

APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) RECURRENT 2009–10 (SUPPLEMENTARY) BILL 2010
APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) CAPITAL 2009–10 (SUPPLEMENTARY) BILL 2010

Second Reading — Cognate Debate

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON PHILIP GARDINER (Agricultural) [5.03 pm]: Before question time, I had reached the point of talking about the spread of different quality and characteristics of greasy wool. That is the fibre that sheep farmers produce. I was saying that some of the wool is appropriate as next-to-the-skin wear for women, babies, men and so on, and other parts of the fibre, across the spectrum, are more suited to off-the-skin wear for all of us. This suit that I am wearing could easily be a 20.5, 21 or 21.5 micron wool appropriate for off-the-skin wear, but if that wool were put into fabric to be worn against the skin, most people—in fact, nearly all people—would find it irritating, itchy and maybe prickly. Hon Adele Farina is nodding her head, but it is not only women who feel that, men do as well. Whose fault is that problem? It lies squarely at the feet of the Australian industry and there are easy ways to fix it.

In Western Australia in the past four or five years a comfort laboratory was set up with Curtin University of Technology, partly funded by the Department of Agriculture and Food and Australian Wool Innovation through the cooperative research centres. This comfort laboratory had people wear particular garments inside a chamber where the temperature was raised. As the temperature is raised, the skin reacts to the fibre in the garment. Researchers can measure the response of these people to the fabric they have on their bodies as the temperature increases to determine the fabric's comfort. They learnt from that research that there is a certain cut-off point for fibres that were suitable for next-to-the-skin wear market as opposed to off-the-skin wear. The saddest part about this story is that, despite the results of that research, it is hard to generate enthusiasm in anyone to utilise it. The ball is at our feet, the goal is a few metres away and we cannot bring our foot to meet the ball to get it into the goal. Let me explain. Every wool grower has their wool measured when they market it for sale. It is measured for fibre diameter, vegetable matter, yield and tensile strength, but there are also unmeasured characteristics of wool, which I will not go into now, that are key elements. If wool is catalogued by what the comfort laboratory has determined to be suitable for next-to-the-skin wear, buyers could come into the auction market, bid for the different lots, aggregate their different lots into a big lot, which might be 120 bales or 200 bales or whatever, and there would be an average measure of the characteristics for that large batch of bales. The wool then goes to a scour for processing. Samples can be taken of the wool as it goes through the scour. Those samples can be put into an envelope and sent to the Australian Wool Testing Authority, which originally measured the greasy wool, to see whether the DNA of the wool, if we like, matched.

What we all fear, and what we know happens, is that the wool processors, be it the scourers, combers or spinners, will try to blend lower quality wool to get a lower cost product, but to the compromise or the corruption of the quality. Therefore, even if we had the right wool at the beginning, by the time it gets to the very end of the process, it could be corrupted and itchy again. The only way the process is effective, of course, is if we have a brand that has value to adorn that right quality wool when it goes into a garment and on to the retail store. Australian Wool Innovation now has a very good brand called No Finer Feeling. It is a fantastic brand. People can have that wool garment on their bodies—how good is that? People would only have that brand, of course, if the wool in that garment at the very end matched the DNA, if we like, of the wool when it was first purchased for the lot to be processed. In that way we structurally change the marketing of our wool. It is not only about supply and demand; we have changed not only how wool is marketed, but also its credibility in the eyes of the consumer who wears it. However, it is very difficult to get that message through. I refer to wool as a niche product—each farmer believes he has a niche product; part of it certainly is, but a lot is not—and to grain as a bulk commodity. The difficulty now is marketing grain in a deregulated environment. People talk about how much better it is and how much more we get now than we got when it was a single desk. By the way, there is no evidence to support that. I know from working in markets in a very focused way that it is absolutely impossible for the individual farmer to beat the professionals. The reason it is impossible is that the professionals are right at the centre of a circle. Imagine a number of concentric circles: the professional is at the very centre and the outer circles represent those of us who are further and further from the centre; that is, those working in their farm offices or out in the paddock. How can we ever know what is happening at the centre of the circle? It is a practical impossibility to know. Therefore, in a zero-sum game, who is always going to be the loser? It is so clear that the farmer cannot win; whereas a single-desk seller with power in the marketplace because of a huge supply and who can work the market is at the centre of the circle all the time. That is not to say mistakes are not made. Of course mistakes are made whenever trading a commodity; be it wheat, money, gold or whatever. But the structural factor of a single desk is logical when we work out what is the better way to do things.

They are but two marketing examples. I do not know enough about milk, honey, pigs or beef to be able to remark upon the nuances of the marketing of those products, but I know that marketing differentiation is the goal every agricultural producer aims for with his product.

I will now talk about a few of the measures that may aid sustainability in agriculture. When talking about these measures, we need to put them in context because, as I said before, the world's marketing and production systems continually change. Over the past 10 years, parts of the agricultural areas in the south west of Western Australia appear to have received less and less rainfall. Taking a number of years since about 1976, rainfall levels, especially during the growing season, have continually declined. Climate change is a term that means a lot of things to a lot of people, and one that causes intense reactions from very many people, which I find very sad because it distorts our understanding of climate change. A necessary precondition to understanding climate change is first of all understanding global warming. That is the necessary condition. Global warming, in my view, is scientifically irrefutable because we can measure it. We can measure every single part of it. There is nothing about global warming that cannot be measured. Most importantly, carbon dioxide, methane or nitrous oxide and those other global warming gases absorb radiant heat. The more of those gases in the atmosphere, the more radiant heat is absorbed. Radiant heat is the heat from the sun that hits the earth and bounces back, and that is the heat that is absorbed by those gas molecules. The more molecules, the more warmth. I presume that all members realise that carbon dioxide makes up an absolute fraction of the earth's atmosphere. Yet, surveys that I have seen indicate that about two-thirds of people think that carbon dioxide makes up 20 per cent or 30 per cent of the earth's atmosphere. I find that amazing. I thought we all learnt the basics in primary school. Carbon dioxide is a tiny fraction of the earth's atmosphere.

My good friend, a member of the House of Lords and a former chairman of Shell, who spoke to us here in the Western Australian Parliament, describing the sun and the nearest planet to it, Mercury, explains that Mercury is the hottest planet of all. Of course we understand that. Next to Mercury is Venus, and Venus, which is further away from the sun, is much hotter than it should be given its additional distance from the sun. It is totally out of whack. Why? Because, apparently, about 75 per cent of the atmosphere of Venus is carbon dioxide. Next is Earth. Given its distance from the sun, Earth also is, fortunately, a little warmer than it should be because of the carbon dioxide in its atmosphere. Of course, the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere creates the greenhouse gas effect—including the water vapour that is a major part of the greenhouse gases—that gives our planet warmth; otherwise the planet's temperature might be around minus 25 degrees or minus 30 degrees Celsius and be impossible to live on. Next, Mars does not have any carbon dioxide in its atmosphere, and its temperature is about what it ought to be given its distance from the sun. I am reinforcing the science and how that, in the way we measure things on earth, carbon dioxide is important for the way that it warms a planet. As a result of that warming effect, the earth's temperature is rising. A sufficient condition of whether we want to go any further in terms of the impact of global warming that we will have to live with in the future, is whether we believe the risk of climate change, as a result of man-made global warming, along with all the other factors that affect our weather and climate, is too big to ignore.

In Western Australia, the south west appears to be receiving less rainfall and to be having more warmer days. However, each of us has to make up our own minds about the risk of that getting worse. And if that is a risk about which we are concerned, we have to think about what we will do.

Returning to the sustainability of agriculture, it could be that the rangelands—although they have flooded recently and had great rains—and the agricultural south west of Western Australia will get dryer and dryer, the people will move closer and closer to the ocean and the cities along the coastline, and that land will be unused. Or it may be that we can adapt and change the use of that land to something productive. When I use the word productive, I use it advisedly because—members may not agree with this—land can be productive even if we impose a price on carbon because we believe too much carbon is entering the atmosphere. If that happens, it will open up a whole different opportunity for land use in both the south west and the rangelands, which will sustain land use in the eastern Wheatbelt and the rangelands area. I have done the figures, and I know a carbon price will work out there, especially because biomass could be used to feed power into the grid and stop the outages and so on so.

We have a real opportunity to change the land use if we feel sufficiently strongly that the risk of not doing anything is too great; each of us must make up our own minds about that. I have read the Ian Plimers of the world and been to the talks given by the chap who came through—namely, Lord Monckton—and I have read parts of publications by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as well as the reports and updates of Professor Ross Garnaut. But if anyone is seriously interested in this topic, they should read a book titled *Poles Apart: Beyond the Shouting, Who's Right About Climate Change?* by Morgan and McCrystal. That book is very useful because it goes through each aspect of this great debate and removes the politics, which have to be taken out somehow at some time so that we can get our feet on the ground about this thing. Chapter 8—the final

chapter—draws a conclusion about which appears the more meritorious argument and case; members must not read chapter 8 first of course.

I will return to sustainability. Last year a drought package was agreed on by the Minister for Agriculture and Food and the federal government. That policy was really about providing farmers with advice on how to manage the risks of their business, and it provided, very importantly, Centrelink support for farmers who had no income. In my view, that was the most important part of that policy. Unfortunately, it did not provide cover for the risks of agricultural businesses; that cover was achieved with the help of people like Hon Nigel Hallett and Hon Max Trenorden, who have pursued this for a long time; the Western Australian Farmers Federation, which actually finally got a committee together; and Co-operative Bulk Handling, which worked with WAFF to find insurers that would give a price for a multi-peril crop insurance product. Mick Murray, MLA, was on that committee, and others from this house were very supportive of that product. The great thing about that product is that at last farmers, wheat growers and barley growers can insure the expenses of growing their crop—their costs of production—and they can recoup those costs if the crop fails so that they can have another go next year. Hopefully that insurance will give the young people we are trying to encourage into agriculture a chance of sustainability. That is a very good product. It is reasonably and relevantly priced, and it allows a grain grower the opportunity of sustainability out there in the eastern Wheatbelt. But do not think the risks are contained to just wheat and barley, as they are at the current time; the risks spread to canola, horticulture and grapes, and so on—maybe even to stock. Animal farmers also suffer from bad seasons if there is no feed for the stock. For the first time we have a product that will provide a great spur to the sustainability of agriculture in that area.

The second thing that must change is land use options, which relates, again, to having a carbon price. Members know that I am very strongly in favour of a market-based carbon price. Conceptually, it would be very simple to do; it would be a bit like each of us calculating the carbon footprint for our households and businesses, and if we are found to be putting net emissions of carbon dioxide into the air, the government could say that by December next year we must all reduce our net emissions by 10 per cent. For example, if I was emitting 100 tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from my farm, the government could tell me to reduce it by 10 tonnes. I would have the option of trying to economise on my diesel use—I might get biodiesel instead—or selling some sheep, because they produce methane by burping, or I could buy some credits. While I am thinking about that, every other household and business would be, and we would have a market. No-one is trying to pick winners. Politicians, with the stroke of a pen, cannot say what the price will be or how many renewable energy certificates will be issued. Politicians are the worst marketeers; they should not be in that market. Forecasts cannot even be properly made on the currency markets, so how can they be made when it comes to carbon? It is just wrong. We should have a free market based on supply and demand. People may say that investment banks and merchant banks will make some money on the way through; that is the nature of every commodity. Do not be mistaken; every commodity has someone taking something from the top. That is a part of price discovery, but it is a necessary part of the market.

If we had a carbon price, farmers could derive their income in two ways. Most farmers have trees growing on their properties; rangelands and eastern Wheatbelt farmers have lots of small trees and plants growing on their farms and stations. We need to measure how much carbon is in those plants, trees and shrubs. Shire roads also have trees growing along them, and it is a matter of measuring how much carbon is in those trees. Those trees can be sold—thereby selling the carbon—to derive income. It is the same for those who want to plant trees. Trees could be planted, not in a fence-to-fence arrangement—no-one is considering fence-to-fence planting; at least I am not—like they did in the south of the state. They could be planted in alleys, and sheep could be grazed in between the alleys—grazing in pastures that can take the drier conditions, and those people could also get a price for their carbon. Carbon farming—if members like to use that term—will provide a more stable, sustainable income to farmers in those areas than they have ever had growing grain. That is the second part of a sustainability plan that I think should be considered.

I digress a little to tell members about the theory of the boiling frog—I suspect most members know it. The theory of the boiling frog is that if a frog is put into boiling water, it will jump straight out. But if we start with cool or tepid water and put the frog in and slowly heat it, what does he do? He stays there until he is cooked because he does not know it is happening. That is the danger we have in not having our minds open to possible changes, as well as the risks involved in the changes that may occur.

Multi-peril crop insurance is a great foundation stone for the building of sustainability, and the land use option is the second great stone. The third stone is more complex and deals with the structure of the buyers and sellers of agricultural products. I referred to this when I earlier talked about nearly all farming businesses being small businesses, and that those buying the products are very large businesses. The countervailing power is seriously mismatched. There are only two ways that that mismatching can be overcome. One is where small businesses form cooperative entities such as Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd, which I think is a very good corporate entity. It has a cooperative structure in which the shareholders of CBH are the same as those who are using its services.

If CBH was corporatised and had corporate shareholders—different shareholders; it would change very quickly, because in a free market anyone can buy the shares—there would be a dislocation between those who are using its services and those who are providing the services. The dislocation will get larger and larger, and it will be just another company earning a profit providing services to a small business, which is again on the bottom and without any countervailing power.

Where we have big structures that are all-powerful in buying our products, the question is whether we break up the structures. We do not have law as there is in the United States where large corporations are broken down when they reach a point of domination in the market in which they operate.

I have covered three possible ways to deliver the sustainability of agriculture. Regional towns in which agriculture operates are seriously exposed, because the whole survival and economic activity of these towns in the agricultural belt is dependent upon the agriculture around them. If agriculture fails, the towns will fail in nearly every circumstance. Some of them may be able to find something else to keep them going. That is not too different from how the gold mining worked back in the early part of last century for cities such as Kalgoorlie, which had something like 30 000 people. When the gold ran out, a number of those towns fell by the wayside. This is not the finishing up of gold; it is the finishing up of agriculture. As I said, it does not have to happen; there is a way through.

I feel very strongly about the sustainability of agriculture. It requires us to think beyond tomorrow. Perhaps if we had have thought beyond tomorrow 10 years ago, and maybe even further back than that, we would be much better off. We are often our own worst enemies in this area. We do not have that much time that we can waste.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Finance) [5.33 pm] — in reply: First of all let me thank all members who have participated in the second reading debate on these bills. I just want to reflect on the nature of the bills and the participation. The bills we are considering are colloquially referred to as supplementary appropriation bills. They are also referred to as money bills. During the course of the debate the President reminded the house, and possibly supplied some members with some new knowledge, that members can speak on any subject they like in addressing the second reading debate on a money bill. A number of members exercised that prerogative, and I thank them for it.

Our standing orders describe a bill such as this as one that may not be amended. Of course a money bill must originate in another place, and the Legislative Council does not have the option of amending a money bill. No matter how much we might like to tinker with a few lines here and there, we do not have that prerogative. The question before us at all stages of the bill is either to pass it or to reject it. The convention and practice remains that this house passes money bills in recognition of the prerogative of the Legislative Assembly to originate such bills. The indications from all sides of the house are that this bill will indeed be passed. I remind members that we do not have the chance to amend the bill. That raises a question, which I want to discuss briefly in my second reading response, about some considerations that may apply to the committee stage, which we will move to presently.

I have the honour of managing these bills on behalf of the government and as the minister representing the Treasurer. Since I first arrived here, along with Hon Ken Travers and others back in the last decade of the last millennium, I have seen a heck of a lot of money bills go through this place. This is the first time I have had the position I now I have. I am looking at how the bills might be managed through the house in a different light to someone not managing an appropriation bill or someone who is in opposition, as I have been in the past. The question of how to proceed with these bills has been on my mind, and I have given some thought to it. In particular, how do I respond to members who have raised issues, bearing in mind that members can raise and indeed have raised issues about anything they like? Some of those issues are highly debatable points, and I want to return to a couple of those shortly. They are made because a member has a need to raise them—and quite properly so—in this place at this time to get them on the record, but again the question arises of how to respond as the minister in charge of the bill.

I do not think it would be anybody's expectation that I now spend the next 20 or 30 sitting hours debating in turn every matter that has been spoken about during the course of the second reading debate. I do not think anybody would want me to do that. If Hon Col Holt really wants me to do that, he can stay here and do it on his own and he can put the lights out when we have all gone, because I do not think anybody wants me to do that.

Hon Ken Travers: It just prolongs the committee stage if you do not respond now, minister.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: That is a very pertinent point, because a number of issues have been raised that draw on the content of this bill. I think that is a very different matter. I will be seeking to respond to questions raised or other debate about matters that are in this bill and specifically contained in the appended schedules. I will do that in a couple of ways. A few members asked me, if I could, to try to address a few matters in the schedules during the course of my response, and I will be seeking to do that in a moment. Other members are anticipating

the committee stage when they can have a more free-flowing exchange, as we always have during the committee stage, and people can speak more than once on any particular point. We will do that.

By way of exploring this subject a little more, I spoke behind the chair with Hon Ken Travers, who is the member in charge of the debate for the opposition, about how we might go about it. The custom and practice of the house with an appropriation bill and for a Treasurer's advance bill is that the committee stage be conducted, as every other committee stage is, in the Committee of the Whole. Hon Ken Travers raised the possibility that these bills be referred to some other committee process with the view of —

Hon Ken Travers: I was offering it as a suggestion to facilitate debate in the house.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Yes; it would be a way of removing the examination from the plenary session of the house and dealing with it on its return. It was a thoughtful suggestion. The practice and precedent of the house is, of course, that that is not how we do it. That has not been explored any further on this occasion. I do not think that consideration should be part of this debate. However, I want to acknowledge that the matter was raised. It probably needs to be a consideration for another day when considering the practices of the house.

Hon Ken Travers: I made it as a genuine offer to try to facilitate the process. I worry that facilitation of this debate requires senior Treasury officers to be here. I would prefer to have them working on the budget, to be honest with you, rather than have them spend a lot of time down here. It could be a way of reducing the amount of time they sit around here waiting for the debate to come on.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Yes. That leads me to consider the content of the schedules, which is the very substance of what we are debating in these bills. The schedules in themselves do not give the full story. That is why I tabled a paper that provides some more information about the items of expenditure that lie behind the various line items in the schedules—so that members can see how, for example, the figure for the various votes was arrived at. In some cases, of course, there are some offsets and that gives a quite different picture. Those tabled papers are now part of the record and I think will form a useful framework for our Committee of the Whole stage. That is what is in the bill; it does not deal with what is not in the bill. Although during the second reading debate members can canvass any subject they like, I think that in considering the bill in detail we must use as our parameters what is being appropriated and the purposes for which they are being appropriated. No doubt, when we get to the committee stage shortly, we will move through the several clauses fairly briefly and spend the bulk of our time, I predict, debating some of the points on the line items in the schedules and the various further line items contained in my tabled papers. When we come to do that, we will be discussing expenditure that has occurred and, in the course of that, we will touch on some offsetting savings that have been made in the course of the 2009–10 budget expenditure that is supplementary to that appropriated in the original budget. These are expenditures that were contemplated and approved by the house under the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill for that year. Now, of course, there is a requirement that the government now come back and, via these supplementary appropriation bills, say, "Here's what we did with the Treasurer's advance authorisation; here are the details of the extra expenditures; and here is how we account for them." This is an opportunity for the house to contemplate each of those items of expenditure and debate them as they see fit.

How do we do that? I am not the minister responsible for many of these votes; I am just the minister with responsibility for the bill. When the house wishes to inquire after the policy that lies behind some of these expenditures, I will seek to do the best I can to advise the house what the money was spent on. I am certainly required to do that. I will try to give any information members seek on how and why that expenditure became necessary, the approval procedures and the circumstances surrounding it. I think that is how I can best manage this bill and be accountable to the house. Matters might arise from the committee stage examination of the bill that members may wish to pursue with responsible ministers by other mechanisms separately from these proceedings, perhaps by a committee picking up some of the information and looking into it. Away from this bill's progress, further questions may arise that members wish to put to ministers.

Hon Ken Travers: Will that not delay the bill? I doubt we will get the answers very quickly if they are questions on notice. I think the house should have that information before we pass the bill.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I will come in a moment to the nature of the expenditure that is contained in these schedules, but I am not suggesting that we put questions on notice or have other committee inquiries or whatever prior to the passage of this bill. I am just saying that those avenues are available to members if they wish to pursue some of these matters further.

What is in the bills? A number of members indicated in their submissions when addressing the second reading debate on the bill why and when expenditures of this type had occurred. I guess that goes to the heart of what a supplementary appropriation bill is all about. Although we are contemplating the content of these bills now, it is history. It has happened. These appropriations were made, with authorisation, in the 2009–10 financial year, and the moneys have been spent. The government is now required to come back with these bills to account to

Parliament for the moneys that have been expended and say what they were expended for. We must remember that this is not a prospective set of budget items; this is retrospective expenditure. I am not sure what would happen if the house were to exercise its prerogative to not pass these bills? I am sure there are mechanisms —

Hon Ken Travers: If it's defeated in the lower house, the Treasurer pays it back; if it's defeated in the upper house, the Minister for Finance pays it back!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: That is a pithy interjection by Hon Ken Travers. Hansard must mind how that is spelt! May I therefore re-state with some enthusiasm how pleased I am that members have indicated their support for the bills at this stage.

I turn quickly to the contributions members have made. I hope already in the demeanour of my remarks I have indicated my full acceptance of the admonition by a number of members that the government has to justify and account to this house for what it is doing. As the government representative in charge of these bills, I indicate that I fully accept that, and I do so with all respect to the house in just the same way I acknowledge the right of members to raise any other matters here given the opportunity presented by a money bill, even if it is not actually about the matters that we are focussed on in these bills.

Hon Jon Ford opened the batting on behalf of the opposition. He indicated that he wanted to raise some questions about the aerial shark surveillance program, and asked about the \$191 000 for that item contained in the tabled paper. By way of response, I indicate that in 2009–10 an additional \$206 000 was approved to increase aerial shark patrols to include weekdays during the period December 2009 to February 2010. Members may recall that at about that time a number of shark sightings and related incidents occurred off the Western Australian metropolitan coast in particular. Cabinet approved some extra funding to increase the aerial shark patrols, and of the total of \$206 000 approved, an amount of \$191 000 was drawn down against that item, which is reflected in the schedule members have before them. In 2010–11 an additional \$216 000 was added to the estimates, while across the out years revisions upwards ranged between \$227 000 and \$249 000. In 2010–11 the total budget amount is \$420 000.

Hon Jon Ford also asked about a recurrent component of \$48 764 000 related to royalties for regions. I now advise that the increase of \$48.8 million was required for this appropriation item due to an additional \$25 million required to reflect the savings contribution for royalties for regions as part of the government's previously announced corrective measures. This funding was not included in the 2009–10 appropriations but was later appropriated to the fund under the requirements of the Royalties for Regions Act 2009, which was proclaimed on 27 March 2010; that, therefore, could not be considered as part of the 2009–10 budget. Further, a \$23.8 million re-allocation was made from the recurrent appropriation, which was required to deliver various projects within royalties for regions as grants, rather than state-owned infrastructure. Materially, they included grants for Karratha service workers' accommodation and Pilbara health partnership projects.

The honourable member also asked why there was a contribution to the Water Corporation for the state Waterwise rebate strategy. I advise that the state Waterwise rebate strategy closed on 30 June 2009. An amount of \$500 000 was budgeted to meet the wind-up costs and any additional claims made in 2009–10. However, an unexpected number of claims were received from customers when the closure date was announced, and an additional \$2.5 million was provided to the Water Corporation to meet the cost of those claims. The actual amount prescribed in the schedule, of course, is \$2.446 million.

Hon Jon Ford was very helpful in his further remarks in that he referred to a number of matters, as was his prerogative as a private member, and offered his views on those matters. I acknowledge that he referred to funding for regional general health issues. He touched on questions dealing with malnutrition and domestic violence. He spoke about time frames for development of the Pilbara Cities. He queried where the dollar provision was for a range of matters, including those I mentioned, and for emergency services and accommodation in the north west. He then said that he recognised that I could not answer those questions as part of this debate. He simply made the point that I had already made that this second reading debate is a suitable vehicle for members to raise such matters. I was therefore very grateful that he did that as the first speaker on the bill in this debate, and that he was very supportive of the points that I have just made.

Hon Ken Travers made a major contribution commencing, I think, on 24 March when we heard his introductory remarks, which were then expanded upon. He, again, took a very broad view. It is a view that is often and fairly—not necessarily justifiably—expressed by oppositions; that is, whatever we do, we can do better. He indicated that he wanted to examine some of the items shown on these schedules, and he asked why we were paying for them. He is quite entitled to do that. I therefore know that he will be asking me a number of questions at the committee stage. Hon Ken Travers canvassed, as is his prerogative, a wide variety of matters. A lot of his points, although valid to make during this debate, were individual arguments for another day. I get the idea from

the tone of some of his remarks that he is not an admirer necessarily of this government, though he did have some veiled praise for the Premier on one or two occasions.

Hon Ken Travers: If I remember correctly, I think there was one thing I acknowledged you did well. I can't remember what it was now off the top of my head.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: What a pity. Perhaps it has been recorded somewhere for posterity, because it needs to be chiselled in!

Hon Ken Travers: The point is that when you do good things, I will acknowledge them.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: I appreciate the sentiment, in the same way that I acknowledge the right of anyone in opposition to robustly critique the performance of governments. In defence of this government, though, I will not ignore those attacks. But I will not spend much of the house's time chasing every rabbit down every hole. I will simply say that Hon Ken Travers has a view about the performance of this government that is contrary to mine. My view is that I am proud to be a part of this government, and I am proud of what we have achieved, what we are achieving and what we will achieve in the future. But, as ever, I will agree with Hon Ken Travers on his opening remark that, whether we are in government or in opposition, we should always ask the question: how can we do this better? This government, I hope, despite Hon Ken Travers' assertions, is not arrogant. We do accept that we need to keep searching for ways to do things better. We do accept that we have to be accountable and that we will be criticised in a partisan way, because that is the nature of governments and oppositions in public debate. I therefore do not take lightly any of the things Hon Ken Travers has said. But, as I say, a lot of these matters are debates for another day. Time will beat me to the dinner break in a moment, but I indicate that I will offer a further response to the member on a couple of specific matters he raised as they are matters that as Minister for Finance I can legitimately address.

Debate interrupted.

[Continued below.]

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.30 pm