

GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Motion

Resumed from 3 May on the following motion by Hon Norman Moore (Leader of the Opposition) -

That this house expresses its grave concern at the significant deterioration in the governance and administration of the state of Western Australia resulting from a government preoccupied with continued internal division and conflict, manipulated by outside influences and increasingly demonstrating serious signs of dysfunction, and calls on the government to urgently address the issues raised by the Corruption and Crime Commission and refocus its attention on restoring public confidence in the capacity of the government to govern for all Western Australians without fear or favour.

HON KIM CHANCE (Agricultural - Leader of the House) [11.11 am] - without notice: On behalf of Hon Ljiljana Ravlich, I seek leave for the Minister for Local Government to continue her comments on this motion at a later sitting of the house.

Leave granted.

The PRESIDENT: The motion is still before the house. The question is that the motion be agreed to. I give the call to Hon Nigel Hallett.

HON NIGEL HALLETT (South West) [11.12 am]: Mr President.

Hon Ken Travers: Great speech; the best ever!

Hon Simon O'Brien: As far as content and brevity go, it was better than any of yours!

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Nigel Hallett has not yet given his speech. Members can make the comment that Hon Nigel Hallett has given a great speech at the end of his speech.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Thank you, Mr President. I am sure my speech will have a lot more substance and detail than any of the speeches given by Hon Ken Travers.

I fully support Hon Norman Moore's motion. I will consider in my speech how the motion relates to rural and regional Western Australia. The people in rural and regional WA have had enough of this government and its track record of not being able to deliver basic services. When this motion was moved in March, there were calls from members on the other side of the house that the motion was wrong. However, one only has to look at the repeated opinions that have been expressed in *The West Australian* about this government not being able to deliver to know that the motion is right. This government has proved that it "can't do". Small hairline fractures in the government's administration started to appear in 2001, but they were wallpapered over during the term of the Gallop government. The honeymoon has come and gone, and now the government has sunk into a state of decay. The sacking of several ministers has depleted the pool of members from which the government can choose its ministers. The government has become dysfunctional. It has well and truly taken its eye off the ball, and it does not appear to have the ability or intent to refocus any time soon. In general, the government has lost the public's confidence in its capacity to govern for all Western Australians, particularly those in rural and regional areas. The government's track record of treating many regional areas with contempt has raised many questions.

Hon Ken Travers: You've got a tough gig today giving this speech before the Treasurer brings down another great budget, haven't you? Did you draw a short straw in the party room to keep the job?

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I hope the Treasurer brings down a great budget for Western Australia.

Hon Ken Travers: He will!

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: All we have seen is an increase in taxes. Western Australia is the highest taxed state in Australia.

Hon Ken Travers: The government cut taxes last year, the year before that and the year before that.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Is it not incredible? What did the federal government do with its big surplus? It has provided tax relief.

Hon Ken Travers: How has it done that? It steals from WA.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Steals from WA my eye!

When this government first came into office, it had an \$11 billion budget, and its budget could possibly be about \$20 billion this year, yet taxes have been increased each year.

Hon Ken Travers: We reduced taxes last year - look at the budget!

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: What taxes did the government reduce?

The PRESIDENT: Order, members! Hon Ken Travers has already given a speech on this motion. Hon Nigel Hallett should not encourage Hon Ken Travers to give another speech at this stage.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Thank you, Mr President.

Taxes have increased slightly. There has been a 53 per cent increase in stamp duty. Payroll tax, and stamp duty on cars, have also increased. People are having to sell their properties because of the abhorrent land tax that the government will not do anything about.

Hon Ken Travers: Which tax?

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I am talking about land tax. Although it brings in \$300-odd million for the state, people are receiving bills of between \$50 000 and \$100 000. What is the government doing about it? It is doing absolutely nothing. I hope today's budget confronts the issue and does something about it.

Hon Ken Travers: What do you think we should do about it?

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Get rid of it!

Hon Ken Travers: Completely?

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Get rid of it completely; it certainly needs reducing. This government has punished first home buyers in this state and has failed to give them any tax relief on stamp duty. The feds have cut taxes while the state has increased taxes.

In the 2005-06 financial year, the state government received more than \$1.8 billion worth of mining royalties from the Western Australian resource industry, two-thirds of which came from the Pilbara and Kimberley. The revenue that flows from those regions allows the government to enjoy unprecedented budget surpluses that it blatantly and unashamedly allocates, more often than not, to metropolitan-based projects and infrastructure. The government will not tell us the final figure - or as near to it as possible - of the Perth-Mandurah rail. What is the government hiding?

Hon Ken Travers: Do you think Mandurah is part of the metropolitan area?

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: It is that close that it does not matter.

Hon Ken Travers: Is it part of it, or not?

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Officially, no, but it is that close.

Hon Ken Travers: When you were debating the electoral legislation, you argued that it was. You remember that, don't you?

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I will move on from that.

Given the recent budget surpluses, the imbalance between the allocation of resources to the metropolitan and regional areas is disgraceful. Most people acknowledge that cuts have been made in spending in regional areas. The government has not been able to deliver on water. Only a couple of days ago, the government said in this house that police numbers have not decreased. At 30 June 2006, there were 12 430 police officers. Six months later, that figure had decreased to 12 098.

Hon Ken Travers: Are you saying that we've got 12 000 police?

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: As at 30 June 2006, there were 12 430 police officers. As at 31 December 2006, there were 12 098 police officers.

Hon Ken Travers: Can you identify the document that you're quoting from?

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: No.

It is time to upgrade necessary infrastructure to support and develop an economic basis that will ensure that the people who live in regional Western Australia can enjoy the same security and quality of life enjoyed by people in the metropolitan area. We are totally aware that with a record surplus budget on the way - some pundits have estimated that is about \$2.5 billion - excessive taxation will be levied on people and businesses in Western Australia.

An article that appeared in *The West Australian* on 4 April reported that Western Australia is the highest taxed state in the country. This equates to every person paying more than \$3 000 in state taxes. As I have mentioned, those increases have been in stamp duty etc. The government should not be employing more public servants and stashing money in the war chest. There are now 18 000 public servants, which equates to \$2.58 billion in public

sector wages. It all comes back to a government that has not been able to deliver basic infrastructure for regional WA. The Carpenter government is continuing to claim that these surpluses are a result of good economic management. However, one should look at the tax take. The government cannot manage the Western Australian economy, and it cannot govern. It cannot fix the health system and reduce the hospital waiting lists. The minister has said that nothing is wrong with the health system. However, page 3 of *The West Australian* of 3 May states -

Emergency hospitals in meltdown, say doctors.

Dr David Mountain is one of those doctors. The hospitals are at full capacity, yet we have not even reached the winter flu season. Therefore, not many doctors agree with the minister that the hospital system is not in meltdown. The government has not been able to fix the health system. One of its promises to the people of Western Australia was that it would fix it. It is worse. The government cannot put police on the street. It is taking services out of country regions, such as licensing checks. There has been no improvement in the delivery of basic services to the people of rural and regional Western Australia.

Labor members of Parliament in regional areas are aware of the situation. The current member for Central Kimberley-Pilbara, Tom Stephens, is quoted in the *North West Telegraph* of 4 April 2007 as saying that the government faces a huge task in rectifying the situation in these regions that the lack of infrastructure spending in the past has created. He said that the regions had not done as well out of national and state economic growth as had metropolitan areas. He said that it is a major challenge for local government, and that we have to find, particularly in the Pilbara and the north west generally, an income stream commensurate with the needs of these local authorities. There it is. One of the government's own members is arguing against what members opposite are trying to tell me. That is straight from someone who knows the area. He knows what is not being done and what this government is not doing. He has acknowledged that the lack of infrastructure is proof of endemic neglect by past and present governments. This can be said to be true, but now we have a government with the resources to do something about it, but it has not done so. This highlights once again that it is a government that cannot deliver.

There are severe land shortages in towns such as Karratha and Port Hedland, which are bursting at the seams with people wanting to live and work there. Mining companies are being forced to buy hotels and motels to house their workers because of the land and rental accommodation shortage. This, in turn, will have a dramatic effect on tourism come mid-year. Average families who want to work and live in these towns cannot afford to pay the rent, let alone buy a house. However, the government continues to drag its feet with a very slow trickle of land releases. Consequently, with the law of supply and demand, the land commands a very high price. This limited supply of land has led to exorbitant prices, as we all know, and this needs to be addressed now. The median house price in Perth has increased from \$275 000 to \$460 000, which is a 67 per cent increase over the past two years. Once again, in regional areas this is a result of the government failing to make sure that the supply of land keeps up with the demand. The demand does not look like slowing, and the estimated shortfall of residential blocks will be about 60 000 over the next 20 years.

New ports and expanded facilities are needed, with the potential for iron ore exports to grow from 235 million tonnes per annum to a capacity of 595 million tonnes over the next 10 years. Each week, more and more projects are coming on stream, and we are hearing of companies now putting in their own power systems and providing their own water. They cannot wait for the government to do it. Bearing in mind the future development of Western Australia's vital resources sector, I find this very interesting as the resources sector is such a huge revenue generator for the government, and it keeps the big budget surpluses coming in, yet the government cannot reduce the ridiculous and unnecessary amounts of red tape associated with the assessments for approval of mining applications. The recent figures show that there is a backlog of about 9 000 applications, and it is estimated that they will blow out to some 15 000 by December this year.

I am sure that members will be familiar with the report from the Fraser Institute, which is an independent Canadian economic research group, and which ranked Western Australia as the least attractive state for mining investment because of the state government's policies. The Chamber of Minerals and Energy has also said the same. Given the fact that the resources sector underpins the Western Australian economy, one would think that this would have set the alarm bells ringing and that there would have been some swift action to rectify this situation. However, I do not think any of us have seen that. Unfortunately, that is still the case. This state needs an efficient, effective approvals system so that this vital part of the economy can progress. This is another example of this government not being able to deliver. It is a government that "can't do".

That brings me to the issue of public servants. An extra 3 629 public servants were employed last year, bringing the total number to 103 296, which is a 20 per cent increase since this government came to power in 2001. In addition to that, according to a recent report from the Auditor General, almost a third of departmental chief executives are employed in an acting capacity, with no key performance indicators to measure their outcomes to

see whether they are doing their jobs properly. This shows a gross lack of responsibility by this government for the accountability of those at the highest public service levels in this state. It is interesting that today's *The West Australian* states -

Public Sector Standards Commissioner Maxine Murray has drawn timely attention to the insidious politicising of WA's public service. The betrayal of democratic principle and rejection of the precepts of public morality in turning the public service into an instrument of party politics are bad enough.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Paul Llewellyn would be aware that mobile phones should not be switched on in the chamber.

Hon Paul Llewellyn: Absolutely, Mr President. I am astounded that I left it on.

The PRESIDENT: So am I.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: The article continues -

Worse is the effect this is having in the deplorable standard of government that is cynically offered to West Australians. The Government is awash with unprecedented amounts of money generated by the mining boom, but its performance on providing some key services to the community ranges from the barely acceptable to the crisis-ridden.

For example, the health system.

I will deal with electricity infrastructure. Just recently at Easter, the power was off in Denmark for six hours. Denmark and Walpole had a total of 30 blackouts, totalling around 20 hours, over that Easter period. It is the busiest time of the year for those towns. Businesses suffered. They lost thousands of dollars. Cafes and restaurants could not operate, and petrol pumps and the old automatic teller machines would not work. Tourists and residents alike were greatly inconvenienced. That is unacceptable in a state such as Western Australia. Walpole is currently suffering a water and energy crisis, and this government is taking no notice. In both those towns, property developments have stalled because Western Power cannot get its act together and confirm the cost of electrical supplies to these new sites and who is going to pay for them. This is all under the guise of trying to make capital contributions more equitable. It is cost shifting to developers. Supposedly an amount of \$12 million will be spent, but developers must contribute. While all of this is being sorted out at Western Power's leisure, development has come to a grinding halt in some of these areas. We need a quick resolution to the provision of adequate infrastructure, particularly, as I have noted, for electricity and water supplies. This would not occur in the city. Residents, businesses and tourists in these towns are suffering once again because this government cannot provide basic amenities such as power and water. It "can't do". Walpole was carting water for residents during the summer. Its water capacity and sewerage infrastructure need to be increased urgently. The outdated infrastructure of Western Power and the Water Corporation is costing the people of rural and regional Western Australia, and this government has not done anything to rectify the situation.

The government's neglect of rural and regional areas, as outlined in a recent announcement, is to spend \$3.5 billion on Western Australia's electricity network, but there is no specific reference to anything being spent in these areas. Although \$26 million has been earmarked to be spent over the next two years through the rural power improvement program, this is less than one per cent of the \$3.5 billion budget, even though \$60 million is to be spent over three years in areas that suffer poor reliability. Once again, nothing specific has been allocated to the towns of Walpole and Denmark. Members should watch this money being thrown around in marginal seats as the next election moves closer. The areas I have just spoken about are not marginal seats.

Schools in rural and regional Western Australia are another very good example of rapidly deteriorating infrastructure. The plight of the WA College of Agriculture in Harvey is an excellent case in point. It remains neglected, even though a recent report from the Department of Housing and Works estimated that at least \$1 million in repairs and upgrades is required. This college, which is responsible for educating and training our future leaders in the agricultural sector, received a paltry \$290 000 under the Fixing Our Schools program to spend on general maintenance. As I will elaborate a bit later, a large percentage of this grant will have been paid to the Department of Housing and Works in management fees. It is obvious that that amount will not even scratch the surface when we see firsthand what needs to be done. It is outrageous that some metropolitan state schools have received significant funding, while the maintenance and risk management issues surrounding outdated and very inadequate facilities for housing and educating 103 students at the Harvey campus are allowed to continue.

Hon Peter Collier: The raising of the school leaving age has put pressure on those schools.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Yes; Hon Peter Collier has seen firsthand the poor state of the Harvey agriculture college. Students who are studying farm management at that site live in old shearers' quarters with no scheme water. It is an absolute joke! Can members imagine the same situation happening in a metropolitan school?

Such a facility would be closed immediately. In addition, the recreational facilities for the school's 99 boarders are deteriorating badly. When \$5.3 million was recently handed out by the Minister for Sport and Recreation to improve facilities across Western Australia, the Harvey agriculture college received absolutely nothing. Again, I ask whether this would be tolerated in the metropolitan area. I think the answer would be no. Why must those students make do with this substandard facility after school hours and on weekends? In 2003, the Bunbury Education Office recommended in a report to the Department of Education and Training that it sell the Harvey site and consolidate the whole college on the Wokalup site. This was later followed by a committee report recommending this take place over three to four years. That period would have ended in, roughly, 2007. The Carpenter government's own member for Collie-Wellington has also called for this to happen, but his government is not listening to him. How can the people of regional and rural Western Australia have confidence in a government that does not even listen to its own members who acknowledge the serious inequity between metropolitan and rural areas in the allocation of resources within Western Australia. In a recent speech, the Leader of the House said that the government had opened 31 new schools since 2001 and will open three more in 2007.

Hon Simon O'Brien: That would be below the number we opened in government.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: It is a long way behind. I would like to know how many of them are in regional areas.

Hon Kim Chance: Heaps, probably; I don't know.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Only three are opening in 2007, so it cannot be too many. As I briefly mentioned, this government has been ripping out millions of dollars in fees from these rural and regional schools and has been the beneficiary of school grants from the Investing in Our Schools program. These grants cover things such as sporting facilities, air conditioning, assembly areas and playgrounds. When it undertakes to build schools or install facilities, the Department of Housing and Works charges a 17.5 per cent management fee - often it is much more - on rural school projects, while metropolitan schools have been paying 12 per cent in project management fees.

Hon Peter Collier: Dozens of those projects have been cancelled as a result.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: That is dead right. The federal Department of Education, Science and Training believes that the figure at some country schools is as high as 23 per cent. Once again, rural and regional schools are getting a pretty raw deal. *The West Australian* of 4 April 2007 provided some examples of this situation. The Tincurrin Primary School received an \$80 000 grant to build a shaded playground and had to pay \$18 182 in management fees to the Department of Housing and Works - namely, 23 per cent of the grant. The Meckering Primary School was given a \$9 012 grant to build a playground and had to pay the Department of Housing and Works \$2 041 in management fees - once again, 23 per cent. On 12 April, *The West Australian* again reported that out of \$130 000, the Augusta Primary School was forced to pay \$149 000 for a project - \$19 000 more than the grant. It had initially received a quote of \$74 000 from a private contractor, but was told it had to get quotes through the Department of Housing and Works.

Hon Peter Collier: They don't have an option; they must go through housing and works. They cannot go to a private contractor, which more often than not will be half the price. They are paying double the price in management fees, which is ridiculous.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: It was only after management fees were reduced and after many complaints were received from the school that this project went ahead. It is scandalous that these commonwealth grants used to pay for the much-needed facilities in our schools are being taken away by this greedy government, particularly when Catholic and independent schools are able to keep the full amount because neither the Catholic Education Office nor the Association of Independent Schools takes any of the grant.

Hon Peter Collier: Don't forget John Willcock College and the issue Murray Criddle brought up about computers.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: Exactly. As I said before, it is a government that has taken its eye off the ball and is not paying attention to people, particularly those in rural and regional Western Australia. How can this government claim to govern for all Western Australians without fear or favour when it is so utterly compromised by recent events and consumed by internal issues, and the constant elbowing for positions of influence in factions that drive these issues? How can the people of Western Australia have confidence in this government, the real colours and workings of which have been so publicly displayed in recent months?

While talking about public confidence, how can I not mention Labor's revolving door of ministers? One of the best examples is in my electorate of the South West Region. There have been seven ministers responsible for the south west in six years, and seven ministers responsible for local government, a couple of which have been recycled. By all accounts, there will be another change by the end of the year in the local government ministry.

The current Minister for the South West, Hon Mark McGowan, is having a second go at the south west portfolio, for which he has had responsibility again for a few months. Before that, Norm Marlborough, the sixth minister, was responsible for the south west. I do not think Minister McGowan has a great passion for the south west. In his initial role as the minister, he did not show any passion and I cannot see him bringing any passion back into the region now. He holds contempt for this wonderful part of Western Australia. That was evident when he responded to concerns about where the Busselton District Hospital is to be relocated when he referred to the people who complained as a bunch of disaffected old libs, which shows how caring a minister he is. That is just one example of Labor's revolving door of ministers who have held portfolios for a very short period before some government problem or revelation has forced them to be moved to another portfolio, and, in some cases, to be removed altogether.

With such examples, it is easy to see the significant deterioration in the governance and administration of the state of Western Australia, and how public confidence in this Carpenter government has been seriously eroded. It will be a very difficult task indeed to restore the Western Australian public's faith in this government. It remains to be seen whether the government will win back the public's confidence and prove that it can govern without fear or favour. I believe this government is haemorrhaging; it is dysfunctional and, as I said earlier today; it is a government that "can't do".

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral) [11.39 am]: I support this motion, which can be broken down into three dot points: the preoccupation of this government with internal division and conflict, the manipulation by outside influences and increasing signs of serious dysfunction.

It is interesting what we have heard and read from tapes and transcripts. It disturbs me that businesses in the state have to use lobbyists of the likes of Brian Burke to get decisions to be made by ministers. I find it quite amazing. Within my region is Broome airport. There was a need to get through to the minister because people were not getting the answers they needed. I inspected the airport with the owners. Their concern at the time was that they were under pressure to accommodate a new aircraft - a DASH 8 - which was to be based there by the federal government for customs purposes and surveillance. Surveillance is very important in looking for Indonesian fishermen, etc and apprehending them before they create any biosecurity problems for the fishing and pearling industries or, even worse, for people in Western Australia.

There was already a suitable hangar at the airport but it needed moving so that the additional customs aircraft could be housed. The airport applied to move the hangar to the other side of the airport. Interestingly enough, when an application was made to the local council, it was advised that it had been given a direction from "above" that it was not to accept any other infrastructure at the airport because the airport was going to be moved. Since this state government has been in office, the airport owners have been advised that the airport will not be moved, and \$16 million has been spent on it. The owners of the airport do not believe that it needs to be moved. However, they were desperate to move the hangar to accommodate the new aircraft, which include helicopters that will service the Browse Basin. In total frustration, the owners looked to deal with the problem. It disturbs me, as a member of this house and a member of Parliament, of the course a private business has to go through to find out what is going on. Anyone should be able to make an appointment with a minister, front him straight on and get an answer rather than having to use a lobbyist to get results.

This has come to light in an article in today's *The West Australian*, which I read this morning. It concerns the member for Central Kimberley-Pilbara, Tom Stephens, MLA. He is an excellent member, who has been around for some time, and who was a member of this house. He was also a minister in the Gallop government. He is a man of great experience.

Hon Simon O'Brien: He was also a minister briefly in the Lawrence government.

Hon KEN BASTON: Thank you, Hon Simon O'Brien. It was remiss of me to not include that. Tom Stephens is accusing the Minister for Health of not solving the problems of health in the state. His comments are in the press today for everyone to read. He accuses the government of what this motion is talking about. Members within the ranks of the government see what is happening. No wonder a motion such as this is before the house. Issues reiterating this have come to light in my region over the past year. I have spoken on, and asked questions about, the Carnarvon courthouse and police station. There are other issues, which I will allude to in a minute, concerning Coral Bay.

For the benefit of the house I will read a letter that was in the *Northern Guardian* on 4 April. It was an open letter to the member for North West Coastal. It states -

Dear Mr Riebeling,

It is with respect and in our capacity as former Shire Presidents of the Shire of Carnarvon that we write seeking your support.

We have read the press release from Premier Carpenter regarding the Justice Precinct Development for Carnarvon, and we can only presume that he has not been advised of the strong community opposition to the Court House and Police Complex remaining on its present site.

We are therefore requesting that you, in your role as our Member of the Legislative Assembly, and as an influential Member of the Government, inform the Honourable Premier and the Minister of Police of our community's overwhelming support for Premier Gallop's promise to relocate these premises.

It is our view, and the view of the overwhelming majority (92%) of respondents to a community survey, the Gascoyne Development Commission Board's view, and the Shire Council's unanimous view that the Court House and Police Station must be moved out of the present town block to enable us to plan for a vibrant central business district through Enquiry by Design.

The Premier has been poorly advised, his decision is unacceptable, and we request that you facilitate a meeting with us, or a public meeting for him in Carnarvon as soon as possible to hear the community's views.

Yours faithfully,

. . .

The letter is signed by three past shire presidents. The first is Wallace J. Dale, JP, shire president from 1984 to 1990 and a freeman of the town of Carnarvon. He is a very respected gentleman. The second is Thomas A. Day, shire president from 1990 to 1996, and a freeman of the town of Carnarvon. He was a highly respected shire president and member of the community of Carnarvon. The third is Delys A. Cole - known as Delys Mills until she recently remarried - who was a shire president from 1996 to 2003. She is also a life member of the Western Australian Local Government Association. Those three people are held in high regard by all members of the community of the shire. When they publicly put into print their disappointment at not being listened to, we should realise the level of dysfunction that is occurring.

I also have a copy of the letter that the member for North West Coastal wrote in reply. The letterhead actually refers to the member for Burrup. That is probably why things are not getting done in the town. He probably does not realise that the electorate has changed. The electorate of North West Coastal takes in Carnarvon. The letter was sent to the three past shire presidents who signed the open letter. I will read parts of the letter because he includes a brag list -

Dear Mr Dale

Re: Carnarvon Justice Complex Redevelopment

In response to your open letter to me printed in the Northern Guardian on the 4th of April, I wish to advise that I have no record of receipt of your original letter. I would appreciate it if you would forward a copy of the original letter to my Carnarvon office . . . Notwithstanding that, I would like to comment on the assertions contained in your letter as follows.

Within the current commitment to redevelop the complex there is not a requirement for the replacement complex to be built on the same footprint. The replacement complex will be placed along Camel Lane allowing the existing complex to continue to service Carnarvon until the new complex is complete at which point it would be demolished.

Hon Vince Catania was at a public meeting and he put out a vote, and he had, as was mentioned in the previous letter -

Hon Vincent Catania: It was a survey.

Hon KEN BASTON: A survey? I thank the member. The survey overwhelmingly indicated support for a move to a site that had been purchased by the local government. Nothing upsets local people more than a member visiting a town and saying, "This is what you've got to have." If we will have regionalisation, there should be some form of consideration for those people. I believe that consultation without listening is totally and utterly wrong. The letter continues -

I would also point out that all significant tourism focused towns in WA have their police and justice complexes located in a significant location within the town. Examples of this include Broome, Albany and Geraldton.

Geraldton's police complex was located out of town at one stage, and the town built around it and extended. Carnarvon would like to do something very similar. Carnarvon is looking ahead and planning. I can remember when the new powerhouse was built in Carnarvon, everyone said it was too far out of town. It now has to be

moved again because it has come to be near the middle of town. I do not think examples can be drawn from older towns like that. I do not think that the police station in Broome is located in the centre of town. In fact, where is the centre of Broome? I cannot comment on Albany because I have not been there.

I must also point out the \$40 million development that the member has alluded to. Yes, of course, any town would very gladly receive the assistance of having money pour in, and, of course, \$40 million is a large amount of capital to be invested in a town. However, if it is not spent wisely and does not take into account planning for the future development of the town, it is not actually a wise investment. The letter continues -

The Enquiry by Design workshop had a wide range of participants and all had the opportunity to air their views on this and the other proposals.

The information I have received is that, yes, they aired their views, but they are still not being listened to. I find that disappointing.

Hon Vincent Catania: The Enquiry by Design has not gone to public comment yet; we are still waiting for the results.

Hon KEN BASTON: I think we know the results.

Hon Vincent Catania: We'll have to wait and see.

Hon KEN BASTON: I am a cynic; I have been around for a while. The letter continues -

I am also committed to the redevelopment of the entire wharf area, the yacht club, the completion of the flood mitigation program and the new power station.

Judging from the answers I have received to questions I asked in this house with regard to the new power station, it has fallen off the agenda. The *Carnarvon Power Project* newsletter number 5 of December 2005, released by Western Power, reads -

This newsletter is to inform you of the Carnarvon Power Project. The main objective of this project is to obtain the best value, technically acceptable project package for a reliable supply of electricity to Carnarvon by replacing Western Power's existing power station in the town.

The newsletter continues -

... four companies that submitted proposals to Western Power in April 2005.

The bids were assessed against a wide range of criteria including price, reliability, community benefits, risk and the ability to undertake and operate the project (both from a financial and technical perspective).

The newsletter goes on to say that enGen was the successful bidder, and that it was a reliable company that already ran projects in mid-west towns and Leonora in the goldfields. The newsletter continues -

Currently, *enGen* is constructing new power stations in five more remote towns in the Goldfields, Gascoyne and Pilbara regions of the state to supply Western Power.

The newsletter even went on to say what form the power would take. Carnarvon enjoys a natural gas pipeline. Many towns would - I should not say "kill" - dearly love to have that supply of natural gas delivered right to its doorstep. On 22 March, I asked the following question without notice of the Leader of the House representing the Minister for Energy -

- (1) Was construction of the new Carnarvon power station commenced in October 2006 as indicated in the December 2005 Power Project newsletter, and if not, why not?
- (2) What is the proposed completion date for the new Carnarvon power station?

I received the answers -

- (1) No.

...

Horizon Power is currently reviewing the most appropriate and cost-effective method of maintaining long-term power supplies in Carnarvon with a view to determining the definitive course of action in mid-2007.

The budget is being delivered today and I look forward to that because I am sure, as Hon Ken Travers said earlier, it will be a hard day when so much is expected from the budget this afternoon. I am sure that the power station will probably be covered by the budget.

I was in Broome the other day when the local power company gave a presentation. The coalition government started the project I refer to; it is a good initiative. A small liquefied natural gas plant is to be established at the Maitland industrial estate near Karratha. This will allow liquefied natural gas to be carted from Dampier and Karratha through to Broome and the Kimberley to provide power. This will be the first LNG supply to be trucked and made available to what can be referred to as small users in Western Australia. Another plant is to be constructed by Kleenheat Gas at Kwinana. Gas from the Maitland plant will be trucked by road train; a road train will arrive in Broome every 18 hours with LNG on board. How privileged is Carnarvon to have a gas pipeline going straight into the town? Nevertheless, there is a delay in deciding what type of power plant is to be installed, just because of the change from Western Power to Horizon Power. That does not mean that the people of Carnarvon do not still need a reliable source of power. I find this delay quite abhorrent. I can only imagine that the real cause of the delay is that Horizon Power is trying to cut some costs. The gas power supplied to Exmouth is, of course, coming out of a pipeline, but they have to cart it in as well. That is CNG, which is actually compressed natural gas, rather than LNG. I guess that when the LNG plant is developed at the Maitland estate, they will perhaps swap to LNG and cart it in directly as well. That is one of the power issues that has been pushed aside. It is quite amazing that that electorate has been sidelined.

The courthouse and police station are very important. Carnarvon wanted it to be situated opposite the Aboriginal Heritage and Cultural Centre. It was formerly known as the Piyarli Yardi Aboriginal Heritage and Cultural Centre, but I believe it is now known by a new name. The minister could certainly interject and tell me the new name. I think it is the cultural centre. A committee has been set up to oversee a \$4.7 million project, and I believe it will now be some two years before it is fully functional. The preferred site was to fit in with that, so that it would be at the main entrance to the town. I think the town of Carnarvon would have been very proud to have a new courthouse and police station across the road from the cultural centre, at the main entrance to the town.

Another issue has developed, and, once again, it concerns the Shires of Carnarvon and Exmouth. It certainly concerns the Shire of Carnarvon, because it falls within that shire. The shire pleaded with the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure not to build the boat ramp approximately one kilometre south of Coral Bay. On 7 April I happened to make a trip through the north, as one does, to revise and to look at what is happening. I had heard so much about this boat ramp that I thought I would go and have a look at it for myself. I must admit, given all that has happened in Coral Bay, with all the protection concerns, the "Save Ningaloo Reef" campaign and the hoo-ha against the building of the proposed resort at Mauds Landing, I was absolutely amazed to see what was actually happening there. I was amazed that the government could sign off on pushing rubble into the ocean in a marine park. I met with several of the people there and many of them said that they were wrong about the proposed resort at Mauds Landing; it should have been built. These are residents who have lived there for some time, and for them to reach this stage is significant, bearing in mind how strong their views were against the Mauds Landing project.

The intrusion into the water is to be 100 to 150 metres long and will have a two-lane launching ramp. It had to be built out of rubble and, unbelievably, that rubble was extracted from the local rubbish tip. The Carnarvon shire was against this project and had told the minister exactly that, and that the chosen location was not where the launching ramp should go. The council was obviously approached with a request to take the rock out of the local rubbish tip. Of course, this would leave a nice big hole for the Shire of Carnarvon to put in more rubbish. That would have been fantastic, and I can understand the shire supporting it. However, the contractor doing the job actually dug up buried rubbish to dig the rock from underneath. There was no screening or anything else. I stood there and witnessed the dumping of rubbish and the extraction of rock occurring at the same time. By this time, the Department of Environment and Conservation had announced that it had halted the dumping of the rock into the ocean. That had been the case for three days by the time I got there. The problem was that rubbish was mixed in with the rock. Many photographs were taken showing rubbish floating in the water, and these photographs are readily available. The local residents of Coral Bay went out and scooped up the rubbish with scoop nets. I was quite disgusted, and I said so on the *Stateline* program that night. By coincidence, the program was being filmed on the day that I was there, so I did an interview.

The *Northern Guardian* of 21 February published an article headed "Paradise Lost". A picture accompanying the article shows all the people there with their thumbs down, showing their feelings about the positioning of the boat ramp. The article reads -

Coral Bay residents turned out in force last Sunday to protest against the new \$7m boat launching facility being built off Paradise Beach, north of Monck Head.

Group spokesman Brent Baker said that the Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) had ignored community concerns about the site, the scale and structure of the project.

Mr Baker, a visitor to Coral Bay for 31 years, said he campaigned against the Maud's Landing resort and marina development in 2002 on environmental grounds.

He was one of the gentlemen who said to me that he had made a mistake in opposing that development. The article continues -

“However, like most of us, I would rather have Maud's Landing than this monstrosity at Paradise Beach,” he said. “The environmental impacts here far outweigh any Maud's might have had.”

Planning Minister Alannah MacTiernan said she spent an enormous amount of time on Coral Bay.

“We have spent six years paying heed to the concerns,” she said. “Having exhausted all options, it is time to make a decision,” she said.

Shire of Carnarvon President Dudley Maslen said the Shire withdrew from consultation with DPI because the locals on the Shire were not in favour of the site.

“This goes back to the Maud's Landing fiasco,” Mr Maslen said. “The government couldn't ignore those protestors, so now we've got all this development going in on top of Coral Bay.

The 5000m² recreational boating facility is being built 1.5km south of Bills Bay within sensitive coral areas on the Ningaloo reef.

Mr Baker said bowser fuel spills would head north with the current straight through the coral.

“At Maud's Landing it would dissipate into an open body of water.”

In fact, if the Mauds Landing development had actually been built, filling the fuel tanks would have been done inside the boat harbour, and if a spill occurred, the entrance to the harbour could have been blocked to contain the spill and deal with it. This would have contributed to the security of the environment for the future in such a magnificently beautiful area. The article continues -

He said an alternative had to be found to the current practice of launching boats straight off the beach at Bills Bay.

“But we are getting our launch facility built here, rather than at the more practical site further north near Maud's Landing, because Maud's Landing is a political hot potato.”

“The new facility will be located closer to the south passage through the reef, the treacherous Yolabia Passage.

“This will tempt boaters to navigate a notoriously dangerous area of water to get past the reef,” he said.

Cardabia Passage to the north is a safe, deep water passage.

Mr Maslen said the site presented a hazard to boaters.

“It is an unforgiving peice of coast,” he said. “Why take boaters out of Bills Bay and put them in a more dangerous position?”

Coral Bay Adventures General Manager Doug Hunt came to Coral Bay in 1967 and has taken tourists to view coral and swim with manta rays and whale sharks for 14 years.

He said a boat launching facility north of Bills Bay made more sense.

“Deeper draft vessels will be unable to access the facility on a regular basis due to the shallow water and corals,” he said.

“We will still have to ferry passengers out to our boat in dinghies.”

Mr Hunt said he also had concerns about the additional number of boats going into such a small area.

Coral Bay PhD student Frazer McGregor has lived in Coral Bay for six years

He said he was concerned about the turbid plume that would be generated during construction.

“Coral was killed off here in 1989 and 2002 by an anoxic event,” he said. “It's just coming back, and they're going to put tonnes of dirt into the water.”

He said he would independently monitor the coral throughout the construction process.

Ms MacTiernan said none of the solutions were without their problems.

“We can't make North Bills Bay environmentally acceptable,” she said. “At one level I would have preferred to see the facility at North Bills Bay, and it would have been much easier to build there.

“The EPA looked at both sites, and said North Bills Bay was unequivocally out of the question.”

Ms MacTiernan said the Government had made a commitment to the people about Maud's Landing. That commitment was to not go ahead, even though it may affect the environment in the future. The article continues -

“The chances of getting anything at Maud's Landing are very limited,” she said.

“Something has to be done to take the pressure off the Coral Bay beach, and resolve the conflict there between people and boating.

“We have got to do something to make Coral Bay a better place and make it work, it's a fabulous place,” she said. “There is only one option left and we are going to get on with it.

“Once this is built, people will use it.”

Mr Baker said DPI agreed to a proposal by the Coral Bay Progress Association that the launching island would be linked to the shore by a piled jetty.

DPI recently told residents their preferred piled structure would be built at Stage Two, when funds become available. Stage One would be a rubble causeway.

“Unless we can stop it, dirt will be going into the water on March 7,” Mr Baker said.

The temporary causeway is made of tonnes and tonnes of rock. I cannot see anyone digging it up later to put pylons in. The Coral Bay boating facility concept design sketch plan has the audacity to show this as a temporary causeway. I find that quite amazing. It is a two-lane causeway, I might add, and everyone will know how much would be needed on either side as a buffer to stop the ocean from washing away the road. It will also be of some significant height. I do not see anything temporary about that.

When I was in Carnarvon, I saw a fellow filming the boats launching in Carnarvon, and how long they took. He had worked out, on the basis of the number of boats that would be using the facility in Coral Bay and the time it took to launch each boat, that there would probably be five hours between the first boat and the last boat going out. I am not sure whether that is correct because I do not know the figures on how many boats are launched, but he was adamant that this was the case. I am sure he will be notifying the appropriate people about that.

I was also interested to note what I think is called a screen. It is a floating fence to stop any rubbish floating away from the area being worked on. That was actually broken -

Hon Vincent Catania: I was there two weeks ago, and it has now been repaired.

Hon KEN BASTON: That is very good. The power of the press is a marvellous thing! I am pleased to hear that. I hope they did not make Hon Vince Catania wear a scuba tank and go down and fix it!

Another issue that affects regional areas is taxi services. Taxi services in the metropolitan area have been in the spotlight for quite some time. Recently, the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure approved extra funding for metropolitan taxi drivers who drive at night. However, that funding was not extended to country taxi drivers. The taxi drivers in Karratha, Port Hedland and Broome are pretty upset about that. It is difficult enough to get people to drive taxis, but to not give regional taxi drivers the same funding as is given to metropolitan taxi drivers is an injustice.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.