

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY — DEFENCE

657. Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI to the Minister for Defence Issues:

First, I proudly acknowledge the staff and students from Woodvale Secondary College in my electorate who are in the public gallery today.

I refer to concerns of job losses within the Western Australian shipbuilding industry due to the federal Liberal government's failure to give Western Australia its fair share of key defence work. What is the McGowan Labor government doing to fight for more defence work and secure more defence industry jobs?

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

I thank the member for her question. I understand that there was commentary in today's media, in *The West Australian*, with respect to observations made by David Singleton from Austal regarding his concerns over Austal's future in the event that it were not part of the selected consortium for the build of the offshore patrol vessel contract, which will be announced shortly—I hope. I understand also that subsequent to the publication of the newspaper, Mr Singleton appeared in the media—I think he was on one of the radio stations—and has tempered his claim, saying that the reporting did not really reflect his position. He suggested that Austal would not be leaving Western Australia in the event that it did not get the OPV contract and that it has sufficient forward orders to take it into the future for some years. I acknowledge that. I will say that I recognise Mr Singleton as a robust and effective advocate on behalf of Austal and Western Australian industry in the defence sector. He should be commended for that. However, I make the point that regardless of which consortium is chosen for the offshore patrol vessel, it will be a Western Australian consortium partly. There is the Austal proponent and its partnership, but also Forgacs and ASC Shipbuilding have combined with Lürssen and Damen to be the other proponents. So the three proponents are Western Australian regardless. The concern I share with Mr Singleton is the lack of indication of certainty for Western Australian industries. In the event that the OPV is awarded sometime this year—I hope it is in the near future because it is getting to the point where we are getting worried about the time frame—the concern is not so much whether a Western Australian company and Western Australian employees will benefit from the awarding of the contract overall, it is whether 10 vessels will be built in Western Australia as committed to by the federal government, and as committed to me by the Minister for Defence Industry, Hon Christopher Pyne, when I saw him earlier this year.

The concern is now that the longer this goes on and the more protracted this process becomes, the greater the questions and uncertainty around whether a third offshore patrol vessel will be built in South Australia in the event that the frigate construction slips. Even more so, the concern is about whether Western Australia will get the 10 vessels it was promised by the federal government. That concern will become more and more heightened the longer this process is drawn out.

The member asked me what we are doing. We are working collaboratively with the federal government. I do not want to go out there and attack Minister Pyne. I have been reluctant to do that since I met with him after our initial robust conversation through the media. I have refrained from doing that since then; it is some six or seven months now since we met in Canberra. However, I am becoming more concerned, the closer we get to a potential federal election, that a South Australian cabinet minister at the federal level might be reluctant to deliver a visible win for Western Australia.

One of the proposals we made to him—he confirmed this—was that full-cycle docking for Collins-class submarines needs to be moved to Western Australia before they start building ships in South Australia. That is 500 real jobs. We do not magically create 500 skilled people capable of doing full-cycle docking in Western Australia without moving the process across here earlier than it is required to commence. I ask that the federal government get on with making that decision, because that is 500 jobs we could have right now and there is also a construction project associated with building the facility next to ASC in Western Australia, down in Henderson, that would create jobs. Those are things that the federal government could be doing right now.

I will complete my answer by asking a question of the shadow Minister for Defence Issues and the Leader of the Opposition: what are their views with regard to the \$100 million that was promised by the Prime Minister earlier this year, in February? What are their views with regard to getting certainty from the federal government on the offshore patrol vessel contract? What are their views with regard to shifting the Collins-class full-cycle docking to Western Australia?

The SPEAKER: Minister!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr S.K. L'Estrange: I'm happy to answer the question the minister has asked me as shadow Minister for Defence Issues, because as the shadow Minister for Defence Issues, we are not in government but I am happy to govern from this side of the chamber, because the junior minister clearly doesn't know what he's doing!

The SPEAKER: You might think you are very funny, but there are protocols in this Parliament. I call you to order for the first and second time. If you do it again, I will throw you out of the chamber—disrespect for the Chair.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Thanks, Mr Speaker. The reason I asked —

The SPEAKER: Minister! You will finish this.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The reason I ask is that I suspect the member for Churchlands is sitting over there with his fingers crossed, hoping against hope —

Point of Order

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The minister continues to ask me to answer a question that you have just ruled I cannot answer.

The SPEAKER: That is not of point of order, and you are very close to going home. You are disrespecting the Chair and I will not put up with it. Minister, I will sit you down if you do not finish straightaway.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr P. PAPALIA: I feel it is very likely that members opposite are crossing their fingers, hoping against hope that the federal government does not actually help Western Australia. They need to speak up on the state's behalf.