

MARBLE BAR ROAD

916. Hon HELEN BULLOCK to the Minister for Transport:

I am wondering whether the minister would like a copy of the question, because this is a question without notice.

Hon Adele Farina: Aren't you organised!

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: Yes—very well.

Hon Simon O'Brien: We'll see.

Hon HELEN BULLOCK: I refer to the minister's announcement earlier this week about work on Marble Bar Road.

- (1) Is the minister aware of the reports by the Main Roads department that the geometry of this road has contributed to the recent fatal accidents on this road?
- (2) If yes, why has less than \$1 million been allocated to upgrading this road?
- (3) How will a minimal spray and "undertaking minimal geometric and drainage improvements" address the serious safety issues of this road?
- (4) How many more lives have to be lost on this road before the minister and his government do the serious major upgrade that is urgently needed on this vital inland road through the central Pilbara region?

The PRESIDENT: Order! There is a section of that question that borders on making imputations. But I will let the minister answer if he wishes.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN replied:

Thanks, Mr President.

- (1)–(4) There have been some imputations around in the last 24 hours. Let me make it quite clear that this government rejects the proposition that we are playing with people's lives. The Labor Party is to be held in contempt, in that it tries to politicise tragedies when lives are lost on roads. That was exemplified —

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: You just shut up and listen! You come in here with this sort of nonsense!

The PRESIDENT: Order, minister! Resume your seat.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Lower the temperature. There is no need to blow a gasket. Minister, answer the question; and members opposite, stop interjecting.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Mr President, let me say at the outset that the fourth part of the question is quite objectionable, and the assumption contained therein is refuted by the government, in the same way that the extraordinary and defamatory suggestions made by a Labor member yesterday are similarly rejected by the government.

Hon Ken Travers interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I remember saying something about no interjections.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: In relation to the balance of this particularly ill-informed question, which reflects some of the ill-informed comment that we have had in response to a recent announcement by the government about works awarded for Marble Bar Road, let me say this. Of course I am aware of Main Roads department reports about Marble Bar Road in relation to the condition of the road and fatal accidents. Of course I am aware of that, and I am concerned about that. That is why I have asked Main Roads to undertake a variety of actions to address the situation. The situation is this. We have a largely unsealed outback road that is increasingly subjected to a heavier transport task. Larger and heavier vehicles, in greater numbers, are now on that road, and whether it be new users or regular long-term passenger users of this road, that poses some hazards.

The second part of the question says —

- (2) If yes, why has less than \$1 million been allocated to upgrading this road?

The premise of that question is wrong—totally wrong. A number of parcels of money have been provided for upgrading this road. The one that I announced the other day was just one parcel, of almost \$1 million, to

undertake some works over a 33-kilometre section, or number of sections totalling that distance, between Newman and the Roy Hill station section. That is not the only works that have been or will be carried out on Marble Bar Road. The works that have been or will be carried out on Marble Bar Road, whether by Main Roads or in partnership between the state government and several mining companies in the area, are works that did not occur during the time the Labor Party was in government.

Hon Ken Travers: We spent more money on roads than this government is spending. This government has cut the budget!

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: They are the facts, so if Labor members want to make offensive remarks about lives being lost, they need to consider their own record. As I said during my concluding remarks in response to a member's statement last night, if Labor members opposite, whether their spokesman or anybody else, want to stick their heads up and bring on a debate in this house about the Coalfields highway, I say bring it on! We will have a look at the Labor Party's record.

Finally, in relation to question (3), I will take the member in good faith and simply answer the question. I will ignore any imputation, which I am sure is not intended in this part of the question. It is actually a good thing that we are proceeding in the way described because it means that we can stretch the improvements that are happening on the road over a much greater distance. If we were to rebuild Marble Bar Road from Newman through to Marble Bar to current Main Roads standards we would be looking at a cost of at least \$145 million. They are not funds that are going to be found any time soon, but I am determined to do something about the condition of that road. The problem with that road that we can do something about is the conditions of corrugations, because it is unsealed and the problems of dust, particularly dust caused by heavy vehicles because it is unsealed. In an environment of heavy vehicles with three or four trailers using the road and kicking up dust, the dust hangs around in the air and causes a real hazard to other vehicles.

Hon Ljiljana Ravlich interjected.

Hon SIMON O'BRIEN: Members opposite claim to be concerned about saving lives. I am telling members what we will do about it! Therefore, the best thing we can do with the available funds—we are finding more, we are applying more and we are entering into cash-or-kind partnerships with mining companies that use the road—is to seal as much of it as we can. It helps preserve the pavement so that it does not have to be regraded every three years. Using the so-called minimal spray means we can cover a far greater area. We are providing benefits to more of the road. I will provide the member with a briefing on another occasion as to the totality of the works on this road. I hope we do not have any more of this sort of nonsense because, quite frankly, it does not reflect very well on members opposite.