

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Motion

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [10.18 am] — without notice: I move —

That this Council condemns the Barnett government for ignoring its own election commitment to “restore integrity” and “respect fair, open and accountable Government”—for example, its refusal to answer parliamentary questions.

I want to begin by referring to the promise that the Liberal Party made to the people of Western Australia in the 2008 election campaign in the document titled “Government Accountability and Public Sector Management” issued by the Liberal Party. Under the heading “Government Accountability”, the document states —

The Liberal Party will move to restore integrity and will respect fair, open and accountable Government.

However, unfortunately, we find that while the government promised the people of Western Australia a high standard, it has failed miserably to meet that standard. As the three and a half years of this government have rolled along, it has got more and more arrogant and more and more contemptuous of the Parliament and of general standards of accountability and transparency.

Earlier this week the opposition asked two parliamentary questions. I will quote from the uncorrected *Hansard*. The first of those questions asked by me reads —

I refer to the government’s decision to approve the Retail Trading Hours Amendment Bill 2012.

- (1) On what date did cabinet make the decision to approve this bill?
- (2) Which ministers, if any, did not take part in this decision and why?

The second question on that same day was asked by Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm, and it states —

- (1) Did the government’s planning framework “directions2031 and beyond: metropolitan planning beyond the horizon” go before cabinet for approval; and if so —
 - (a) on what date did cabinet make the decision to approve the framework; and
 - (b) which ministers, if any, did not take part in this decision and why?
- (2) Did the government’s activity centres policy, which implements elements of “directions2031 and beyond”, go before cabinet for approval; and, if so —
 - (a) on what date did cabinet make the decision to approve the policy; and
 - (b) which ministers, if any, did not take part in this decision and why?

A third question was asked on the same day by Hon Ed Dermer, and it was to the Leader of the House representing the Premier. It states —

Some notice has been given of the question. I refer to the July reconstitution of the ministry.

- (1) Were any term-of-government employees offered, or did any of these employees request, redundancies as a result of the reconstitution of the ministry?
- (2) How many redundancies were offered, how many redundancies were requested, and how many redundancies were granted?
- (3) What are the names, levels and positions of all the term-of-government employees who received redundancies?
- (4) What is the total current cost of redundancy payments paid to term-of-government employees as a result of the reconstitution of the ministry?

The answer to the first two questions about the date on which the decision was made and which ministers, if any, did not take part in the decision was delivered in a kind of smug, “you should know better” way. The answer to the first question was —

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1)–(2) As the member would be aware, it is against convention to disclose information relating to the deliberations of cabinet. That has been the situation for as long as I can remember.

The answer to the second question, which was asked by Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm, states —

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- (1)–(2) As the member would be aware, it is against convention to disclose information relating to the deliberations of cabinet.

Part (3) of the question asked by Hon Ed Dermer asked for the names, levels and positions of all the term-of-government employees who received redundancies, and the answer to that part of the question was —

- (3) It is not appropriate to name the employees involved.

I want to refer to the ministerial code. This is the version of the ministerial code published in September 2008 under the insignia of the government of Western Australia, and it is described as the “Ministerial Code of Conduct”. That puts in place the provisions that ministers are bound to follow to ensure that the public can be granted a degree of confidence in how ministers will conduct themselves. The critical parts, for example, go to things such as conflicts of interest. Paragraph 5, “Conflicts of Interest”, on page 2 of the Ministerial Code of Conduct, states —

Public duties must be carried out objectively and without consideration of personal or financial gain. Circumstances which could give rise to a serious conflict of interest are not necessarily restricted to those where an immediate advantage will be gained. They may instead take the form of a promise of future benefit, such as a promise of post-parliamentary employment. Any conflict between a Minister’s private interest and their public duty which arises must be resolved promptly in favour of the public interest. The same is as true for a perceived conflict of interest as an actual conflict.

The document also provides in its introduction a kind of general statement about the importance of the highest standards of probity, accountability, honesty, integrity and diligence in the exercise of the public duties and functions of a minister of the Crown, and it refers to the conformity with the Westminster principles of accountability and collective and individual responsibility. On page 1 of that document it makes the following point —

A Minister’s responsibility to act as a trustee of the public interest should always be paramount in the performance of their functions.

The Westminster system requires that Ministers are answerable to Parliament, and through Parliament to the people.

Protections are in place in that ministerial code to ensure that when cabinet is making decisions, if there is any real or perceived conflict of interest that might go to personal financial interest or other interest, those things are declared and, when it is appropriate, a person is excluded from the decision making that occurs within cabinet on that matter to ensure that personal interests, be they financial or otherwise, do not influence, and are not seen to influence—that is just as important as not influencing—important decisions made by government. It is a two-pronged protection. The first one is that if there is an interest, or a perceived interest, the person must declare that. Paragraph 8, on page 4 of the ministerial code, sets out that once the declaration has been made —

Ministers shall advise the Premier in Cabinet should they find themselves in a situation of conflict of interest, or where there is a potential for conflict, in respect to any item before Cabinet. In case of doubt, the final determination as to whether there is a conflict (or a potential conflict) will be made by the Premier. Where it is determined that there is a conflict of interest or potential conflict, the Minister shall withdraw from the Cabinet room while the relevant item is under discussion.

There is the declaration, and then there is withdrawing from the cabinet room while the decision is made. That is the first protection. Equally important as that protection is transparency; that is, a person is seen to ensure that there is no conflict of interest, real or perceived.

The first two questions the opposition asked, which I referred to earlier in my comments, were about the date on which a cabinet decision was made and whether any ministers excluded themselves. The question did not ask about the deliberations that occurred within the cabinet discussion once any issue, if there was one, of real or perceived conflict of interest had been determined. It did not ask about the deliberations of cabinet; it asked: who, if anybody, excluded themselves? The second prong of the protection, that avoiding conflict of interest be seen to be achieved, is just as important as actually identifying the interest, declaring it and removing oneself from the decision making. In fact, it is meaningless to do the first if the person does not provide transparency when asked about whether they did it; it is absolutely meaningless. If the person does not provide transparency when asked, they might as well not do the first one because they are not demonstrating that they have met that high test of ensuring that the public interest is always paramount. If they do not demonstrate they have done it, there is no point in doing it. In fact, it is meaningless to have a requirement for a person to declare and exclude themselves if they then hide the fact that they have; it is absolutely meaningless.

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 16 August 2012]

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Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Norman Moore; Hon Linda Savage; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Kate Doust; Hon Peter Collier

The questions we asked were not about disclosing the deliberations that went on once any interest had been identified and once anyone may or may not have removed themselves from the meeting. The question asked for the date of a decision. It asked which ministers excluded themselves; that is, who was not part of the deliberations. If there is no capacity for transparency about key accountability measures, the measure is meaningless.

On 23 August 2005, Hon Simon O'Brien asked a question of the Leader of the House, Hon Kim Chance. It is question 499, headed "Dampier to Bunbury Pipeline", and states —

I refer to the government's decision to financially contribute to the expansion of the Dampier to Bunbury pipeline, which is now under new ownership.

- (1) On what date did the cabinet make the original decision to contribute financially to the pipeline expansion?
- (2) Was it known by cabinet at this stage that Macquarie Bank, Alcoa and Alinta were potential bidders for the pipeline?

Part (3) is the critical part —

- (3) Which ministers, if any, did not take part in this decision and why?
- (4) On what date was the cabinet first advised that Macquarie Bank, Alinta and Alcoa were potential bidders for the pipeline?
- (5) Did the cabinet make a subsequent decision to finally sign off on the deal to contribute to the pipeline expansion when it was known who the successful bidders were; and, if so, on what date did this happen?
- (6) Which ministers, if any, did not take part in this decision and why?

The Leader of the Government, Hon Kim Chance, answered and gave the date the decision was made. Hon Simon O'Brien asked, "Was it known by cabinet?" The answer was yes. Then, "Which ministers, if any, did not take part in this decision and why?" The answer to that was, "Hon Clive Brown, who was on leave." In answer to part (4) of the question, "On what date was the cabinet first advised", the date is given, "5 August 2004." The last question asked was, "Which ministers, if any, did not take part in this decision and why?" The answer given was, "The Premier, who was overseas at the time."

What government members put to us during the interjections that followed the questions we asked earlier in the week was that not providing the date of a cabinet decision and the names of any ministers who may have excluded themselves from that decision was part of the longstanding convention—as long as the Leader of the House could remember—about not disclosing what went on in cabinet. That may be a convention of this government; it is not a convention of this Parliament or of the Labor Party, because we answered those questions when they were asked of us. Some of the answers that we provided went on to have devastating consequences for some of the ministers—for example, Hon Bob Kucera. Hon Simon O'Brien question's ended up in a minister losing his position. Whether members think that was fair or not for Hon Bob Kucera, they are important matters of probity, transparency and accountability. The Westminster system was followed to its limit in that matter, because ultimately the buck rested with the minister, and the minister lost his position as a result.

Question after question in this place that members ask ministers, who are bound by that ministerial code, refer them to websites, including as recently as yesterday, even though the President has made his feelings known about that to members. The other trend is not to provide information about ministerial staff, as per the third question that we asked earlier this week, on the grounds that it is inappropriate to name them because it breaches their privacy. These are people on the public payroll who are working in the offices of ministers of the Crown. Those matters are a matter of public interest. Ministerial staff are on the public payroll. Why might these questions be important? At least one minister's office—for example, Hon Peter Collier—has had a turnover of something like 40 staff during the time he has been a minister. That is an important matter of public interest and we ought to be able to ask questions about that. Whichever business people are in, if they had a team as small as the teams in ministerial offices, and they had a turnover of 40 staff, somebody would be asking questions. If they were governed by a board of directors, they would be asked what was going on. Why is there such a high turnover in an office that has normally 12 or 15 staff, and perhaps a little higher in some circumstances?

When we ask pertinent information about the separation payments, we are told we should put in a freedom of information request. Yet, when we FOI it and a number of FOIs go into the system, what does the Premier do? The Premier says, "You're clogging up the FOI system. Stop asking so many FOIs!" The FOI process is another important part of accountability and of transparency. I do not think it is appropriate for the government of the

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Norman Moore; Hon Linda Savage; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Kate
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day not to answer questions to the Parliament about the employment and names of people employed on term-of-government employment arrangements. Those are important public interest matters. I do not think it is appropriate to say, "We're not going to tell the Parliament who those people are. You need to go and use the freedom of information process." I do not think that is appropriate. But then to say, once we use the freedom of information process, we are clogging up the freedom of information process and to stop doing it is just ridiculous. If that is not arrogance in the extreme, I do not know what is.

The election commitment made by this government was to raise standards. I want to turn to another matter that I asked a question about on Tuesday; that is, the Minister for Education, a senior minister in this government, making comments about this country's first woman Prime Minister and using terminology like "cane toad" and "peeing on every post". The point has been made in the media by a journalist that the interesting thing is that not only is a senior minister making those sorts of comments about a woman in leadership, but also that it is the Minister for Education using that kind of terminology. Although government members may shake their heads and say that he did not do it in a sexist way and it had nothing to do with her gender —

Hon Peter Collier: It wasn't; it's true.

Hon SUE ELLERY: The minister may well claim that, but the feedback I have had to my electorate office as the opposition shadow on women's interests is that it is an inappropriate way to speak about women. I asked the question —

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Do you know what the minister needs to do? The minister needs to go and read the research I referred to in that question! The reason I asked the Minister for Women's Interests a question, not the Minister for Education, was because the Minister for Women's Interests has responsibility for the Office of Women's Interests and one of its key areas of work is a policy on women in leadership. It has very recently published research on that material—in the last 12 months. That research looks at a couple of things. It looks at how women in leadership positions are perceived and at the culture that makes it difficult for women to either achieve leadership positions and/or for women to make the decision that they want to pursue a leadership position. It looks at the cultural mores that inhibit women from entering, and make women decide they do not want to enter, that scenario. One of the cultural issues is comments like the minister's. The point I am making is that although the minister may not have intended that—let us be generous, although I think that is far too generous because I think he knew exactly what he was doing. However, let us be generous and say that the minister did not make the connection and he was not trying to be a bully. Let us be generous and say that he is not the bullying kind, shall we? If he reads the research, it will tell him —

Hon Simon O'Brien: He's not.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Is that so?

Hon Simon O'Brien: Have you ever heard of Paul Keating?

The PRESIDENT: Order! Members! We were proceeding very smoothly; let us keep it that way.

Hon SUE ELLERY My suggestion to the minister, to make sure he does not get that kind of criticism again, is to read the research that his government commissioned into the cultural issues that stop women deciding they want to pursue leadership positions. The minister should go and read his government's own research. The minister sits next to the Minister for Women's Interests, so he can ask her to give him a copy. I could say that the minister could get it off the website, but I would not! The minister can ask the Minister for Women's Interests to give him a copy, and he should read that.

The election commitment made by members opposite was to raise standards, but the practice, in fact, has been to set new lows with a complete disregard for the ministerial code. The government has rejected the notion that the public interest is paramount and that it is answerable to the Parliament. The public interest means the government answers questions that demonstrate it has ensured no conflict of interest, but on that test this government has failed.

HON NORMAN MOORE (Mining and Pastoral — Leader of the House) [10.42 am]: I have to confess to being a bit surprised that the Labor Party should raise an issue of integrity in government, because those people who are students of even recent history will recall the five sacked ministers of the previous Labor government. Those who want to go back a little further than that will remember the days of Brian Burke and WA Inc and all the issues attached to that.

Several members interjected.

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Norman Moore; Hon Linda Savage; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Kate
Doust; Hon Peter Collier

The PRESIDENT: Order! Members, let us stop it there. The Leader of the Opposition got through about 18 minutes of her allocated 20 minutes without an interjection. The Leader of the House has 15 minutes in response and we have got through 27 seconds. Let us have the same rules apply to everybody.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I repeat the point I made to begin with: I find it extraordinary that the Labor Party should talk about integrity in government and criticise some other government when it has the history it has, which is recent modern history. It started in about 1983 and it has been going on ever since. The Leader of the Opposition criticising other governments for lacking integrity I find quite extraordinary. Let us look at what she raised questions about today. She has given us a lesson about cabinet confidentiality and ministerial codes of conduct. The ministerial code of conduct, which she quoted from, requires a minister to declare a conflict of interest to the Premier and, indeed, to the cabinet secretary, and that is recorded in the minutes. In the event of a conflict on a matter being discussed by cabinet, the minister should withdraw. However, she forgot to tell the house the next part of the cabinet code of conduct, which states under part 9, "Use of Confidential Information" —

Ministers will maintain the confidentiality of information committed to their secrecy in the Executive Council, in Cabinet or otherwise in accordance with their duties.

The issue is quite simple: what goes on in cabinet stays in cabinet. That convention has existed for as long as I can remember. When these questions were asked of me the other day and I said that members should know that the deliberations of cabinet are confidential, they suggested that that was not the case when they were in government. Let me provide a few examples to the opposition of what they said and did in government. This first question from which I will quote was asked by Hon Matt Birney to the then Premier, Geoff Gallop, and relates to a conflict of interest. The question asked on 13 October 2005 in the Legislative Assembly reads —

- (1) Given that the Premier knew that serious questions were being asked about a potential conflict of interest with regard to the Dampier to Bunbury gas pipeline sale long before I raised it in Parliament yesterday, did the Premier —
 - (a) raise this matter in cabinet;
 - (b) investigate the pecuniary interests or shareholdings of cabinet members or ask any of his staff or ministers to do so; or
 - (c) raise this matter with the Minister for Energy?
- (2) If the Premier did none of the above, what exactly did he do to investigate any potential conflict of interest within his cabinet?

The answer was —

- (1)–(2) In respect of the first part of the question, matters within cabinet are matters for cabinet.

This is Geoff Gallop. The answer continues —

That is always the case. That is certainly the principle under which I operate; indeed, the High Court has confirmed the principle of cabinet confidentiality.

Hon Sue Ellery: An entirely different question.

Hon Simon O'Brien: It was about conflicts of interest, which is exactly what you were insinuating without coming up with any actual allegations.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Look, it is a common rule and practice in this place that only one member can be speaking on their feet at a time. There is only one member on their feet.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: That particular question was asked of Dr Gallop, one of Labor's better Premiers in recent history, about a conflict of interest and the issues being raised in cabinet. His view was that it was a matter of cabinet confidentiality and, indeed, that the High Court had confirmed the principle of cabinet confidentiality. Let us look at a few other answers that have been given over time by former Labor ministers, some in this house and some in the other house. I will not read out the questions and all the answers, I will just read out the various answers given in respect of this matter of cabinet confidentiality.

Hon Adele Farina: We would like to hear the questions because they might be relevant.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Hon Adele Farina can go and have a look in *Hansard*, because I have only 10 minutes and I have a lot of things to read out. This is Hon Kim Chance —

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Norman Moore; Hon Linda Savage; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Kate
Doust; Hon Peter Collier

The government is always concerned about breaches of cabinet confidentiality and the need to preserve cabinet confidentiality.

Here is the response of Hon Tom Stephens to a question asked by Hon Jim Scott —

It is against convention to disclose information relating to the deliberations of Cabinet. Any proposed expansion will require full environmental approval.

This is from Hon Kim Chance —

The Cabinet agenda is the business list for Cabinet meetings and as such details relating to its content or formulation are covered by the convention of Cabinet confidentiality.

Hon Sue Ellery: That is not the date and who was at the meeting.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NORMAN MOORE: This next question was from Mr Graham to the Premier, Dr Geoff Gallop. I will read this out because it actually relates to the issues the member raised the other day. This is the question from Larry Graham to Premier Geoff Gallop —

- (1) How many times has the Regional Development Cabinet Sub Committee met to discuss the collapse of Ansett?
- (2) On what date was each meeting held?
- (3) Which Ministers attended each meeting?
- (4) How long was each meeting?
- (5) What decisions were taken at each meeting?

The answer by Dr Gallop was —

- (1)–(5) Cabinet discussions are a part of the deliberative process and by convention are not disclosed.

Hon Simon O'Brien: And he was quite correct.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: By convention they are not disclosed. That was Dr Gallop, not some other minister or premier.

Hon Sue Ellery: I asked who wasn't there.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Come off it! So is asking who was not there okay but asking who was there not okay? Hon Sue Ellery cannot have it both ways. I repeat: in answer to the question asked by Larry Graham, Dr Gallop said —

Cabinet discussions are a part of the deliberative process and by convention are not disclosed.

Hon Adele Farina: What was the context?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I just read out one question that concerned the same issues raised by the Leader of the Opposition; it was the same context. I will not keep going through those questions and answers because they are all the same. In answer to a question asked by Mr Barron-Sullivan, Mr Brown said —

Cabinet discussions are confidential.

There are dozens of them. The bottom line is very simple: the Labor Party in government adhered to the convention that what goes on in cabinet stays in cabinet and that the issues are in fact confidential.

Hon Sue Ellery: Why did we answer Hon Simon O'Brien's question, then?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I am blown if I know. Obviously, the opposition is a bit selective in which ones it answers. There are dozens of them in which the answers were all the same—cabinet deliberations are confidential. That was the view of government ministers over time when the Labor Party was in office. For reasons that escape me, they decided to give the answer to a question.

I have an answer that Hon Ljiljana Ravlich gave to a question. If I can just find it, I will remind her of what she said as a minister.

Hon Ljiljana Ravlich: You don't have to remind me of anything; I remember it all!

The PRESIDENT: Order, members!

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Hon Ken Travers interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Look, anybody who wants to interject should remember that they have the opportunity to make a contribution to this debate in turn like everybody else, but not through interjection.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Another example is a question asked in the Legislative Council on 28 February 2008 by myself to Hon Ljiljana Ravlich. This demonstrates not just the point I am making about cabinet confidentiality but also how sometimes members do not get the answer to the question they have asked, which was talked about yesterday. The question was from me to the then Leader of the House representing the Premier, and stated —

I refer the Premier to the answer provided to the Legislative Council in question without notice 99 on Wednesday, 27 February 2008. On what basis does the Premier claim that cabinet decisions are privileged?

The answer was —

I thank the member for some notice of the question. On behalf of the Leader of the House representing the Premier, I provide the following response.

As the honourable member knows, the deliberations of cabinet are confidential. The Premier refers the honourable member to Legislative Council question without notice 1483 of 30 June 1998, where the member amply describes the importance of cabinet confidentiality in the Westminster system.

I thank Hon Ljiljana Ravlich very much. That was a great answer, except the question was: on what basis did the Premier claim that cabinet decisions are in fact privileged? Privileged is different from confidentiality; it is quite a different issue altogether. The question did not get answered. However, it suits my purpose today to remind Hon Ljiljana Ravlich of the answer she gave to this house on the issue of cabinet confidentiality. I thank her very much for that.

On the issues raised by the Leader of the Opposition about having to know the names of those people who are made redundant as a result of cabinet reshuffles and so on, these people are term-of-government people who are appointed by ministers sometimes for the term of those ministers and other times for the term of government. The reason we suggest that members find out this information through freedom of information is that it gives people some protection in the context of information being made public when they have no capacity to be involved in that information being made public. The FOI process provides third parties with the capacity to at least have their point of view taken into consideration by the FOI commissioner in the event of some argument down the track about whether it should have been made public. That is, in my view, a fair and reasonable proposition.

Hon Sue Ellery: Why?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I just told the member.

Hon Sue Ellery: Why shouldn't they be named? Why do they need to be protected?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Because they may have a reason to want to be protected.

Hon Sue Ellery: Why?

Hon NORMAN MOORE: I do not know what it is; they may claim —

Several members interjected.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: The FOI legislation brought in by the Labor government in 1992 and brought in late enough in the term to make sure it never had to abide by it, provides for third parties to have some capacity to avoid information being made public. There are all sorts of reasons for which they may wish to avoid that information being made public. As members also know, there is a process of appeal and at the end of the day, the Information Commissioner can decide whether that the information is to be made public. However, an individual person can argue to the Information Commissioner —

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Do you mind?

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Do you mind?

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Sue Ellery interjected.

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Norman Moore; Hon Linda Savage; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Kate
Doust; Hon Peter Collier

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Do you mind?

Hon Sue Ellery: Yes, I do.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: We actually had —

The PRESIDENT: Order! Fair is fair; every member has the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities as everyone else. If a member is on their feet, give them the opportunity to complete their remarks in the allocated time.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: With these motions brought on by the opposition, we have a fixed time. I do not mind interjections from time to time, but a repeated, constant speech being made at the same time as I am trying to make one makes it a bit difficult to —

Hon Sue Ellery: You have just used another minute up.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Okay; that is fine.

In respect to the Minister for Education making some public comments about the Prime Minister, compared with some things I have heard about the Prime Minister, his comments pale into insignificance. There is a view around the place that this is the worst Prime Minister that the country has ever had. Some people now say that even Gough Whitlam was better than her; that is saying something! Commentators are making that comment about our current Prime Minister. We live in a country that has so much going for it at the moment, but the lack of confidence is palpable. It is a result of a federal government that is totally and absolutely incompetent—absolutely incompetent.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NORMAN MOORE: The Leader of the Opposition asked a question in this chamber about a comment made by the Minister for Education, but she asked the question of the Minister for Women's Interests, inferring that somehow or other the comment about cane toads and other things had something to do with the fact that the Prime Minister is a female. That is absurd. Members are free not to like the description, but there is no peculiar relationship between cane toads and a female Prime Minister—there is not. In describing the Prime Minister as a cane toad or something like that, the Minister for Education would have used the same language if it had been a male Prime Minister.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NORMAN MOORE: If the opposition is concerned about integrity and the way in which ministers or other members of Parliament should make comments, the Minister for Education should have been asked why he made those comments. It has nothing to do with Women's Interests or anything to do with gender —

Hon Sue Ellery: We know why he said it, because he's a bully.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Can I just interrupt? By interjection, a word was used that has been levelled at other people in this place at certain times. Continual interjections can be interpreted in that way, if it is wished to be interpreted that way. I have an opposition member earmarked to be the next speaker, and I am sure that opposition member will not want to entertain the level of interjection that the current member on his feet is receiving. The rules apply to everyone in this place, not just one or two members.

Hon NORMAN MOORE: The suggestion by the Leader of the Opposition that somehow or other the minister's remark was sexist is just nonsense; it is clear and absolute nonsense. If the Leader of the Opposition was offended by the comment the minister made, she should have asked him the question or even used the procedure today to spend 20 minutes or whatever we get launching a vicious attack on the Minister for Education for his description of the Prime Minister. But to ask the question of the Minister for Women's Interests on the basis that somehow or other it was a sexist remark is absolutely ridiculous—completely ridiculous. It misses the point altogether. We will leave it at that, and the minister can defend himself in respect of that "wet lettuce leaf" attack on him today if he wishes to.

This whole issue that has been raised by the Leader of the Opposition is absolutely amazing coming from a political party that has a very, very poor record when it comes to integrity in government—a very, very poor record indeed. If members look over history, they will find that what I said at the beginning of my remarks is correct. The Labor government was the government that gave us WA Inc; it was a Labor government that gave us five sacked ministers under the Gallop —

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Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon NORMAN MOORE: Just to conclude, when Hon Ken Travers was a parliamentary secretary this is part of an answer he gave to a question I asked on 12 June 2001 —

The Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre Taskforce is a committee formed by Cabinet to provide advice to Cabinet. As such, any recommendation or advice is subject to cabinet confidentiality.

It seems that in those days Hon Ken Travers believed in the concept of cabinet confidentiality; today he does not, which I find absolutely amazing. What I would like to ask the opposition is: will it tell us today that when it next becomes the government, it will make the deliberations of cabinet available on an ongoing basis whenever anyone asks? I bet it does not.

HON LINDA SAVAGE (East Metropolitan) [10.55 am]: I also speak on this motion, and in doing so I would like to start by talking about the importance of question time. In some ways, question time is the most significant part of the day in Parliament, and that is because it is the opportunity for ministers to be held responsible and for questions to be raised, often on behalf of constituents. It also provides perhaps the clearest demonstration of the concept of responsible government under the Westminster system. I do not know what other members of Parliament do with the answers to the questions they get or what members of the government themselves do with questions that they have responded to, but what I do is send them out to a wide range of stakeholders. The way a minister answers questions in the Parliament may be fulsome or it may be an answer that requires several more questions to try to get the information I am after. No doubt I have been frustrated at times when it has appeared to me that the question I have asked has been perhaps deliberately misinterpreted or answered in such a way that I am not able to extract any useful information out of it, and that can be somewhat annoying. Ultimately, an answer like that goes to the stakeholders, and I get a lot of feedback, when I send out questions, about the quality of the answers that I receive. So, although in the context of Parliament it may seem that an answer to a question that does not provide adequate information is just a response to that person asking it, it actually has far wider ramifications, because it goes out to many people who follow the issues we raise. We are debating the questions and the standard of answers in the bubble of the Parliament, and the failure of question responses to provide an adequate answer plays a role in undermining people's confidence in the integrity of Parliament. Let us be frank: the opinion of the general public about politicians is not very high. In fact, current research shows that the ratings for politicians in terms of ethics and integrity are at an all-time low. When we read the polls, politicians are described with words such as "untrustworthy" and I think that is deeply concerning. In letters to the newspapers, politicians are often referred to en masse as "self-serving" and "dishonourable" and I think we should all feel very concerned about that, because with that accelerating decline in the standing of members of Parliament and the now real contempt that is held for MPs, comes a real threat to the integrity of the democratic process itself. That is why, in raising issues about the way that questions are answered by the government, it is important that the impact those answers have on the wider community be taken seriously. I am particularly concerned about this because I am aware of how young people perceive Parliament. It is often question time that is reported in the media. Unfortunately, we know that a lot of young people feel very disengaged from the political system and wonder why they would bother to be involved in it.

Although I was overseas when the comments were made about the Prime Minister, I received feedback in England while I was visiting. I note that in answer to the question asked by Hon Sue Ellery on Tuesday, Minister Hon Robyn McSweeney responded —

... the minister's answer had nothing to do with the Prime Minister being a woman. He was actually referring to, in generality, what he called her. She happens to be a woman, but that was not why he was saying she was a cane toad and "peeing on posts", ...

I beg to differ. I think it is semantics to say that it was about the Prime Minister and the fact that she is a woman was immaterial. Although the Minister for Education may not have thought he was making an association between the Prime Minister and a female, I can assure him that, from the feedback I received when I was away and certainly when I got back, generally people saw it as an attack on our first female Prime Minister. I think it showed a deep lack of respect for women. That is the message it sent, whether or not that is what the minister intended. I will read a letter to *The Weekend West* of 11 August from Marralyn Polglase of Capel. It states —

I am appalled. Is this the standard of professionalism that our educators and students can expect from our Education and Energy Minister Peter Collier?

To refer to the Prime Minister, no matter what your political preference, as a cane toad that pees on posts is the extreme in poor taste and shows a lack of verbal skills.

He should hang his head in shame.

I note that Hon Norman Moore made references to what other members of Parliament have said about other people. I was certainly brought up to believe that two wrongs do not make a right and that everyone should set the standard of their behaviour based on what they think is appropriate. It is not only inappropriate, but also deeply insulting to women generally for the minister to have called the Prime Minister that.

I have a further interest in it that the Minister for Education might be interested to know about. I have a son who is studying to be a teacher. The minister will potentially be the head of the department that employs my son. My son and other young men are hearing such comments from the Minister for Education. The minister's intention is immaterial, because it was reported in the press without all those qualifications. I think that should be answered by the minister with a retraction or an apology. Although he may think that there was some subtlety in what he said, the minister is well aware of how things are reported in the press. There is no capacity within the press for that level of subtlety or semantics.

When we talk about issues of integrity, ministers and leaders—the government of the day is in that position; particularly the Minister for Education—are in a position to set high standards. I hope that the minister will consider finding an opportunity to make it clear that that comment was not one that he thought was appropriate to make about our first female Prime Minister.

HON ADELE FARINA (South West) [11.05 am]: In Australia we have a system of responsible government. This system of government embodies the principle of parliamentary accountability, which is the foundation of the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy. In our system of government, the powers of the Crown are exercised by ministers who, in turn, are answerable to Parliament. Ministers are individually and collectively responsible to Parliament for the policies, programs and activities of the government. They are responsible to Parliament for everything that is done under their authority. They are answerable to Parliament and its committees and, ultimately, in the case of this Parliament, to the people of Western Australia. Ministers have a constitutional responsibility to Parliament and to the people of Western Australia. Ministers who do not take this responsibility seriously do so at their own peril.

In addition to this constitutional responsibility, in 2008 members opposite made a commitment to the people of Western Australia that, if elected, they would restore integrity and would respect an open and accountable government and, further, that they would ensure that the people of Western Australia have a transparent, clear understanding of how their government conducts its business. That is the solemn commitment made by each member opposite to the people of Western Australia. However, since being elected to government, members opposite have arrogantly ignored their solemn undertaking to the people of Western Australia. The government has in every instance been anything but transparent, open and accountable. There is no better example of the height of arrogance of this government and the disregard that ministers in this government have for responsible government and this Parliament than the answer provided by the Leader of the House to a question asked on Tuesday by Hon Sue Ellery about which ministers, if any, did not take part in the cabinet decision to approve the Retail Trading Hours Amendment Bill 2012. The answer provided by the Leader of the House was not transparent, open or accountable; nor did it honour the undertaking given by each member opposite to the people of Western Australia at the last election that they would ensure that they have a transparent, clear understanding of how their government conducts its business. The leader's answer, that it is against convention to disclose information relating to the deliberations of cabinet and that this has been the position for as long as he can remember, not only lacks accountability and transparency, but also is misleading.

As explained by Hon Sue Ellery, a similar question was asked by Hon Simon O'Brien of the then Leader of the House in 2005. In that instance, the Leader of the House answered the question in full. He did not seek to hide behind inaccurate applications of defences of convention or cabinet confidentiality. He was open, transparent and accountable. He respected the principle of responsible government and his responsibilities to Parliament. On Tuesday, the Leader of the House stated in answer to Hon Sue Ellery's question that it is against convention to disclose information relating to the deliberations of cabinet. The question asked by Hon Sue Ellery did not seek information concerning cabinet deliberations, and therefore the convention referred to by the Leader of the House does not apply to the question asked by Hon Sue Ellery. The Leader of the House refused to provide open, transparent and accountable answers to Hon Sue Ellery, to Parliament and, ultimately, to the people of Western Australia. The convention of cabinet solidarity has no relevance to the question asked. What occurred on Tuesday showed a grave disregard for our system of responsible government and for the people of Western Australia. It was far from open, transparent and accountable.

Time and again, ministers opposite have shown a blatant disregard for their responsibilities to Parliament and to the people of Western Australia. In answers to questions, ministers in this government have time and again referred members to websites rather than provide the information to the member, which has been the convention

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in this place. In many instances the websites do not even contain the information sought by the member, but the minister's office does not care—it has no regard for the responsibilities to Parliament.

In answers to other questions, ministers in this government have time and again told members to seek information through the freedom of information process. I find this particularly interesting given that on 21 April 2010, when we debated a motion moved by Hon Ljiljana Ravlich relating to the freedom of information process, Hon Michael Mischin—our now Attorney General—had the following to say. I will quote from *Hansard*. Hon Michael Mischin was quoting from the second reading speech when the freedom of information bill was introduced into this house when he said —

This Bill is not intended to replace existing practices for giving information or to discourage their use; it is intended as a means of exercising rights where access is not available as a matter of custom or law. Therefore, clause 6 recognises that a right of access is not needed in relation to documents which are already available to the public.

One of those means of access available by custom or law is Parliament. Members of the public do not get to insist on the provision of information by members of the government; however, Parliament is the means by which parliamentarians—if they know their job—can try to extract information from the government. It is not done by descending into misusing something such as the Freedom of Information Act.

Hon Michael Mischin, our now Attorney General, told this place that the use of the freedom of information process by members of Parliament to extract information from government is a misuse of that process by parliamentarians—that we should not use it. These are the words of our Attorney General. I suggest that he has a long discussion with his cabinet colleagues because time and again, in replying to genuine questions asked by members in this place, we are being told to lodge an FOI application rather than being provided with the answer by the minister. Members have heard the words of our now Attorney General that he considers that to be a “misuse”—an abuse of the process by members of Parliament. Perhaps ministers might note that. Remember that part of ministers' responsibilities under the Constitution to this Parliament and to the people of Western Australia is to actually provide an answer when a question is asked and not to simply refer members to the freedom of information process or to websites to seek information. The whole point of question time in Parliament is to hold government to account. Ministers have a constitutional responsibility to answer questions and to provide the information that is sought rather than to seek to hide from it. It has become apparent under this government that this is just a game. It has no regard for responsible government or the commitment it made to the people of Western Australia. On other occasions, ministers in this government have replied by saying that the time required to answer the question would divert resources away from core activities. This is nothing more than an excuse provided by this government to avoid answering questions when ministers know that the answer will embarrass the government. Members in this place have an obligation to the people of Western Australia to hold government to account and to ask questions. Ministers have an obligation to genuinely answer questions that have been asked.

Yesterday, in response to a question I asked about police rostering, I was told that answering the question would take a significant amount of time and resources to collate and process; therefore it would not be possible to obtain the information without significantly compromising other core policing activities. Police rostering and pays are handled electronically. I do not think that any member of the community buys the explanation that I was provided yesterday. In this age of computer technology, it ought to be a matter of just pressing a few buttons. Further, I doubt very much that police officers are employed in the human resources and finance branches of the WA police service, especially after the Commissioner of Police's push to get all sworn police officers away from their desks and onto the front line; hence it is highly unlikely that core policing activities would be compromised by providing the information I sought yesterday. The minister simply did not want to answer the question. She did not want to be embarrassed, and chose to ignore her constitutional responsibilities by refusing to provide the information sought. This is a government that is anything but open, transparent and accountable. This government time and again ignores the principles of responsible government and its commitment to the people of Western Australia to be open, transparent and accountable. The government does so at its peril, as the people of Western Australia do not tolerate such arrogance.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Finance) [11.14 am]: The terms of the motion moved by the honourable Leader of the Opposition are that this government needs to be condemned for ignoring an election commitment. The election commitment, as she selectively quotes, was to restore integrity. Members have to ask themselves up-front: why was it necessary for a party aspiring to government to make an election commitment to restore integrity if it was not an issue of the day? There was a widespread perception and reality in our community that integrity had been, and continued to be, undermined by the Labor government that was then in power. The whole essence of the attack—feeble though it might be, we take it seriously—was to zero in

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on a question that was presumably asked the other day to get the answer that could have been expected with a view to having this debate today. It is a manufactured exercise—and not a very cleverly manufactured one either.

The Leader of the House has exposed the Labor Party's hypocrisy on this matter. Members opposite are pretending to beat their chests and wail that somehow this government lacks accountability because it declines to breach the rules about cabinet confidentiality! That is the supreme irony of all of this. Some of the claims made by those opposite expose them for people without regard for what they themselves have done in the past. They really have feet of clay in this matter. I will come to a couple of questions in a minute which are quite instructive and show the silly nature of the opposition's attack today, feeble though it might be. Before I do that, in the course of conducting some research into these questions my attention was drawn to a question asked by another opposition in another place to a then Labor minister. A question was asked on 19 February 2002 by Dan Sullivan, MLA, to the then Minister for Small Business, namely —

During cabinet discussions on industrial relations reform, has —

Opposition members interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Mr Deputy President, may I be allowed to continue? I will restart the quote —

During cabinet discussions on industrial relations reform, has the minister represented the interests of small business or his union mates?

I wonder what the atmosphere was like in the Assembly when that question was asked. Minister Brown, as part of his reply, made the observation that cabinet discussions are confidential—indeed, I agree. That would have been the response one would expect. It raises an interesting matter in the context of this debate when the Leader of the Opposition is getting all twee about raising the sorts of questions that were raised on Tuesday, and saying that this is about accountability and detecting whether there are conflicts of interest within cabinet. Think about it: did that Labor minister have a conflict of interest in the cabinet when considering a matter of industrial relations reform? If members of cabinet are considering a bill, drafted probably by a union official —

Several members interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: — and relying on the goodwill of their union mates to secure their position, or their ongoing position, in cabinet, do they actually have a conflict of interest? That is an interesting question, and I do not intend to pursue it.

Several members interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: But the question that Dan Sullivan raised with Minister Brown on that day about conflict of interest in cabinet is a more substantial question than the one that the Leader of the Opposition has raised today.

Mr Larry Graham—who I think we would agree, both then and now, was a respected member of Parliament—asked a question of Premier Geoff Gallop back in February 2002 that I think deserves revisiting. On Tuesday, Hon Sue Ellery was asking questions of the Leader of the House representing the Premier about which ministers, if any, did not take part in a certain cabinet decision—so, ergo, if we know who did not take part in a cabinet decision, then we know who did take part in a cabinet decision and we are commencing that inquiry into the proceedings of cabinet. On 20 February 2002, Mr Larry Graham asked Premier Gallop a question about a regional development subcommittee and its meetings to discuss the collapse of Ansett airline. He asked on what date meetings had been held. Again, judging by the standards that the Leader of the Opposition is now trying to exhibit, are we entitled —

Several members interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Mr Deputy President, my time is being used up by unruly interjections that I am clearly ignoring. I am seeking your protection.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Brian Ellis): Okay, minister. The minister has the call.

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! The minister has the call.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Part of the question that Mr Graham asked Premier Gallop was, “Which ministers attended each meeting?” That is exactly the same question that the Leader of the Opposition is now saying is germane to a debate about integrity. The answer from Premier Gallop was —

Cabinet discussions are a part of the deliberative process and by convention are not disclosed.

This is the Premier Gallop under whom the Leader of the Opposition served. This is the Premier Gallop who was described today by the Leader of House as one of the better Labor Premiers in recent times—and he had some

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competition, too, with Premier Carpenter, Premier Burke, Premier Dowding and Premier Lawrence; indeed, he was one of the better ones.

Hon Kate Doust: What about Ray O'Connor? He was a shining star on your side!

Hon Simon O'Brien: The member is just saying that because he is a man, I should think!

Hon Kate Doust: No!

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! There is only a certain amount of time.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Let us look at some of the members whom we have in the here and now. We listened to a beautifully read speech from Hon Adele Farina. It took me back to a series of questions that I asked. Back in October 2007, it had become a matter of virtually open knowledge, I think, that the then government was tasking sundry of its agencies to review their capital work programs. That included a rigorous assessment of the viability of deferring between 20 per cent and 25 per cent of their planned 2007–08 building construction works. I asked a series of question about a number of agencies. The question that I asked in relation to LandCorp was as follows —

- (1) When was this request conveyed to LandCorp?"

I wanted to know what communication had been given to LandCorp—not what was discussed in cabinet. I asked also —

- (2) Has the rigorous assessment of LandCorp building construction works commenced in accordance with the expenditure review committee's directive?

I asked the same question on another day about the Public Transport Authority; I asked the same question on another day about the then Main Roads WA; and I asked the same question on another day about the then Department of Planning and Infrastructure. The answer that I got from Hon Adele Farina, as the then parliamentary secretary, was as follows —

- (1)–(2) The deliberations of cabinet, including cabinet subcommittees, are confidential ...

HON KATE DOUST (South Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [11.25 am]: I congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on raising this matter today; I think it is born out of pure frustration in having to deal with a government that, as we now know, has a pervasive arrogance wafting through all of its ministerial offices. We have seen over the past four years that question time in this chamber has become a bit of a farce, where ministers choose not to answer all of a question, or part of a question; they dance around issues, and in some cases they use questions as an opportunity to denigrate individual members of the opposition or other parties to try to take away from the importance of the question. The questions that the Leader of the Opposition has singled out are significant. Today, we are seeing not just in this chamber, but in the other chamber, also, a degree of frustration as to how this government is dealing with integrity and transparency in running the government of this state.

It is important to look at the motion in front of us. The motion talks about the Barnett government ignoring its own election commitment. We know that when the election was called, Mr Barnett was indeed a last-minute replacement for the former leader of the Liberal Party, who has his own issues about standards at a range of levels in both his professional and private life. So Mr Barnett of course did not have a lot of policies or ideas that he could run on, and so he chose to go into the public arena and talk about how his government would run on integrity, honesty and transparency. He talked that up as being his primary objective. Mr Barnett was successful in the Liberal Party gaining the Treasury bench as a result of his loose de facto marriage, if you like, with the Nationals—that loose coalition that from time to time we have seen fall apart.

Several members interjected.

Hon KATE DOUST: No; they did not vote together last night. Although the Premier may have trotted out these mantras of integrity and transparency for his government, he consistently pops up with all sorts of thought bubbles and does not provide to the public the level of detail required and that the public should expect of a government. Quite often the Premier trots out these ideas without even consulting with his own cabinet. So it probably should not surprise us, Leader of the Opposition, that the members of this government cannot provide all of the answers, because the Premier probably has not told them what is happening or what to say. Therefore, when we come into this place and we put questions to ministers, and when we want responsible answers and honest answers from those ministers so that we can provide that information to our constituents and to interested parties who may have raised issues of concern with us, it is very distressing and disturbing that this government cannot provide accurate and honest information, or deliberately seeks not to provide that information, by hiding

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behind the camouflage, if you like, of cabinet confidentiality, or in some cases of the commercial arrangements that the government may have entered into. Minister Collier is an expert at hiding behind those types of arrangements. It is indeed frustrating.

The other issue that probably has not been canvassed as broadly is this government's total disregard for issues of conflict of interest. I raise this matter because, again, it comes back to the Premier—this individual who went into the public arena and talked about integrity and honesty, but who quite blithely says, when issues come up about his ministers or issues come up about his advisers, “No; that's not a conflict of interest; we don't perceive that as a conflict; you shouldn't see it that way.”

I want to draw members' attention to a recent conflict. Minister Day was involved in a very interesting conflict of interest in the seat of Nedlands. There was a property development in Waratah Avenue where Minister Day owned property. I say that because it has been interesting to note the way the Premier handled that matter; he was quite dismissive of it. However, it was a matter about which the Premier's own chief of staff raised concerns and galvanised that part of the community against the government. The concern about Minister Day is a matter that was raised by quite senior members of the lay Liberal Party.

I raise the matter concerning Minister Day because, as all members know, this week is National Science Week. I have asked a series of questions in this place about national science programs and state-based programs. As members know, I raise this issue all the time. Unfortunately, this government does not have an interest in the issue; it keeps changing the minister responsible for the science and innovation portfolio and the minister who represents the minister in this place.

I have gone back and read through my questions in this place that have received vague responses and non-answers. I asked a question yesterday about the proposed bioprospecting bill, which is a very significant piece of legislation for the science community. It is hoped that the bill will provide an opportunity for those people to find cures for a range of illnesses that plague members of our community. It will provide an opportunity to create jobs in our state. It will provide an opportunity for a future viable industry in our state. We have been waiting for this legislation for more than four years. A report was conducted in 2008 and I understood drafting instructions were resolved in 2011. I asked a question in March this year about where this legislation was because the various ministers responsible for this portfolio had talked up this legislation and said they were going to deliver it. They keep telling people in the industry they are going to do it but it is not happening. So, I have been watching and waiting for this legislation and have been continually asking questions about it. I am continually told that the drafting instructions for the legislation are being done, so in March this year I asked a question without notice about it. Hon Helen Morton responded to the question and said —

In August 2011, cabinet approved the preparation of drafting instructions for a WA bioprospecting bill.

Hon Sally Talbot: Goodness!

Hon KATE DOUST: I know! It is action, is it not? I got an answer and thought that was great and that we should expect it to happen.

Hon Sue Ellery: I hope she was disciplined!

Hon KATE DOUST: That is right. Hon Helen Morton breached something that cabinet had done! The Leader of the Opposition is right and has a point there.

I have been waiting and thinking that the government would have it all done and was expecting a bill by March. However, nothing happened. Of course that is because this government is not interested in the science space. The Leader of the House answered a similar question I asked yesterday. My question reads —

Given it has been a year since cabinet approved the preparation of drafting instructions for the bioprospecting bill, have the drafting instructions been completed?

I asked that question in the full knowledge that in March this year I was told the drafting instructions had been completed. Hon Norman Moore's reply on behalf of the minister reads —

The bioprospecting bill drafting instructions are currently being finalised.

I therefore do not know now what is going on. I thought the drafting instructions had been completed and that we would be getting a bill. I have therefore been telling people in the industry that the government said the instructions had been done. I now find they are still being developed or finalised.

Hon Norman Moore: I will find out what's going on.

Hon KATE DOUST: I do not know whether the Leader of the House misled the house yesterday, or whether the minister did or just does not know what is going; he is just not engaged. However, Leader of the House, it is the frustration of getting those types of answers that leads us to raise these issues. Here we have a government

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that said, “We’re coming in. We’re going to be transparent and honest. We’re going to deliver the goods for the state and for the community.” That is just one small example of the answers we get whenever we come into this place and ask questions. I could go through reams and reams of questions I have asked of Hon Peter Collier and in answer got a great song and dance, but no clear answer. A very good example I can give is of the Premier’s constant reference to a re-merger of Synergy and Verve. He has talked about it in the media—print and radio—and about how he has consulted with people. Consistently in estimates and even about two weeks ago we raised questions again with the various government players in the energy field about whether the Premier has had discussions with them. No! On each occasion the answer was no.

Where is the integrity of the Premier in going out into the community and misleading the community about the activity he is involved with in that very important and significant issue in the energy market? Members, I tell you what: he does not have that integrity. This government should be embarrassed because it is not delivering what it should be delivering for this community. When the public elects members to Parliament, they expect that they will hold a high level of standards in every way in which they conduct themselves. We find that government members are so arrogant that they think they can bowl up and do whatever they want. They do not care about —

Hon Norman Moore: You have a very short memory, haven’t you? I have been here long enough to see the answers you’ve traded on and they were appallingly bad, and you know it.

Hon KATE DOUST: I am dealing with the last four and a half years of this government and its own record. This government is responsible to this community and it does not deliver. This government does not provide the correct and appropriate responses so that this community can find out exactly what it is doing. It hides.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Minister for Education) [11.35 am]: I have only a couple of minutes, unfortunately, but that is fine because I just want to put a couple of things on the record.

First, I am staggered that Hon Kate Doust claims that I have an incapacity or inability to answer questions at question time. I have never once in this chamber asked a member opposite to put a question on notice—ever.

Hon Kate Doust: You have!

Hon PETER COLLIER: I have never.

Hon Kate Doust: You have so!

Hon PETER COLLIER: Can I just finish?

Hon Kate Doust: Do you want me to go and find it?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! There is only a certain amount of time and the minister has the call.

Hon PETER COLLIER: On occasions —

Hon Kate Doust: You have!

Hon PETER COLLIER: Can I finish?

On occasions we have a situation where, for example, there is a question about a number of bills that have not been paid. In the two hours available it is simply not possible to get the answer to the question. But I will say, and I have always said, that I do not have that information and I will get it to the member as soon as possible. I have not said to put it on notice.

Hon Kate Doust: You have!

Hon PETER COLLIER: I have got the answer back to the member much sooner than the required nine sitting days. I have always said that. On every single occasion I have made every attempt to get the answers to those questions back in time. On every occasion, as I said, when those answers have not been available, it got to a point when I said I would get the answer to the member whenever I possibly could. But I have not said “put it on notice”. I could go on and on about it, but I will not.

I want to make some comment about comments I made about the credibility of the Prime Minister—not the Prime Minister personally; I want to make that perfectly clear. About a month before I made those comments the Prime Minister came over to Western Australia and made a claim about the energy sector in Western Australia. The Prime Minister then made claims right across Australia that the increase in electricity prices was the problem of state governments and that they were gold-plating the networks et cetera. That was abject nonsense. There is absolutely no credibility to that claim whatsoever. The federal government imposed a 9.13 per cent increase in electricity tariffs as a result of a carbon tax, and that is exactly why I made those comments. It would not have mattered if it were the Prime Minister, the energy minister or anyone within the federal government

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who had made those claims, they were completely nonsensical claims to deflect attention away from an immoral carbon tax that will do virtually nothing whatsoever to reduce emissions and that will increase electricity prices in Western Australia by 9.13 per cent. Electricity prices in Western Australia would decrease tomorrow if the federal government reduced the carbon tax. As far as energy is concerned, therefore, it is the credibility of the federal government that is important, not the gender of the Prime Minister or the energy minister, whoever it might be.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.