of the house. At the invitation of an elder I was taken on a tour of the community and I inspected the power station. Much to my horror the fence and safety measures were inadequate. A magnificent solar system had been installed, with batteries and solar panels, but there was no inverter. Guess what: it had been sitting there for two years! I made some more inquiries, because I could not believe what I had seen. The workmanship of the person who installed it was shoddy. There had obviously been no investigation into what had happened. The tank holding the fuel that was running the existing generator was not even bolted down. There was an earth wire but it was not even connected. I have photographs of that. A road runs right past the system that is used for filling the tank. Doors on the power house were attached by only one screw in the hinges. It was incredible. The staff have to rely on this power for the school. Okay, these people live in isolation, but in this day and age that is not good enough.

The funding for this community alone was \$484 433. After a little more digging to find who was responsible, I contacted a community in Port Hedland that was supposed to monitor this equipment after the work on it had been finished, but the people there will not take it over because they know the work is not finished. Another three communities are in exactly the same situation. The sustainable energy system has not been connected. Grass is growing all around it and it is an absolute fire hazard. The Pilbara has had a fantastic wet season this year. The grass has grown well up into the solar panels and of course it is very green at present. However, when it dries out, one lit match could destroy not only the solar panels, but also the whole power system for that

community. Where is there some form of credibility? Why are some government departments not working together?

In answering the question, Hon Kim Chance palmed the matter off to the commonwealth. I refer to a document from the Sustainable Energy Development Office in Western Australia that states that one of the things the office is liable for is overseeing these programs. Yes, this office does receive federal funding, but it is administered by the state. In my view the state is responsible. In this house we have talked about federalism and the feds taking over, but do we need the feds to take over if this state cannot manage its communities in the regional areas? It disappoints me to come from those regional areas and to see this utter waste of equipment worth many thousands of dollars lying on the ground. Those batteries are not cheap and they have been there for two years already. That represents a large slab of their useful life before their use-by date.

I seek leave to table the photographs of a sad case that should be a marvellous case for the communities in those regions. We read in the paper of unfortunate things happening in places like Halls Creek. However, in this case people are trying. I have experienced these children working in the classroom and I have been able to gauge their reaction to the teachers and how successfully that school is working. We need to do better than we are.

I seek leave to table these photographs for the remainder of today's sitting.

Leave granted.

[The photographs were tabled for the information of members.]

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 5.25 pm
