

ROE HIGHWAY STAGE 8 — SAVE BEELIAR WETLANDS RALLY

1093. Hon LYNN MacLAREN to the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the minister's comments on the Channel Nine news report of 31 October on the save Beelias wetlands rally, which attracted more than 1 000 people.

- (1) Does the government believe that "most of the community" support spending over half a billion dollars on a five-kilometre stretch of road?
- (2) Can the minister confirm that in the video footage from February 2001 he said —

I've got to tell you I have difficulty reconciling having a six-lane superhighway coming through here with the environmental situation that we've got here.
- (3) Can the minister describe precisely what he was having difficulty reconciling?
- (4) Did the minister state, "The comment that I made back in 2001 was in response to an Armageddon scenario that had been advanced by an opponent"?
- (5) What was the Armageddon scenario to which he referred?
- (6) How does that scenario differ from the Armageddon scenario the minister is now proposing?

The PRESIDENT: Perhaps the member who asked that question may like to reacquaint herself with the standing order relating to questions.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN replied:

I thank the honourable member for her question.

Mr President, I can understand your trepidation as you feel she might be inviting me to comment at great length in response to a question that canvasses so many things. I will be quite brief in dealing with this.

- (1)-(6) Let me advise the honourable member and the house that there is strong community support for this important infrastructure project. The overwhelming feedback that I receive from the community is that people in the south metropolitan area want to see this road extension happen. Members will not see supporters out there protesting for it because they feel that their vote for a Liberal-National government was enough to see it move forward—and they are right; we are going to move it forward. I might point out, too, that there were large-scale protests in the time of the previous government—far larger than anything we are seeing now—protesting about what the former Labor government was doing. However, this question is about us, not them, so I will leave my observations about the former Labor government for a moment.

I would also suggest to the member, with the greatest possible respect, that she should exercise some caution in coming here and simply regurgitating some of the mistruths that are being peddled by others in this matter. On the two comments that she refers to me making, one most recently to say that I made some comment back in 2001 about some Armageddon scenario that was proposed by an opponent, the opponent was a bloke called Joe Branco, who lives near North Lake and does not appreciate the prospect of a new road being in the middle distance of his view.

Hon Sue Ellery: He also cares about the environment.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Of course, yes, he cares about the environment! As we all do. At this rally, in January 2001, I think, Mr Branco got up and told people that they were going to see a wall of concrete 110 metres wide advancing across this wetland system killing every living thing in its path! That was the Armageddon scenario that was advanced in 2001 and that I referred to in my recent comment on Channel Nine.

There was no Roe 8 in prospect in 2001. There was not even a Roe 7, 6, 5 or 4; they had not been built yet. There was nothing in the 10-year plans. There was no Fremantle eastern bypass, Roe 8 or anything like that. I know, because I checked that when I knew this rally was on and I was asked to go down to it. I was a bit unsure what this protest was about, but I thought I had better find out so I went down there. In answer to a question that was put to me about what was in prospect, I was not able to elucidate, because there was nothing in the works program at the time. Therefore, I did not know what all those people were protesting about, but it seemed a good thing on the eve of the 2001 election, presumably, in some of their minds. There were the Jim Scotts and all those sorts of people down there.

I think I can be forgiven for saying—this is the other quote the member referred to—something along the lines that I had difficulty. Sure, I have difficulty reconciling some six-lane superhighway coming through this area

from an environmental perspective. That is the clip that is being used by opponents of Roe 8. But what the member may not know is that they have edited it very carefully. Has Hon Lynn MacLaren seen the unedited version? She might want to, because she will see what they have cut off at the end of it. The bit they cut off the end was me saying, "At this stage, I will keep an open mind on it." I was saying that people had raised concerns and that it was a bit hard to reconcile what was said to be proposed there with the environment we have, but I would keep an open mind on it. That is what I said! Not the disingenuously clipped item that is being put about on the internet and in other places.

Let me conclude by reassuring Hon Lynn MacLaren, because she is not a mindless protester; she is not. She is not some silly person who is against progress for the sake of being against progress! I will not hear it said that she is anything of the sort—nor any of her colleagues! I will not hear it said. I know that she will take it on board when I reassure her that this government has given no remit to the South Metro Connect project team to build a road through a lake or part of a lake. No remit is being given to destroy a wetland or to destroy any fauna, currently endangered or not. I repeat what I have said before. Hon Lynn MacLaren may not believe it, but I think that we can end up with a better environmental situation in that locality than what we have currently, and I know I will enjoy her support in getting there.