

Dr Tony Buti; Mr Rob Johnson; Acting Speaker; Mr John Quigley; Mr Murray Cowper; Mr David Templeman;
Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Frank Alban; Ms Janine Freeman; Mrs Carol
Martin; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Fran Logan

PREMIER'S STATEMENT

Amendment to Question

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [3.03 pm]: I have a few more comments to make on my support of the amendment. I just want to reiterate that our support for this amendment is not an attack on the firefighters. As I have repeatedly stated today, the firefighters have performed an outstanding service, as was relayed in the media by the Premier. We seek an inquiry that will look at wider issues, which hopefully will actually support the firefighters because, as I stated, I have received numerous communications about insufficient support for the firefighters. If those communications are correct, they are a damning indictment on the minister and this government. However, as I also stated, if it had been a westerly wind that afternoon, the fire would have moved up through Roleystone and we would be looking at a greater disaster. As the member for Darling Range and I have observed, looking at the people who have lost their homes, it is something that none of us would want to see repeated.

Why is the government, which has shown sympathy and acknowledged the grave circumstances of 6 February by providing financial assistance, so stubborn in refusing to have a proper open and independent inquiry?

Mr R.F. Johnson: We're not.

Dr A.D. BUTI: We are not, are we? The terms of reference the government has proposed at this stage and what the Premier mentioned today appear to be insufficient to obtain enough information to prevent this disaster happening in the future. It says that we are going to look at prescribed burning, planning and building regulations. Of course we need to look at those things, I agree, but it does not get to the fundamental issue of how our firefighting services, whether they are voluntary or career, are being supported. There is also the communication issue. No lives were lost—thank goodness no lives were lost. However, as I have stated, if the wind was blowing the other way, I wonder whether I could say that today. I urge the government to please listen to this amendment and support this amendment, because we—I am sure every member, whatever political party—are all here to do the best for the people of Western Australia. Surely, an independent, open, full and wide-ranging inquiry to ensure that our emergency services are properly prepared and geared to fight a disaster is something that we all should support. Nothing I have heard about the government's proposed inquiry gives me confidence that this is the case. More importantly, I do not think it gives the victims confidence. One of the issues we have to look at in recovery is the issue of healing. The victims need to be healed. Eventually their properties will be rebuilt. Some will never return to the hills, but many will. They need to be confident that the government, the state of Western Australia, is in tandem with them during their healing process. Anyone who knows anything about healing and reparations understands that it is not just material reparations that we must provide—that was provided in small measure by the instant relief, which is very much welcome—but also emotional healing and emotional reparations. That is done by listening to the victims and to the firefighters who have been damaged by what they saw and what they had to fight on 6 February.

Therefore, I strongly urge the government to support this amendment. All we are trying to do is improve the situation in Western Australia so that we can fight bushfires in a better, more efficient way in the future. Maybe the inquiry will find that the system we have now is fine. If that is the case, so be it, but it may also make recommendations for improvements. As the member for Girrawheen, the Leader of the Opposition and I have said, we do not seek to apportion blame; we seek to find answers and ways to improve the current system. Therefore, I urge members of this house to support the amendment.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys — Minister for Emergency Services) [3.08 pm]: Obviously, I intend to respond to this amendment to the question before the house, and as I do so I will ask a couple of questions. These are genuine questions. When did the member for Girrawheen go to the Roleystone–Kelmescott fire area?

Ms M.M. Quirk: I didn't say I did.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: So the member has not been there.

Ms M.M. Quirk: I didn't say whether I did or I didn't.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: So the member has not been there.

Ms M.M. Quirk: Talk to the amendment.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: So the member has not been there. I know that the —

Ms M.M. Quirk: No, I was there about three months before the fire happened and said that it was at risk.

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Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That was before the fire, okay. The Leader of the Opposition went on Tuesday, I believe.

Ms M.M. Quirk: Yes.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I believe the Leader of the Opposition went on Tuesday.

Mr J.N. Hyde: Deal with the amendment!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Be quiet—the member for Perth has no credibility whatsoever!

The Leader of the Opposition went on Tuesday.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Wednesday.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Leader of the Opposition went on Wednesday—okay. So the member for Girrawheen who is the shadow spokesperson for emergency services has not even been out there yet. The Leader of the Opposition, with all credibility, and I accept that he in good faith —

Several members interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Members opposite do not like the truth, do they? I accept that the Leader of the Opposition went there to see what was going on and to offer support. I accept that absolutely and I believe that he went there for that reason. However, the member for Girrawheen has not even been there since the fire.

Mr P.C. Tinley: What has that got to do with it?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I will tell the member for Willagee why. If he just keeps quiet for a little while, he will learn something.

The Leader of the Opposition went to the Roleystone–Kelmscott area on Wednesday. Yet, on Tuesday, the day after the Premier and I were there, we get a press release from the Leader of the Opposition. He had not even been there! There is also what is almost a press release within a press release from the member for Girrawheen. She has not been there, but she knows exactly what we need to do: we have to have a royal commission.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Give me a break: 72 houses were burnt down. That's enough! You don't have to go there to recognise the seriousness of that.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: You should be ashamed of yourselves. You are dragging —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Don't be nasty! You don't have to be there to talk to people and know anything.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Why don't you be quiet? I am not talking to you, because you are one of the laziest previous ministers ever, and you will be one of the laziest shadow Treasurers ever! My colleague the Treasurer will look forward to taking you on any day. He will have you for breakfast.

Mr E.S. Ripper: He didn't do so well today!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes, he did!

Here we have the shadow spokesperson on emergency services who has not even been out to that area to see what has happened. She has not even been out there and now she knows about everything.

Mr E.S. Ripper: She knows what needs to be known.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: She knew it the day after the fire! Her press release was issued before the fire had even stopped. I have never seen such crass political point-scoring as I have seen today.

Mr T.G. Stephens: Yes, you have! You used to do it!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Leader of the Opposition is not looking to you for any help! He does not want your help, my friend! He does not like you anymore; you are a naughty boy—and you are incompetent! Those are words of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr P.C. Tinley: And you're so loved by those people behind you, aren't you?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Weren't you one of the Judas team out at the office of the member for Victoria Park? You were one of them!

Mr E.S. Ripper: Where's your support?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: They are all around, do not worry. I will tell you this: this is a serious issue. Basically, the opposition is calling for a royal commission into what happened in Roleystone–Kelmscott.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Think about what happened! Think about the danger!

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Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Of course, I do. I was there! Did you go there? No, you didn't even go out there!

Mr P.C. Tinley interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Why don't you be quiet, my friend? You still haven't learnt; you are still very much a new boy—the same as the member for Armadale, who I think had good intentions. The member for Armadale might be the new boy, but please do not learn the bad habits of the member for Girrawheen and some of the other members opposite. I have a bit of faith in the member for Armadale. He is intelligent and I think that he means well. But I tell you what, the member has been fed some garbage, because some of the comments he has made today are absolute garbage. They are not truthful comments. They were fed to him with a particular reason in mind. I will talk to the member for Armadale outside this chamber, and I will assure him of that. The member for Armadale said there was nobody left to look after the metropolitan area.

Dr A.D. Buti: I didn't say that. I said that's why we need an inquiry—to ensure that is not the case.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I can tell the member for Armadale that it is a rare occurrence when the majority of resources are committed to a fire, such as the Roleystone–Kelmescott fire. However, at the height of the emergencies on that weekend, there were five stations protecting the remainder of the metropolitan area. The information that the member for Armadale is getting is a little bit jaundiced, and I wonder why. There were also local government and Department of Environment and Conservation resources left in reserve.

The member for Girrawheen talked about some of our volunteer firefighters coming from Albany and not being put on immediately to fight the fire. That is part of the operation. If we throw everybody into fighting the fire, there would be nobody to take over when the firefighters have to have a rest. We cannot expect our volunteer firefighters or our career firefighters to fight fires for 48 hours nonstop without rest. It has to be done, like in the Army they would strategically use teams to go out.

Mr P.C. Tinley: How would you know? Have you been there? You say you think you know how the Army operates. Apply the same argument that you've already invoked onto this! You're just a joke! You're a lone, dribbling old joke and you want to find the door, pal, because it's coming.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I thought you would be a good member when you came in, but I have lost that notion now. The member has gone into that typical Labor mould of being a nasty person with a very loud voice—like some other members. Let us get back to the amendment, because that is very important.

I can tell members that there will be a full investigation, inquiry and review, which is always the practice after a major incident. It is not the case after every fire, but after a major incident, such as Toodyay and Roleystone–Kelmescott. That will be carried out by an independent person, Stuart Ellis, who is recognised internationally and throughout Australia as being an expert in that field. He has enormous experience. For anybody in this chamber to insult him by saying that he will give the report that FESA wants is a disgrace. That is what members opposite are saying. For members opposite to say that FESA would appoint somebody who will only give them a favourable report —

Ms M.M. Quirk: That is not what I said.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That is what has been said this morning.

Ms M.M. Quirk: That is not what I have said, though.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That has been said this morning by the member for Girrawheen and others.

Mr J.R. Quigley interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am not talking to you. My mother said if I did not have something good to say —

Mr J.R. Quigley: I know why you don't want to talk because you don't know what to say!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: My mother said if I have nothing good to say about somebody, I should not say anything at all. I use that in relation to the member for Mindarie. I know that he was one of the main instigators who got the member for Pilbara going in the Judas-like action against the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis): Member for Mandurah, I am on my feet. I have reached the limit of my tolerance. I will keep standing and I will start calling people. I direct the minister to come back to the topic on hand, which is the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I will be delighted to, because I want to give an assurance to the house that a full and thorough investigation and review will take place by Stuart Ellis, who will do all the necessary things that need

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to be done. As members opposite know very well, that is a prepared list. He will be dealing with and talking to anybody he needs to.

Ms M.M. Quirk: That is not what it says. It says “key stakeholders”.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The member for Girrawheen did not even go there. I would keep quiet if I were her! The member has got all her information second-hand from certain people, I am sure. I give credit to the Leader of the Opposition, but the point I am making is that before even the Leader of the Opposition went out there, he had issued his press release and the member for Girrawheen had issued hers.

Ms M.M. Quirk: It’s the same one, I suspect.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The same one, yes. I refer to Western Australia’s firefighting capabilities.

Ms M.M. Quirk: That was in the Toodyay report.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, that is what the member for Girrawheen wants; she refers to the relationship between firefighting agencies. I wonder why she is asking for that.

I will go through with members the number of major incident reviews undertaken over the past 10 years: cyclones Vance and Elaine in 1999; the Bellevue HAZMAT fire in 2001; the Karijini incident in 2004; tropical cyclones George and Jacob in 2007; and the Toodyay bushfire in 2009. A review into the Perth metropolitan storms is underway and will come forward, and also the Redhill, Roleystone and Lake Clifton bushfires; they are all underway. In addition to these reviews, there have been numerous external inquiries including the Tenterden fire coronial inquiry in 2003, the Ledge Point fire coronial inquiry in 2003; the Auditor General for Western Australia’s performance examination responding to major bushfires in 2004; and the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee review into fire and emergency services legislation to deal with bushfires in 2006. Members opposite had a majority on that committee, and 98 per cent of those recommendations have been accepted by the government, and some of them have been put into operation. The ones that we could do quickly we have done. We have amended the Bush Fires Act, and the other recommendations are being worked through in legislation and almost certainly a new act will have to be put in place. That was a long and a very good inquiry. There was a review into WA bushfire preparedness in 2009. Have members opposite seen that? We have seen the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission interim and final reports in 2009 and 2010, and the Boorabin bushfire coronial inquiry in 2010. We have had all of those inquiries, and the government has put in place the latest one for Roleystone–Kelmscott.

Ms M.M. Quirk: Can I ask the minister whether the 13 recommendations about Toodyay have been finalised and acted upon?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I will come back to that and give the member that information. The Premier has said quite openly that we will have another and separate inquiry that will not deal with the things that Stuart Ellis is dealing with. There may be some overlap, but, as the Premier said, quite rightly, there are areas that we need to look at that may be able to prevent in the future the significant fires that we saw that weekend—for instance, planning controls. The Minister for Planning and I worked together on guidelines for building in bushfire areas, and they are the guidelines that local authorities now have. We urge people to adhere to those guidelines. Many areas need to be looked at. The member will find out, once cabinet has approved the recommendations and from the report that will come through from the Premier next Monday, I assume, exactly what we are going to do. But the member wanted to call for an investigation into the fire two days after the fire started. What I am saying is that the fire was still burning.

Ms M.M. Quirk: Do you want us to be slack like you and do it six months later?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am sorry?

Ms M.M. Quirk: Oh, nothing.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, the member is being rude again, but that is typical of her. But I just cannot believe that, as the shadow minister, the member has not even been out there yet, and she has not spoken to the residents out there. She may have made a phone call or two —

Ms M.M. Quirk: I have spoken to a number of residents by phone.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Have you?

Ms M.M. Quirk: I left a message with the mayor of Armadale, and I have liaised with the local member.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes, but the other point is that the Leader of the Opposition issued a press release, along with the member’s press release, the day before he had even been out there. The member issued a press release

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calling for a huge inquiry without even going out there and seeing for herself firsthand what the problems were and how devastating it was.

Ms M.M. Quirk: I know what the problems are.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I can tell the member that when the Premier and I went out there on the Monday, we met lots of firefighters there, and we take our hats off to them. They are tremendous people. None of them even intimidated the sorts of things that the member is saying. Every time the fire trucks went by, some of the residents there would clap the firefighters because of the tremendous job that they did. We stopped and talked to some of them. So do not start criticising any of our firefighters for the job that they did, because they did a sterling job, and they had more equipment for that fire than they had for any other previous fire in Western Australia. They had more equipment than any other government had given them. The opposition is trying in a way to blame the government for what happened.

Ms M.M. Quirk: No, we're not. You should be bipartisan. You're making it political.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The opposition is saying, "Did they have sufficient resources?" We gave them more resources than the previous government ever dreamt of.

Mr D.A. Templeman: That is wrong. The previous government made a massive injection into firefighting.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Did it?

Ms M.M. Quirk: Yes, we did.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Show me where. I would be very interested to see. How many Fire Kings did the previous government have?

Ms R. Saffioti: Who introduced the helicopters into the system?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: What—the helitacs? The little ones or the big ones? We have funded more for FESA than the previous government ever dreamt of. We have given the Department of Environment and Conservation more money for its firefighting equipment than the previous government ever dreamt of.

Mr M. McGowan: You've taken a quarter of its budget away.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, we have not. We are funding an extra 102 career firefighters. We are providing funding of \$10 million a year for the next four years for extra water tankers because we know all these things are needed. We are replacing some of the old equipment which the firefighters had when Labor was in government and which they were asking to have replaced. So do not try to tell me that this government has not done everything it can to try to assist our firefighters in fighting these fires.

Dr A.D. Buti: Do the volunteers have the proper equipment?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes, I believe they do.

Dr A.D. Buti: Do they have breathing apparatus?

Ms M.M. Quirk: No, they don't, because they don't have that. They are bush —

Dr A.D. Buti: But they had to fight structure fires. How do they fight a structure fire without breathing apparatus?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I can tell the member that no-one is sent in to fight structure fires without proper equipment.

Dr A.D. Buti: Yes, but volunteers in the hills are legally obliged to do it. That's the point we're trying to make: they are legally obliged to fight structure fires and they don't have the equipment, so how are they going to do it?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Let me just tell the member this, because I have received a couple of notes since he made those comments. He got that information from someone, and I have a pretty good idea who it was. The answer to that part of the question is —

The firefighters attending the incident were appropriately equipped for a defensive rural urban interface strategy (protecting property and exposures from bushfire impact externally)

They are used to fighting fires in the bush; they are used to fighting fires in semi-rural areas where there are properties. The member knows what it is like in Roleystone–Kelmescott. There are houses that, unfortunately, have tremendous overgrowth around them. They have trees hanging over them. They are a disaster waiting to happen. The member knows what caused the majority of the fire there. It was an accident arising from the use of an angle grinder, unfortunately. That is what we assume happened. I do not know what will happen in the future

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about that. I think a person has been charged, so I do not want to go into too much detail about that. However, something like that cannot be foreseen, and with 85 kilometre-an-hour gusts of wind in an area like that where there is so much bush around and between properties, it is a disaster waiting to happen.

Mr E.S. Ripper: There are more —

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I accept that. I believe that is why the Premier wants to have a separate inquiry focusing strategically on some of those areas that would not normally be part of the FESA inquiry. So we are doing that.

Dr A.D. Buti: We are not disagreeing with that, minister, but we are also saying that it has to go further. That is all we are saying. And if you are confident in your answers, you should not fear an inquiry.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: So you want a royal commission.

Dr A.D. Buti: I would be happy if you prove me wrong.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I think we will prove the member wrong.

Dr A.D. Buti: But prove me wrong.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I will prove the member wrong; the government will prove him wrong. I think the opposition has dragged itself down to the lowest point in political point-scoring, which is what it is trying to do. It is using the tragedy of what happened in Roleystone–Kelmscott and the poor people who lost their properties for political point-scoring. It did it on Tuesday. It did not even wait until the fire was out. It thought, “Here we go. We’ll have a go at the Barnett government. We’ll get our boots in there.” I find it disgraceful that the opposition should sink that low. It is not surprising that it is disgraceful. But, member for Girrawheen, I am —

Mr C.J. Barnett: The firefighters were dismayed at that.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Absolutely. A lot of the firefighters I spoke to had nothing but good things to say about the facilities and the equipment that we have been able to give them since we have been in government. They came from everywhere, as they do, because they are a wonderful group of people—not only the firefighters, but also the State Emergency Service volunteers. They are tremendous.

Dr A.D. Buti: Yes, we agree.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Well, the opposition is demeaning them and their actions by simply —

Dr A.D. Buti: We’re talking about the equipment and whether they have enough support. Do you want to go and get *Hansard* to see how many times we have complimented the firefighters? That is so wrong, minister.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The opposition is politicising that tragedy. It should have come out and said, “Look, this has been the nature of the incident. We as an opposition will support the government 100 per cent in everything that we can do to try to ensure that there are not these devastating fires in the future.” That is what the opposition should be doing, but, unfortunately we do not expect the opposition to do it.

Dr A.D. Buti: It is fair enough to criticise us for calling for an inquiry, but don’t say that we are criticising the firefighters. We have not done that, and I take exception to that.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: You take exception to what you like, my friend. You should listen to what your senior colleagues say, because that is what they are implying—that the firefighters not have equipment and that they do not have a voice within government. I can assure the opposition that they have. They have a great team at FESA who care tremendously for all our volunteer firefighters. FESA gives them every bit of equipment, every bit of encouragement and every bit of support that it can—something that was missing under the previous government.

MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Mindarie) [3.28 pm]: There is common ground between the opposition and the government that there needs to be an inquiry. It is the structure of the inquiry that is really the contentious issue. No-one in this chamber today has cast any aspersions on the inquiry, Mr Stuart Ellis or his capability to conduct an inquiry. However, the grave concern is the protection of witnesses who come before the inquiry. Victims who have lost their houses might want to criticise the way in which their properties were defended or the preparation or the planning issues involved in the situation of the properties. Unless there is a properly structured judicial inquiry, none of these people will be protected from the law of defamation when they make submissions. It could be a volunteer firefighter or a public servant who wants to make a criticism of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority or a criticism of the way in which a particular group was defending the fire assault. The government must make clear to the victims, the public servants and the volunteer firefighters that, in its inquiry, the victims will be stripped of any protection. It is terrible for them to have gone through such an event and not be able to candidly state their views. Similarly, public servants who know something about the matter will not be able to candidly give their views to the inquirer without the risk of defamation. That is why a royal commission was

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established in Victoria. It is the very reason a royal commission was held after the Dwellingup fire. People cannot come before these inquiries and express their concerns candidly unless they are protected from defamation. The government has form. It is the same in the Spratt case when the Premier specifically resisted a public inquiry, but once the Corruption and Crime Commission established an inquiry, officers were able, with full protection, to contradict the Commissioner of Police's version of events that he played out through his press releases.

The fire victims have already lost their homes. They will be facing an inquiry naked of protection from defamation. We all thank the volunteer firefighters for the extraordinary effort they made in fighting this fire. If they go to put in their two bob's worth, they will know that this government does not hold them in sufficient regard to protect them from the laws of defamation. This is the tragedy for the public servants and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority people who might want to say something about the preparations that were made to fight the fire. They are not protected so their superiors could sue them. It is just not satisfactory that the people who have lost everything could in this inquiry be left exposed to the threat of defamation proceedings. Royal commissions and judicial inquiries provide full protection for witnesses who come before them. These people, who have suffered so much already, can speak the truth as they understand it and be protected; they can raise concerns about what has gone wrong or about why they have lost their family home. That is why there is a point of difference between the opposition and the government. We care to protect the volunteer firefighters; we care to protect the public servants; and, most of all, we care to protect the victims who might want to come before the inquiry and give their account of the truth as they understood it, without the fear that they could receive a lawyer's letter threatening them with defamation for what they might say to the inquirer.

MR M.J. COWPER (Murray–Wellington — Parliamentary Secretary) [3.32 pm]: I will not hold up the chamber for too long, but I want to put on record that certain procedures exist within organisations to address incidents of this kind. I am speaking from a personal perspective. I have been in charge of a number of serious incidents, including fires, cyclones and lost people. Two common issues that arise at debriefs held subsequent to those major incidents are communications and training. I do not recall ever having been to any incident at which those two issues have not become critical. No matter how much training we provide or how good the communications at the time, they can always be improved.

The notion that the member for Mindarie proffered was that a royal commission should be held so that witnesses can be protected. I do not subscribe to that view. Will it mean that every time there is a fire from now on we will hold a royal commission into it? For instance, there was a fire last night at Lockridge, and my brother was there fighting it. Will we call for a royal commission into it? Will the opposition call for a royal commission into the Lake Clifton fires, where 10 homes were destroyed? Four years ago in 2007, fire swept across my electorate including Dwellingup, through the Coolup valley almost into Waroona. Sixteen homes were destroyed on that occasion. Is the opposition calling for a royal commission into that fire?

Several members interjected.

Mr M.J. COWPER: I understand that the opposition has a role to play. It has called for a royal commission because it seems to be the right thing to do.

Mr E.S. Ripper: How many more of those fires do we have to have before we do something about it?

Mr M.J. COWPER: I have some concerns in relation to the Fire and Emergency Services Authority but not with its operations around fires. The rank and file within FESA work quite well.

Mr D.A. Templeman: You keep mentioning that there were deaths. Do you have to have some deaths before you do something about it?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr J.M. Francis): Thank you, member for Mandurah. You were not in the chamber the last time I got to my feet. Am I making myself perfectly clear? I call the member for Mandurah for the third time.

Mr P.C. Tinley: Should 100 houses be destroyed before you have an inquiry—72 or 75? What is the number; where is the line?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Willagee.

Several members interjected.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Thank you, Mr Speaker. In 1961 a royal commission was held as a result of a fire that wiped out almost a complete town. It lost its industry and numerous places were destroyed. A number of recommendations were made as a result of that royal commission. We saw them played out in a royal commission following the 2009 Victorian fires—the same recommendations were made in 2009 as those in

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1961; they related to prescribed burning. That is an area we need to revisit. If we do not reduce the fuel loadings within our forests, we will have significant problems.

I am here to tell members that forest fires and fires in bushland areas will continue in the future, and they cause me grave concern. I was gravely concerned when I was in charge of the Denmark Police Station. We ran some simulated fire exercises down that way involving our emergency services, including the State Emergency Service, bush fire brigades and local fireys. FESA came down and did some fuel hazard analysis on the forest near Lights Road, not far from where the member for Blackwood–Stirling lives, in fact. The fuel loadings in that karri forest were 90 tonnes per hectare, when the acceptable level of fuel loadings in the forest in that part of the world was four tonnes per hectare. Some areas of our state give me real concern.

Closer to the peripheral urban environment of Leschenault, in my electorate, just north of Australind, the fuel loadings and the number of beautiful homes built right on the lovely Leschenault estuary are of grave concern to me. If a bushfire runs through that place, many, many homes will be lost. It concerns me that we might even lose lives. It is a miracle that we did not lose lives in the fire at Lake Clifton. I am very pleased there was no loss of life among our friends who live in the Kelmscott hills. We have been very, very lucky here in Western Australia. I think the last death as a result of a fire was, unfortunately, in Toodyay when a schoolteacher drove off the road. It was a very tragic event. Some time ago I was talking to the crews at Julimar about that incident.

I understand that the opposition has a job and it is here to hold the government to account. But in this instance let the experts within the organisation examine the issues surrounding that fire and look at what can be done to improve operations. I think we already pretty much know that the fire at Kelmscott was, unfortunately, accidentally lit by a person. I am sure we all understand his situation—he made a mistake. What was very pleasing to see in the reports on television was the forgiving nature of the people whose homes were destroyed.

Mr E.S. Ripper: In conversation with some of those people, it struck me as amazing that people who lost their homes could be so gracious.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Indeed. In contrast to that, in my neck of the woods, I spoke to a bloke named Joe Ferarro, who was not insured. He lost everything. The only things he was left with were what he stood in. His business was roof carpentry. His machinery, including bobcats, which were housed on his small acreage, were totally destroyed. He was not so forgiving, primarily because it was understood, although not proved, that that fire was deliberately lit. That particular fire was attended by circumstances of criminality—in fact, arson—so why has the opposition not called for a royal commission into it? It is only a miracle, as pointed out by a member opposite, that no lives were lost. I am very pleased that no lives were lost. The reason no lives were lost, and the way the fires were contained to a certain degree, comes down to the great efforts of our volunteer firefighters. One thing that came out at Lake Clifton was the need to support the Lake Clifton and Preston Beach volunteer bush fire brigades. They are struggling for numbers. Volunteerism for those fire units is diminishing. A royal commission is essentially what this motion calls for. I have been involved in royal commissions; it is not a pleasant place to be, being quizzed by the likes of now judge Kate O'Brien. It is not a comfortable place to be. Let the experts look at this fire. I think it will be conclusive as to what caused it. The experts will consider how things can be improved and what needs to be put in place to mitigate the effects of fire; that is, preparedness, response and repair.

To jump at shadows because the opposition wants to be seen to be doing the right thing is not doing this place and its members any favours whatsoever. If there was some merit to it I would support members opposite, but I do not believe there is merit in this instance. Once upon a time fires were investigated by police and reported to the coroner. The way we are structured nowadays, we have a designated team, including investigators from the Fire and Emergency Services Authority, and when circumstances of criminality exist the arson squad is involved. They go into great depth and have access to resources. The American Federal Bureau of Investigation is one of those resources. It had access to investigative techniques that we never had a few years ago. I am very confident that, where possible, that arrangement will rise to the top and be exposed. For whatever reason, I do not know, members opposite are calling for a royal commission. I believe the shadow minister, the member for Girrawheen, is a genuine person who has a genuine interest in the safety of the people of Western Australia. She is doing a pretty darn good job. I do not support her on that basis. There is probably not an electorate more fire prone than the one I represent. Thank you, members.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [3.42 pm]: It is very important that I place on record a couple of important points. In the Premier's earlier tirade, and if I can call it a contribution by the Minister for Emergency Services, an offensive insinuation was made that by bringing this motion to the house members on this side do not support the magnificent volunteers within our communities, and indeed within other communities throughout Western Australia, who have responded to what was a horrific fire emergency. That is offensive. Of course it

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also includes those people who are career personnel. The Premier and the minister made offensive remarks to insinuate that by bringing this motion forward, we on this side do not absolutely 100 per cent support the people in our community who put their own lives on the line to support and assist people in peril, and their properties, who face the disastrous effects of fires or other disasters. We have to put that on record. The member for Armadale put it very well but tried to do that a number of times whilst the minister and the Premier were speaking. How dare the government have a go and say that we do not care! The fact is, we do.

The reason this motion is before this house today is that we need to learn the lessons of the past. The last royal commission into a major disaster such as a bushfire emergency was in 1961—50 years ago—when the township of Dwellingup and the hamlet outside it, Holyoake, were threatened to be wiped out. The populations there gathered on the oval in Dwellingup to shelter—the only place they could shelter—wondering whether the fire would consume them. One of the things we must do in Western Australia is look at the history of emergency management in other states of Australia. I chaired the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee that looked at our own emergency management legislation. One of the differences Western Australia has is that up until last week—indeed even up until the 1961 disaster—we had not had a major catastrophic loss of life, unlike what occurred in Victoria in the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983 and the Tasmanian bushfires earlier than that. Immediately after those disasters there was a change in the legislative regime in those states. After the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983, the Victorian government initiated major legislative change. In Western Australia we have not had the catastrophic loss of life that triggered legislative change, major inquiries and indeed major judicial inquiries like those that recently followed upon the disastrous and tragic bushfires in Victoria, only two years ago. That does not mean that this state should not ensure that it has the most modern legislation and resourced organisations, be they volunteer or career firefighters, in the country. The member for Murray–Wellington thought that we had been lucky; I agree with him. We have been fortunate not to have had catastrophic loss of life, but we have had loss of life. That in itself is a great tragedy. Do not come in here, whether the Premier or the minister, and insinuate that I or anyone else here does not understand the gravity and the tragedy that people experienced not only last week, and not only in the Lake Clifton areas south of my own electorate, but indeed anywhere that people have faced calamity during other emergencies that are not of a bushfire nature.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Were you the chairman of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Absolutely. You sat on the committee!

Mr R.F. Johnson: No, I did not.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: You were on the committee with Larry Graham.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Sorry?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No; you actually got off the committee. You were on the committee but you got off.

Mr R.F. Johnson: You looked at the emergency services legislation and what should be done.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The issues of emergency management.

Mr R.F. Johnson: That committee made about 90-odd recommendations for changes to the Bush Fires Act—was that the one?

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: There were a number of recommendations.

Mr R.F. Johnson: You never took it to cabinet in the two years!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, minister; you've had your chance. I have only 15 minutes.

Mr R.F. Johnson: It took us to come to government.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: No, no; the minister is missing the point totally.

The member for Mindarie put this very well: we have had a number of very, very tragic events. The opposition is asking, I think quite rightfully, that we have a thorough judicial investigation to ensure that we put ourselves at the forefront in Australia, knowing that we have in place the best possible procedures and the best legislation to underpin that. That is what we are asking for. The minister has already attacked members on this side for insensitively attacking volunteers. That is absolute rubbish, and the minister knows it!

Mr R.F. Johnson: I am accusing you of gutter politics by coming out, before you had been to the fire —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: However, the minister will not admit it. He will not be big enough to admit it because he will then go off on a tangent to talk about other things, as he did during his contribution in this house. He is

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supposed to be the Minister for Emergency Services! It is a fact that since 1961, when the last royal commission into a major bushfire catastrophe took place, the urban fringes of the Perth metro area have grown dramatically. In fact, many of the places that were threatened probably did not exist as major urban centres in 1961. As the population of the Perth metro area has grown, and indeed spread further south into the Peel region, we have pushed more and more of our population into the hills and into the areas of the members for West Swan and Swan Hills. The member for Swan Hills distracts me because he has moved from where he was! I used to be able to attack him over there, but I now have to go over there! The fact is that the Perth population has expanded rapidly and over that time we have allowed people to do all sorts of things. We have let local government authorities allow planning approvals for dwellings made of wood right underneath canopies of very highly treed areas on blocks of land that slope dramatically. We have allowed a range of things to occur over the past 50 years. Is it not now timely to look very carefully at the procedures and processes that we have in place for responding to an emergency? We and local government authorities must properly examine those aspects when people choose to live in places that are absolutely vulnerable, as they are and have been proven to be in the past few weeks. To do that, as the member for Mindarie put very clearly, we need to allow not only for that examination to be transparent and open, but also for people to have their say no matter what their experience or their circumstances. No matter whether they are or were a victim; no matter whether they are people who work for a local government; and no matter whether they are public servants who work in the emergency services area, they should have absolute confidence that they can appear before an appropriate review or judicial inquiry, have their say and have the relevant protection. That is the point the member for Mindarie made. That, in itself, is a compelling argument on the intention of this amendment to the motion.

Mr R.F. Johnson: No, the intention is to condemn this government. That's what it is.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Yes, because we are.

Mr R.F. Johnson: That's what you said in your amendment for not having the inquiry.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: We should be condemning the minister's performance in his speech, because his speech was appalling.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Give us a break! We have told you it's going to happen. Wait until Monday.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister's speech, as the person who should be leading the cabinet on issues in emergency services, was appalling. It was outrageously appalling; and it demonstrates the lack of confidence many people have in him holding that position, quite frankly. Rather than talk about the seriousness of the issue, he decided to go off on a tangent. He may think that is funny.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I don't think it's funny at all.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The minister thought it was funny when he was having a go at a couple of members on this side of the house about issues totally unrelated to the issue.

Mr R.F. Johnson: You don't like it.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: This issue is far more important than that.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Of course it is.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: But the minister, as a person who should be leading and demonstrating his knowledge and experience in his portfolio—if he has it—should have been strong enough to demonstrate that. He did not. He failed dismally. The Premier failed dismally, too, because he decided that he would simply become personal and try to paint members on this side of the house as people who do not support volunteers in their communities. The fact is that every member of this place supports those people who are members of their community, whether they be career firefighters, members of emergency services or volunteers. There is not one member of this place on either side of the house who does not support those very important people in our community.

I urge government members to understand the intention of the amendment to this motion. It is an amendment that should be supported. It is an amendment that has a very clear intention; that is, to make sure that we put ourselves in a position so that Western Australia can continue to lead in its capacity to respond to these calamities that we have experienced, unfortunately, in all too great a frequency in the past few years.

Forget the rubbish about having a go at each other and saying, "You don't care about people, and you don't care about people." That is rubbish! I am on three strikes, so I have to be careful. Let us debate the issue. Let us make sure that we do the right thing by the people who have lost everything. Let us make sure we do the right thing by the people who have put their lives on the line to go out and help out their mates—career firefighters who were there, volunteers who were there and the people who came after to support what happened afterwards—and that

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we are actually dinkum about this. Do not come into this place and try to denigrate members opposite, as both the Minister for Emergency Services and the Premier did a few moments ago.

Amendment put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (24)

Dr A.D. Buti	Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mr P. Papalia	Mr T.G. Stephens
Ms A.S. Carles	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr R.H. Cook	Mr M. McGowan	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr P.C. Tinley
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mrs C.A. Martin	Mr E.S. Ripper	Mr A.J. Waddell
Mr J.N. Hyde	Mr M.P. Murray	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr A.P. O’Gorman	Ms R. Saffioti	Mr D.A. Templeman (<i>Teller</i>)

Noes (28)

Mr P. Abetz	Mr V.A. Catania	Dr G.G. Jacobs	Mr C.C. Porter
Mr F.A. Alban	Dr E. Constable	Mr R.F. Johnson	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr C.J. Barnett	Mr M.J. Cowper	Mr A. Krsticevic	Mr A.J. Simpson
Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr M.W. Sutherland
Mr I.M. Britza	Mr J.M. Francis	Mr P.T. Miles	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr T.R. Buswell	Mrs L.M. Harvey	Ms A.R. Mitchell	Dr J.M. Woollard
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Mr A.P. Jacob	Dr M.D. Nahan	Mr J.E. McGrath (<i>Teller</i>)

Pairs

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr B.J. Grylls
Mr M.P. Whitely	Mr J.J.M. Bowler
Mr P.B. Watson	Dr K.D. Hames

Amendment thus negatived.

Consideration Resumed

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [3.59 pm]: I rise to respond to the Premier’s Statement. This is my first speech in this house since becoming the Labor Party’s sustainable living spokesperson, so it is an opportune time for me to outline how sustainable living relates to my electorate of Gosnells and many electorates across Western Australia. It is important to say from the outset that sustainable living is an issue that reduces our environmental impact, but in this speech I will outline the interface between sustainable living and good social policy. It is essential that we think about reducing our impact on the environment but at the same time ensure that the needs of people who are suffering the consequences of increased cost-of-living pressures are also met. We must ensure that we are able to achieve an outcome that gives people a better quality of life, improved standards of living and more environmentally sustainable lifestyles.

In recent times we have had to face incredible hikes in utility bills; there was a 45.6 per cent increase in power bills and there is a likelihood of further increases in the years to come. I note that in the Premier’s Statement the Premier apologised to Western Australians for having to feel the pain of those price hikes. It is one thing to make some form of apology for those things, but it is another to look at means of alleviating the pain that people are suffering. Before going back to that issue, I want to talk about some of the difficulties that people have faced because of the electricity price hikes. For example, in 2010 the St Vincent de Paul Society reported a 46 per cent increase in demand for its utility assistance programs compared with 2009. Of the 10 000 people who sought assistance, 34 per cent sought assistance specifically for power and gas bills.

It perhaps seems strange when we are going through a heat wave to reflect on the consequences of the cold snaps that were faced by Perth citizens in July 2010, but I think it is worth recalling. In July 2010, a woman in Bayswater aged in her 80s died on a night when the temperature dipped to 0.8 degrees. These climatic circumstances that we face impose a huge cost on our society and sometimes that cost is tragic. The St Vincent de Paul Society is concerned about not only the people who come through its doors, but also the people who do not present at all—those people do not know of the society’s services and do not seek its assistance. The charity has experienced a 30 per cent increase in general welfare calls and provided over \$200 000 in assistance in the last financial year.

In the Gosnells electorate there are examples of how much people are struggling when it comes to paying their Synergy bills. Let me tell members about the case of a woman who has lived in a private rental property in the southern suburbs for some seven years. During that time no maintenance has been done on the house at all. Members can imagine the general deterioration of the house; it has become draughtier and increasingly expensive to heat in winter and to cool in summer. It is a home that unfortunately has been allowed to deteriorate

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into such a state of dilapidation that electricians refuse to work on the home. This is not the fault of the tenant in the property, but a case of the landlord not taking responsibility. As a result, the tenant faces a disconnection warning from Synergy and has an outstanding bill of \$2 885. This person has applied for a grant under the hardship utility grant scheme, HUGS, and is hopeful of getting that assistance to pay the bills. The real point here is that that sort of situation could be avoided if we were serious about improving our housing stock. That is the real theme of my speech here this afternoon: we must look at means to improve the quality of our housing stock so that properties are affordable to live in and do not require us to suffer ridiculously large bills because of the heating and cooling costs. As a consequence, homes will be less demanding on our resources, contribute less to greenhouse gas emissions, and be easier and more comfortable for people to live in.

I have another example of someone who has had to use the HUG scheme, in this case for the sum of \$1 019. This person has received approval to use the HUG scheme. In this example the resident has a type of bone cancer and has had titanium placed in their shoulder to help alleviate the pain from this terrible illness. In that state of health this person must use air conditioning—there is just no way around it—and as a consequence they have a \$1 000 Synergy account. The need for air conditioning is unavoidable in this home, no question, but the amount of air conditioning could be reduced if the housing stock was maintained to a quality that would allow for more efficient cooling or allow the house to be organised in such a way that heat would not get into it to the same extent.

Mr A.J. Simpson: How do you feel about black roofs on houses?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I will get to that issue later, member. I thank the member for raising the issue. I have a few points to make about the government's strategic approach to dealing with these HUGS cases. A good initiative is the hardship efficiency scheme, which was brought into effect in December 2008. That program aims to help people who are facing big bills and give them the wherewithal and means to make their homes more efficient. The scheme is a good initiative, but it has not been reviewed. We desperately need to know how effective the scheme has been. I think the concept sounds great, but we need information on how well it is performing. The program was initially set up for a six-month period—there is no question that there is a demand for it—and it is available to people who are selected customers or engaged in the HUG scheme. The hardship efficiency scheme needs refining—this touches on an issue that the Minister for Environment has already gone into—which brings me to the showerhead exchange program. I was encouraged to hear about that program initially, because I thought that it showed at last that the Barnett government has seen we need to return to the Waterwise campaign that was such a feature of the Gallop and Carpenter governments. We must realise that people look for government assistance to make their homes more waterwise or energy efficient. The design of that particular scheme was a timid dipping of the toes in the water, because it is probably a scheme that is a little out of date. Most people who have the ability to dismantle their existing showerhead, take it to Bunnings, get the paperwork together to apply for a new showerhead, make the exchange at Bunnings and then install the new showerhead in their homes have probably already done so. I think there is another cohort of people who are not as inclined to do those home maintenance-type activities. Those people need the assistance and someone to come and install the new waterwise, nine-litres-a-minute showerhead. I am thinking of people who are elderly, incapacitated in some way or perhaps simply not inclined to home maintenance activities. Seventy thousand showerheads have been obtained by the government for distribution through the shower swap scheme. I am sure that they will all be allocated to homes, which is a good thing. Broadly speaking, we need much more when it comes to home sustainability initiatives.

I turn now to some other aspects of current programs. I have touched on the need for public review of the hardship efficiency program, because it is critical to ensure the best value for money from these schemes. I note that in 2008–09, some 357 people receive the benefit of a HEP audit.

Some research has been done into an interesting area; namely, the benefit we would get if we moved from a five star Building Code of Australia rating to a six-star rating. That sounds like we are going from one very high level to one slightly above, but information indicates that a six-star rating home consumes 75 per cent of the energy of a five-star-rated home. Therefore, it is quite a considerable improvement. It is all about improving the quality of our housing stock, and finding the means to do that and realising the consequences of not doing it. If we do not do it, we could face circumstances like Europe faced in 2003: a heatwave that went through northern Europe with an enormous cost. There was a death toll of some 60 000 people across northern Europe in the European summer of 2003 because of the heatwave conditions and the fact that the buildings were not adapted to those kinds of temperatures. We see also submissions from our own WACOSS and its report “The Rising Cost of Living in WA: August 2010”. The report states —

The demonstrated consequences of limited or no access to essential services such as water and energy include deterioration in physical health, significant psychological impacts and exclusion from

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education, employment and the life of the community. The declining affordability of essential services is causing some people to consume less than they need to for fear of the cost. The issue of under-consumption of essential services such as electricity is a major one. It forces us to address the hidden numbers of people who are compromising their health and wellbeing because they can't afford to use as much energy as they need.

That is an interesting point. Many people who are low consumers of water and energy, are under-consuming. If they were to consume more, they would be living better, functioning better and making better contributions to our society. We must not have a situation in which some people are too scared to use either heating or cooling appliances because they fear the bills. I urge the state government to provide information on the effectiveness of the HEP program and to deliver better outcomes to people under the financial stress of increased utility bills.

I also wish the state government to consider the potential health benefits of increasing energy efficiency stringency requirements in rental and in public housing. To that end, we have a perfect opportunity to do it when we see presented to this house certain amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act, especially amendments to section 42. There is scope to dramatically improve the quality of rental accommodation in Western Australia. I might come back to that issue if time permits. Energy auditing of WA's public housing stock is critical to all this; we need to know the standard. Indeed, our government has committed us to do such a thing: the state government has committed us to the national strategy on energy efficiency when the Barnett government signed up to that strategy in July 2009. Through that program, we are committed to auditing our public housing in Western Australia. Therefore, I will certainly be pushing the Minister for Housing on the audit of public housing so that we can understand the real rating of public housing in all forms of energy and water efficiencies.

I have another public housing case study from my electorate. This is an example of the impact of a lack of action on this issue. A single mum and her 15-year-old daughter were referred to the hardship utility grant scheme because her Synergy account was \$488. She says that during the summer the heat is unbearable because of the way that her house is set up. There is no shading of windows. She does not have security screens on windows, so she cannot air the house at night. There are no ceiling fans and there is no insulation in the roof either. Therefore, she has been forced to buy a small air conditioning unit to somehow get through the summer, but as a consequence her bills are high. To get through a Perth summer these days in a substandard house, there is no question that an air conditioner is needed. To get through a Perth summer without air conditioning—of course, the Premier is an expert on this matter—security screens are needed on windows to let the cooler night air in, although I do not think it was really the case last night! It certainly makes a difference to my place being able to air the house out overnight. Decent window treatments are needed so curtains or blinds can be closed when people go out during the day, to ensure that no excess heat comes into the house. It is necessary to shade glazing that is facing to the east, north and west, thus keeping out the heat of the sun.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Of course, it is necessary to draught-proof a house. That is obviously an issue in winter, but also in summer, in ensuring that no areas have hot air gushing in. Ceiling fans are needed; these can make a huge difference to people's sleeping comfort and being able to avoid air conditioning.

I am disappointed that I have not received a response to a question on notice I submitted to the Minister for Housing back in November. I asked these very questions: How much of public housing contains ceiling fans? How much of it has security screens? How much of it has roof installation? I am desperately waiting for those figures because they will give us a clearer understanding about the state of public housing. These are things that we need to understand, because if we are not providing these basic things to people, we are lumbering them with properties that are extremely uncomfortable to live in or perhaps just plain expensive to moderate the comfort levels in.

I touched earlier on the importance of roof insulation. We in Western Australia need to acknowledge the success of the federal government's insulation program. I know that in the federal electorate in which I live some 8 000 homes were insulated. I have yet to hear of a single house fire or a single problem across Western Australia; there have been no problems. We have many homes that have benefited from having that insulation installed.

I turn now to the difficulties faced by tenants in private rental homes. It could be said that they are really a disadvantaged group. Indeed, 24 per cent of the population is in rental accommodation; that is a significant proportion. In my electorate, 24 per cent of people live in some form of rental accommodation. I think that is pretty well the case across most electorates, as we have a statewide average of around 24 per cent. Of those, 50 per cent are on Centrelink benefits. We are not talking about wealthy people who rent. There would be some cases of wealthy people renting, for sure, but in at least 50 per cent of cases, we are talking about people on Centrelink benefits; namely, people who are quite strapped financially. These people have to cop the stress of

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these increased utility costs, and do not really have the opportunity to access the sorts of schemes that a property owner would be able to access. That is another area in which government policy change is so desperately needed. We need to ensure that we are actually providing landlords with the incentives, the encouragements, and, I think more than anything, the education to realise that there are opportunities to access schemes to improve the quality of their housing stock. I referred earlier to section 42 of the Residential Tenancies Act. It strikes me that by amending that act to insist on, and regulate for, some minimum energy and water efficiency standards in private rental housing, we could lift the standard in a uniform way across the whole private rental property sector and ensure that people have far better quality of housing. It would be fair—all landlords would be required to do this and would, of course, have access to all kinds of government assistance schemes. At the same time, landlords would be ready for the capital gain that they could achieve and they could access the negative gearing mechanisms that enable them to do so well out of investment properties. There are any number of schemes to make it affordable for landlords to invest in the quality of the properties they rent to people; however, we need to ensure that those rental properties are of a satisfactory standard.

A very comprehensive review was carried out by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute into the environmental sustainability of Australia's private rental housing stock. A key finding of that report was that we have to do better to educate landlords on the different opportunities that are available, such as the home insulation program. Landlords were not really aware they could access that program and improve the quality of their housing. It was not anything that would see them out of pocket; on the contrary, they would actually improve the quality of the property they own and increase the value of their assets. Therefore, it is unfortunate that it seems so few private landlords actually took advantage of that opportunity. It is vital that we help landlords understand the financial benefits of improving the quality of the housing stock.

It is true to say that tenants in private rental are disadvantaged in other ways. It is unlikely that they will be able to access things such as the 47c per kilowatt that someone in a private property gets for putting photovoltaic panels on their roof. There are other schemes that private rental tenants are unable to access in the same way as a private owner. Therefore, looking after the quality of the housing stock really means that we need to have some significant policy action when it comes to influencing the owners of rental properties in areas such as ensuring that they supply efficient hot water systems. There are all too many rental properties that have old-fashioned electric storage heaters, so immediately the tenant is burdened with an expensive way to heat water; therefore, we need to ensure that those hot water systems can be converted. Synergy provides figures that there are many vulnerable households that will in fact turn off essential heating, cooling and hot water services rather than face the stress of not paying bills. Synergy's own research indicates there are people who in a way under-consume so that they can avoid the indignity and frightening circumstances that come when they must deal with a bill that is too large to pay. Clearly, we should set some minimum energy efficiency standards for our housing stock and the Residential Tenancies Act provides a means for us to deliver that. I do not believe that lifting the whole of the housing stock would increase the rent that people will be required to pay because, after all, the amount of rent that people can demand is market-driven. If the improvement of standards is uniform across the entire rental sector, we will simply have a situation in which people can look for properties but there would not be an actual increase in rental prices. It is essential that we ensure that basic things such as ceiling insulation, security screens, windows and doors with proper treatments and energy-efficient hot water systems are in place so that people do not have ridiculously large bills to deal with.

A system called a mandatory disclosure scheme is also coming into effect, supposedly in May of this year. It will be an opportunity for people to declare the energy efficiency rating of the property they are selling or about to lease. I think it is very important we have that scheme. It has been committed to through the national strategy that I referred to earlier and is therefore something that the Western Australian government is committed to, as are all governments. I understand at the moment that the program exists only in the Australian Capital Territory, but the national strategy for energy efficiency makes the commitment that we will have a phase-in of mandatory disclosure of residential buildings and their energy, greenhouse and water performance. That disclosure will come on at the time of the sale or lease of a property, and the scheme is supposed to commence in May 2011. I think that would again have a huge benefit for the quality of our housing stock. It would, of course, improve the situation for rentals because it provides for properties that are about to be leased. People looking to buy a property will also get the benefit of a rating and it would lead people in the marketplace to compete. If someone is trying to sell their home and they are keen to sell it more quickly than someone who has a very similar property down the street, they will want to ensure that their property is more energy efficient with a better rating. There are a whole lot of issues around how we develop that rating system and that is very important. We have got to get the detail on that right, but the broad policy is excellent.

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I note that we have had reviews into the Residential Tenancies Act 1987. The Stamfords review in 2001 was hesitant, in fact, I think dismissive of the idea of having mandatory requirements for energy and water efficiency. However, things have changed dramatically since the Stamfords report was first written as a result of a review or updating of the Stamfords report by the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection a couple of years ago, which is now of course part of the Department of Commerce. The view was that some minimum standards should apply to security, so we can see that clearly there is a desire to include security, a key component of being able to manage a home's climate and comfort adequately, in the Residential Tenancies Act in accordance with the recommendations from DOCEP. I think those amendments will be a positive start.

I conclude by saying that our Western Australian housing stock in the rental sector is not of a good standard at the moment; we are lumbering people with ridiculously large energy and water bills simply because of the poor quality of the properties. There is much to be done. This issue affects 24 per cent of the people in my electorate—a similar percentage across most other electorates. We must act on this. We must also, of course, act in the new homes sector. There is much to be done there to improve the quality of housing. The housing product that is made available to people so often may appear initially affordable, but in fact turns out to be something that provides them with a constant stream of expensive energy bills. I look forward to hearing from other members and working with ministers on improving the quality of our Western Australian housing stock.

MR A.J. SIMPSON (Darling Range — Parliamentary Secretary) [4.30 pm]: I will reply to the Premier's Statement in terms of my electorate of Darling Range. As members would be very much aware, it is the biggest seat in the metropolitan area, covering over 2 000 square kilometres. It is a challenge trying to get around my electorate and to service a wider community that is situated across a vast area with no real major shopping precinct, but rather is served by small community stores.

It was great last week when the new Minister for Transport came to look at the issues in my electorate. I thank the minister for coming to look at the issues concerning the extension of Tonkin Highway and to hear his thoughts on it and how we can proceed to continue that highway from Thomas Road in Byford through to South West Highway, south of Mundijong. That would be a great asset to my electorate. Considering the growth which is occurring in Byford and which is planned for the Mundijong–Whitby area, the extension to the Tonkin Highway will definitely be needed in the coming years. It was great to have the opportunity to show the minister that area.

Another issue I will talk about is evolving, as Byford is growing at a steady rate. I think the shire is the fastest or second fastest–growing metropolitan shire in the country; it is up there. Byford is being driven by the Byford structure plan and is growing at a very fast rate. The train service to Byford is an issue that is constantly raised by my constituents. I was glad to brief the Minister for Transport on that. We need to look at electrifying the rail line from Armadale out to Byford and then further on to Mundijong. Obviously, the most compelling factor beside cost is having the population to utilise the train service. But I am convinced that, with time, the numbers will be there to make this happen. It was good to get the minister to look at the bus services, as the bus figures always reflect the need for more public transport. We had a chat about the growing areas in Byford and about trying to work on getting more bus services for Byford, the Serpentine–Jarrahdale area and from Mundaring down to the Midland train station. Those rural properties all utilise the main town centre and they need a bus to get them to the next train section, which gets them into the metropolitan train system.

The other area that I want to touch on in my electorate is policing. I acknowledge that the member for Swan Hills and I met with the Mundaring council last week to consider some of the issues it faces. Many businesspeople in the Mundaring town site have experienced a number of break-ins, as well as the antisocial behaviour, graffiti and so forth that goes along with that. We are trying to organise a community meeting with the businesspeople and the council to bring them together and to look at what we can do to help them. We popped down the road after meeting with the council to meet with Sergeant Ross Eastman, who is at Mundaring. He is a very good sergeant, and it was great to hear his thoughts on this and how we can engage with the community. It was good to hear that Sergeant Eastman had made an arrest on one break-in. In a lot of these small rural communities, there tends to be a dirty dozen, if we like: young adolescents or even young children who tend to stick together, and it takes only one or two of them to send the rest of them down the wrong path. It was good to hear that Ross had been making an impact in the area. We talked about trying to obtain proceeds-of-crime funds to purchase closed-circuit television cameras. We will probably explore that at the community meeting.

The other police station in my area is Mundijong Police Station, which the Minister for Police visited last year. It was good to show the minister this police station, which was constructed over 50 years ago. We just spent a considerable amount of money on cleaning and painting and new carpets. It is not perfect, but as Sergeant Garry

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Oliver said, “We shouldn’t be spending a lot of time in there; we should be out doing police work.” I agree with him, but it is my number one priority to get far better facilities for them to operate out of the police station.

One of the things with policing that always amazes me is the number of people who come to me saying they want a police station in their suburb or area. But when I met with the police, I realised very quickly that modern policing is not about standing in a police station waiting for someone to complain about the neighbour’s dog or somebody in the street. Modern policing is about getting on the roads, so that when a call is made, someone comes. Every modern police car is a station on wheels, because they can access a lot more stuff from their cars. We can certainly see where policing is headed. The police in Mundijong and Mundaring are doing a fantastic job. I will also touch on Armadale Police Station and John Bowman, who did a fantastic job in the fires—I will talk about that later—and also in serving the eastern and western sides of my electorate out of Armadale. John is a fantastic sergeant.

The other area that I will touch on is education. Last year the Minister for Education came to my electorate and we looked around a couple of the schools in my electorate, especially in Byford. I pushed very hard with the minister the need for the next Byford primary school. It is in the budget papers for 2012, but I hope it will happen sooner than 2012. It is now on us to get West Byford Primary School up as school numbers are growing very fast. The other issue I raised with the Minister for Education was air conditioning. It was good to hear the Premier say that a review was being undertaken into that. It is an unusual system that someone designed in the 1970s. They take into account a body mass indicator and so many days over a certain temperature to work out whether a school is entitled to air conditioning. The most peculiar thing is that every school in my electorate has air conditioning, except those buildings provided under the Building the Education Revolution program. We are trying to work through those issues, and I am confident that the Minister for Education’s review of the air conditioning zone will include a few of those areas so that they can be fixed, as well as the problem with the 12-month warranty over the building, which seems to be the next stumbling block that we have to work through. It was good to have the Minister for Education visit and to explain to her a few of the problems that we are experiencing. The plans for the future Byford high school indicate that the area is growing quite fast, and we are looking at a new high school in 2014. It is certainly a fast growing area.

A week and a half ago one of Western Australia’s worst bushfires happened in the hills of Roleystone and Kelmscott. I was absolutely astounded at the outpouring of support from the Western Australian community. The Roleystone–Kelmscott bushfire devastated parts of the community on Sunday, and by Monday, all in all, 72 houses were lost, as well as sheds, numerous cars and a person’s collection of motorbikes. People on rural properties store all types of stuff in their sheds, and they have lost it all. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the fire authorities involved, both volunteer and career firefighters, who valiantly defended those homes. In debate this afternoon members talked about the volunteer fire brigade protecting houses. It is my understanding that they protect property, rather than going into buildings on fire, which is where the need for breathing apparatus comes in. Members have heard the stories of the volunteer driving around trying to get people out of their houses when his own house was burning down. There are really amazing stories out there about our firefighters and the tragic losses they have seen and experienced.

It is known that the fire started at 11.42 am on Sunday, 6 February from a spark from an angle grinder. There was a total fire ban on that day and I trust that a review into that fire will look at that, because on the Monday at the incident control centre at the Roleystone Fire Brigade, a comment was made to Channel Seven that its news bulletin on the Saturday did not indicate there was a total fire ban. That is probably one of the areas that review could look into. The other point I wish to raise is about what a total fire ban means. I know what a total fire ban means in a rural area: I cannot drive a truck through a paddock or start machinery. In the metropolitan area, I cannot use a lawnmower or an angle grinder, which is something that creates a spark; there are certain things that people cannot do in urban areas. That comes down to education about what people can and cannot do. Fire bans are great, but we need to talk about that process.

As I said, the whole bushfire area in the hills is in my electorate. The fire was well and truly fuelled by an easterly wind of up to 80 kilometres an hour. Those of us who live up in the hills or at the bottom of the scarp know what the easterly winds are like. In my hometown of Byford, I could be out the back having a barbecue and by 10.00 pm the wind has picked up and I know the next day will be a hot day because the wind is blowing early in the evening. The easterly winds are very strong. It is hard to explain to members, but it is similar to the Fremantle doctor, except that it is coming from the other direction and it is boiling hot because it comes from inland. When I hear on the news that the Fremantle doctor is in, I reckon by the time it gets to my area the easterly is pushing it back, so it does not quite get there!

It was a relief to the community and great to see when the Fire and Emergency Services Authority got the helicopters involved and they started flying on the Sunday. That is what brought my attention to the fire. I went

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 16 February 2011]

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to the petrol station just after noon to grab some fuel for my lawnmower and whipper snipper—believe it or not, during a total fire ban! I bumped into Phil Brown from the Oakford brigade coming to fill up his tank. I asked where he had been, and he said he had been at the fire in the City of Swan and he was coming back for a shift change. I asked, if he was going back, and he said, “No. We’re going to Roleystone now. There’s a fire up there. That was the first I heard of the fire. As I said, by three o’clock that afternoon I could hear helicopters, planes and sirens. I went for a bit of a drive around, trying to see what I could see. One helicopter came in and sucked water out of Champion Lakes. It was quite amazing to see the helicopter come and dump water on the fire. By about six o’clock Sunday afternoon quite a big crowd had gathered behind the Stargate IGA in Kelmscott. The car park was full of cars that had come out of the Clifton Hills area. One gentleman brought down his camper trailer and there were also caravans. Other people just turned up with their kids and the dog and the car packed up with all their stuff. A lot of people brought the animals and kids down, leaving the husband and elder son to fight the fires. They were supposed to go down to the Armadale arena where the registration was, but they wanted to stay there that night because their loved ones were up in the hills and did not want to go any further.

The owners of the supermarket, Glen Wood and Robert Jonas-Green, said they had some sausages to cook up. I said, “No problems.” I went home, brought back my trailer and barbecue and started up the barbecue. We cooked some sausages pretty much all night, as did the federal member, Don Randall.

Mr T.G. Stephens: You cooked a barbecue in a total fire ban?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: Yes, I know. It is quite a funny story. We had the gas barbecue out. The wind was blowing. I could not get it to heat up. We were moving crates around to try to hold the heat in the barbecue, because the wind was blowing too strong. But we fed them. It was great to see. We were in a safe enclosed area at the back of the IGA.

Dr A.D. Buti: Near my office!

Mr A.J. SIMPSON: It was near the member for Armadale’s office actually. People came to collect some food. The IGA had put out boxes of water and fruit for people to help themselves. I remember the shell-shocked looks on their faces. I asked them how they were going and they said, “Yeah, good.” They did not know what had happened because the information was not coming out. Their houses were up there, but they were not quite sure whether they were still standing or had burnt down. Everyone was in that shell-shocked situation. We did not get away from there until nearly midnight. We went around giving out drinks and talking to people. I think Channel 9 was broadcasting live, and we were watching that happening. People could not get any further as the police were stopping them from going further up the hill. I was absolutely amazed by the community and the way everyone pulled together.

Mayor Linton Reynolds and the City of Armadale have done a fantastic job throughout the fire. Over the next three months they will help rebuild and regroup and try to get the resources on the ground. The Department for Child Protection and Centrelink came into the Armadale arena and helped out with all the services we need. It is still hard to get over. On the Monday that the member for Armadale and I attended the first briefing—members would have seen it on the news that night—the Armadale arena was just chock-a-block full of people. Unfortunately the public-address system did not work well. The authorities tried to divide the people into three groups, and they went over and started talking to them. It is a numbing feeling when someone says, “House No. 26 on Such-and-such Street—100 per cent gone”, and then jumps to the next street. The person asks, “How is No. 28?”. They say, “I haven’t got it on my list, but 26 is gone.” The resident asks, “So we could have damage?”, and they say, “Don’t know”. Some people knew their house was gone, and the other person was saying, “Well, my house is next door to it, and I do not know whether it has been damaged, or part of it is damaged or it is just completely gone.” It was like the news camera guy said; it was like a lottery you did not want to win, and it was quite clear. How do we help?

The member for Armadale mentioned a great point about driving around and checking on someone’s house, and I did the same thing when I did my tour. I rang them up and told them their house was still there, and they said, “Oh, thanks for that.” That was probably one of the other areas that was not really well coordinated. There were people who chose to stay. If you can imagine, the fire by Monday, all the police have closed off the road, and on Tuesday it was still closed off. There were people who stayed in, fought the fire, saved their houses, saved neighbours houses. Then on Tuesday afternoon they say, “We might shoot out and see if we can get some food, because we haven’t got any power.” They go out and then they cannot come back in again, under the fire regulations, and that caused a bit of heat and tension. I understand why; it was not safe to go back. But for the ones who were there and came out, it was that whole process.

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Many volunteers came from all around the state, and the Victorian government let us have two of its big helicopters. They came over late on Monday, and they are still here now. People from all over the state helped out. The member for Jandakot was a volunteer firefighter with the Jandakot brigade. He went to Forrestdale station on Sunday night from 7.00 pm to 7.00 am and sat, waiting for the callout. Again, people just turned up from everywhere to help out. That was the thing that really amazed me. It really sticks in my mind how great the community was.

We still have a lot of work to do. Driving around the hills at the moment, yellow and orange ribbons can be seen on everyone's letterboxes to say "thank you" to all the volunteer people who helped out. My office has been inundated from about four or five different groups who want to hold some sort of benefit concert to help out, which we have been trying to work out through the City of Armadale. Again, it is going back to Neil, the community development officer, and saying, "How about this one, Neil? Have a look at this one." Hopefully he can help work through that. All they are trying to do is say, "Let's get behind them". The Armadale-Kelmscott Lions Club was at the arena for the four days, feeding sausages to everyone at lunchtime. Now they are trying to help out with some sort of concert to help raise awareness. It is just amazing.

A young lady from Keysbrook was the only person injured in the fire. She is well. She is out of hospital and walking. She has a lot of internal and external bruising. She still has a lot of recovering to do, but she is up and about, and out of hospital. Unfortunately she was caught up in the fire, and I think she was partly run over by one of the service vehicles in that process.

A number of people helped out on that day. It is interesting to bump into people. Four houses on Sunset Terrace were lost. Susan and Dave McWatters had been there for 22 years. Dave's son owns the Perth Scale and Slicer Service, which I used to deal with in my bakery days. I have known them for 20 years. People I bump into have just lost it all. I was at the arena last Friday. I bumped into an elderly couple from Anderson Street. Anderson Street, off Bromfield Drive, was one of the main streets that lost something like seven of 11 houses. A couple in their seventies said that though they were insured, it was probably not enough to rebuild. They said they were too old to rebuild and that they were going to move closer to the kids and grandkids.

Harvey Norman came to the party with a donation of \$100 000. IKEA donated \$75 000. It goes on and on—smaller amounts that have helped people back on their feet. I am absolutely amazed by the amount of help and support our community has given. I cannot say that enough.

Everyone has read the stories, but I just want to put on the record that I am very proud to be the member for Darling Range. I have a great community that has turned out and rolled up its sleeves. Today the member for Armadale told me that the Navy was out there in force, helping to clean up. It is happening as we speak.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan) [4.48 pm]: I rise to respond to the Premier's Statement that we heard yesterday in his house. There are a number of things in the electorate of West Swan I want to talk about. But firstly, I just want to talk about a number of things that were discussed today, particularly the motion on the fire and the need for a full inquiry and also some of the comments made by the Treasurer during question time. In particular, I refer to his claim that projects the Liberal government is delivering have blown out by only two per cent. Six projects he claimed had blown out by two per cent. We do not know what projects they are, but, assuming they include the Northbridge Link, the waterfront development, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, and Oakajee, information already on the public record shows that that cannot be true.

For example, in relation to the Northbridge Link, on 29 April last year, the then Minister for Transport announced a \$100 million blow-out in the Northbridge Link. As I understand, that is just the transport element of the Northbridge Link. But let us assume it is the full cost of about \$650 million—a \$100 million blow-out is about 15 per cent, as I quickly do the figures.

We then look at the waterfront development. Again, it is very hard to estimate the total cost of the blow-out on the waterfront, because not enough information was given early in the piece. But assuming, as was reported, the cost of the waterfront redevelopment was going to be between \$225 million and \$300 million, the total cost will now be \$440 million. That will be affected by land sales, but again, just using those raw numbers, you see that there is a significant cost blow-out in the waterfront redevelopment.

We then go to Oakajee. We have not heard the latest report on the total cost of Oakajee. However, I cannot believe that the blow-out on Oakajee will be two per cent. I think it will be far more than two per cent. Of course, there is also the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children project. That is a great project. But, again, what was its original cost? Information provided to a committee last year that was made public showed that the original cost was \$200 million. However, let us just assume that that was not the project that this government is delivering. The cost as at 30 April last year was \$928 million. It is now \$1.17 billion. Again, it is a significant cost blow-out. As I said, I do not know which projects the Treasurer was talking about, but he talked about six

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projects having an average cost increase of two per cent. Maybe we will get further information on that to see how he can justify that figure of two per cent, because I think that especially the Treasurer has to provide full and accurate information.

The next thing I want to talk about is the call today by the Labor Party for a full inquiry into the Roleystone–Kelmescott bushfires. Many of us represent seats on the urban fringe, such as my seat of West Swan. During the summer period, we have before us, as does the community, the issue of bushfires, and in particular around the urban fringe where there is the interaction of homes and bushland. My colleague the member for Pilbara just highlighted another fire today in Eden Hill, which started near Lord Street in Whiteman Park. Every day all of us in the community are confronted with the need to be able to properly battle bushfires.

In respect of the Roleystone–Kelmescott bushfires, my family lives in Roleystone. Although my family was not very close to the bushfires this year, they were close to the big Karragullen bushfires that raged through the area about four or five years ago. All of us, especially those with families living in that very dangerous area, want to have a 100 per cent assurance that the government is doing, to the best of its capability, what it can. The government must make sure that we have the right equipment and the right communication processes to ensure that our families and our communities are protected. I am not criticising the Fire and Emergency Services Authority. However, we need to ensure that we have a full, independent and fearless inquiry so that we do not have a repeat of the bushfires that we have seen, and so that we can ensure that our homes and our lives are protected. That is not too much to ask.

We have talked about how things have changed over the past 10 years. I remember when we were in government one of the initial things that we were looking at was the aerial capability of our firefighting equipment. I think we had fixed-wing aircraft, but, as I recall, when we entered government there were no helitanks or water-bombing helicopters. One of the things we did was improve our aerial firefighting capability, acknowledging that fixed-wing aircraft have difficulties in the Darling Range, in particular, because of the hills.

As I said, I believe that we need to have a full and frank inquiry. This is something that both parties should support. It should be pretty much apolitical, because all it is about is ensuring that we do not repeat what happened in Roleystone–Kelmescott. I think 72 homes is a lot of homes to lose. Those people's lives will be affected for decades to come. I heard a psychologist talking on the radio about the impact of bushfires on children in particular. I cannot imagine those children going home and seeing everything they know absolutely destroyed. My niece and nephew had to be evacuated four or five years ago and I know from personal experience how it still impacts them, and they did not lose anything in those fires. We need to make sure that we do everything we can to protect our families and our children, so that they do not have to go through losing everything they know, including all the children's toys. We must have the ability to fight those fires, and in particular on the urban fringe. That day was an unusual day in the sense that we had the massive Herne Hill fire and our resources were stretched. As well as the Herne Hill fire, there was another fire on the way to Lancelin, as I recall. There was another one in Forrestdale. About four fires were going on. I know that initially there was a lot of confusion about the scale of the Roleystone fire, because my parents were with me, and my dad had to go home. We were very unclear about the situation with the roads and how he was going to go home. I would not say that the information was weak, because, let us face it, it was a very trying time, but for the first couple of hours in particular there was a bit of confusion about exactly how that fire was going.

I believe a full inquiry is needed to ensure that we do not have loss of lives, as happened in the Victorian bushfires. Expertise in this area is changing all the time. As I said, the role of aerial firefighting equipment over the past decade, in particular, has emerged as a key tool in fighting fires on the urban fringe. Again, we need to do everything possible to equip our volunteer firefighters, our professional firefighters and the community to make sure that we do not have a repeat of that massive loss of homes. They are just two comments on some general issues that we have been discussing today.

I would like to go on to deal more generally with issues within my electorate of West Swan. The community is facing a number of issues, and we are working together to try to solve them. I will start first with public transport. An issue that is at front of mind at the moment—because I met with the residents only last week—is about a bus stop in Orchid Park. Last November, I think, that bus stop was removed overnight. Therefore, we had a situation in which the poor residents went to catch the bus one morning. They pressed the button so that the bus would stop—they had a little button that they pressed—and they could catch it, and the bus just kept going. They had been given no information about the bus stop being removed. That bus stop was removed overnight. After one of the residents contacted the Public Transport Authority, it put the bus stop back for 12 hours, I think, and then it removed it again, saying it was a mistake. Therefore, we have a large residential area that is now not serviced by a bus stop, so on Beechboro Road the bus speeds past these people, and they

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now have to walk about 200 or 300 metres in an area where there is a significant amount of traffic. Of course, young children also catch those buses.

I have written to the new Minister for Transport, Hon Troy Buswell, asking him to look at this matter. The reason put forward for the removal of the bus stop was safety issues. However, a number of things can be done to remove those safety issues—for example, creating a little bay or the bus possibly going into the suburb itself by going through the little roundabout, and making sure there is an accessible bus stop for those residents.

I listened to the Premier's speech yesterday in which he talked about all these grand plans. At the end of the day, it is how people's lives are affected on a day-to-day basis that impacts them most significantly. If a bus stop is removed and people cannot let their children catch that bus in the morning, that is a huge issue, and it has a huge impact on their lives. These are the things that the Parliament, and in particular the government, need to get right to ensure that our community is not adversely affected by very stupid decisions.

I want to deal with roads in the area. Again, many members, particularly those who represent the growing suburbs, are faced with the continuing need to improve our roads and improve the road network. The Minister for Transport highlighted yesterday that the overpass on Alexander Drive, Mirrabooka is being constructed. That will have an effect on the electorates of the member for Nollamara and the member for Girrawheen. It will also impact on my electorate, as the people of Landsdale will be able to use that road. The Alexander Drive-Reid Highway overpass, which the member for Nollamara and I have been lobbying for, is being constructed and, hopefully, will be open in a few months. Although those two overpasses are being constructed, there is a continuing need for the Reid Highway-Malaga Drive intersection to be improved, particularly with an overpass. It is, frankly, very dangerous and, I think, two years ago was listed in the RAC survey of traffic hot spots. Construction of the Alexander Drive-Reid Highway overpass is underway, and the Reid Highway-Mirrabooka Avenue overpass is about to commence. Reid-Malaga is the next logical overpass to be undertaken. Building costs have gone down. I think Alexander-Reid was originally estimated at \$72 million; it is now down to around \$30 million and Reid-Mirrabooka is about \$30 million.

Ms J.M. Freeman: I think Alexander-Reid is about \$40 million.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. The cost has come down dramatically from costs that existed during the building boom of three or four years ago, so the cost of these overpasses is becoming more affordable for government. I urge the government not to create a massive bottleneck at Reid-Malaga when the other two overpasses are built.

The other key issue people raise with me continuously is the need to turn Reid Highway between West Swan Road and Beechboro Road into a dual carriageway. The member for Swan Hills will have received as many complaints about that as I have. I am being nice to the member.

Mr F.A. Alban: I wasn't listening.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The Lord Street and Reid Highway intersection needs to be improved.

Mr F.A. Alban: There's a chance.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The member said it is a chance.

Mr D.A. Templeman: You said that about the railway line.

Mr F.A. Alban: The odds of that are greater.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I would not put any money on the rail line! Reid Highway and Lord Street is a major intersection. Changing Reid Highway into a dual carriageway between West Swan Road and Beechboro will, hopefully, encompass an improved intersection at Reid Highway, and Lord Street in particular, probably incorporating lights to reduce the number of accidents. There are other key roads in the area of Lord Street, which has had some widening but, again, it is rather a dangerous road as residential development is occurring there. There is also the need to make Gngalara Road, which stretches across the top of my electorate, into a dual carriageway as more people use it, particularly as Ellenbrook continues to grow. They are the road priorities that the community keeps lobbying for, and I will continue to lobby for them. I have written to the new Minister for Transport outlining all those road priorities.

I move now to public transport. Member for Swan Hills, we are still waiting for the Ellenbrook rail line, in particular for this government to release the transport master plan that, over the past year and a half the government has been undertaking. I hope to see, as part of that, the route to Ellenbrook. As we all know, it was a core election commitment by the then Liberal opposition and now Liberal government —

Dr A.D. Buti: It promised everything.

Dr Tony Buti; Mr Rob Johnson; Acting Speaker; Mr John Quigley; Mr Murray Cowper; Mr David Templeman;
Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Frank Alban; Ms Janine Freeman; Mrs Carol
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Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It did. It promised to begin construction in 2012. We would like to see in this upcoming budget a defined route, plus some funding dedicated to it. I seriously hope the member for Swan Hills will be more vocal on this issue among his own ranks. I hope he lobbies for it every day.

Mr F.A. Alban: I am speaking after you so I will be vocal.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: More generally, I hope he —

Mr F.A. Alban: You might not like it.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I am sure I will. I have turned over a new leaf. I am very happy.

I hope that within government the member for Swan Hills will lobby the Premier daily on this issue. Frankly, it is only when he says he will lose his seat that the government will fund it. I urge him to lobby within government to get this Ellenbrook railway line turned into a reality. It needs a strong voice from the member.

Mr F.A. Alban interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: As I have said a hundred times in this place, we all know it was a core election commitment; the member distributed brochures; and there were signs at the polling booths. He has to deliver. There is a new Minister for Transport, so the member should approach him and tell him how vital it is to his area and get him on board to deliver this rail line.

The other public transport priorities of course are improved bus services throughout Ballajura, as well as the Alexander Drive busway.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: A feasibility study has been undertaken. We need more direct and quicker routes into the city for the people of Ballajura, including those in that whole Alexander Drive corridor. The government is looking closely at this issue. I urge again that the master plan be released, that these priorities be components of that master plan and that, of course, there is funding in the upcoming budget. A priority I failed to mention is the Perth–Darwin Highway, again a key promise made by the member for Swan Hills. I hope funding is dedicated to that project in the forthcoming budget. As well as a lot of transport issues there are a lot of planning issues as our suburbs grow and new subdivisions are developed. A number of planning issues are put before me and the community. I cannot go too far without mentioning the culs-de-sac in Landsdale over which the City of Wanneroo and the Minister for Planning have reached an impasse. We do not know what is happening.

A quick snapshot of the history is that culs-de-sac were planned to be removed as part of the development of a new structure plan for East Wanneroo—cell 9. The City of Wanneroo rejected that. The Western Australian Planning Commission overrode that and now the City of Wanneroo is saying that it will not remove the culs-de-sac and turn them into through roads. I have written two letters to the Minister for Planning. It is up to the minister to now say what will happen. The people in this area of Landsdale do not want their culs-de-sac removed. They bought their properties based on the premise that their homes would be in culs-de-sac. They enable their children to enjoy a certain quality of life and they do not want them removed. I think the last time I wrote to the minister—during the past couple of days—I asked him to please give certainty to these people. The City of Wanneroo will not allow the culs-de-sac to be removed, but the residents need certainty from the state government. Again, I urge the minister for planning to work on this issue and solve it for the community of Landsdale.

Another planning issue concerns the mushroom farm buffer. Since I raised it in Parliament, there has been a reduction in the mushroom farm buffer in West Swan from 650 to 500 metres. That has allowed some development to occur but those within the 500-metre zone want more work done to reduce that mushroom farm buffer.

I also want to refer to the renaming of North Beechboro to Bennett Springs. I was approached by constituents early last year asking that the area of North Beechboro in my electorate be renamed Bennett Springs mainly because most of them live in the Bennett Springs estate and they consider themselves to be residents of Bennett Springs. I understand they have been given some commitment by perhaps the developers—I am not 100 per cent sure of that—that that suburb will be renamed Bennett Springs. We have been working with the community to acquire the name of Bennett Springs. The City of Swan has shown support for that. However, the Geographic Names Committee has overturned it, and now the issue is in front of the Minister for Lands. Hopefully, when he returns he will take this issue very seriously.

Mr T.G. Stephens interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Apparently they do not like two-word names now.

Dr Tony Buti; Mr Rob Johnson; Acting Speaker; Mr John Quigley; Mr Murray Cowper; Mr David Templeman;
Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Tony Simpson; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Frank Alban; Ms Janine Freeman; Mrs Carol
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Mr W.J. Johnston: What?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: The Geographic Names Committee does not mind the name Bennett, which sounds odd, and Bennett Brook is not too bad.

Mr W.J. Johnston: There's Queens Park.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I know but the committee wants to move away from two-word suburb names. That is what I have been told. It has overturned it, so it is up to the Minister for Lands.

Dr A.D. Buti: What about hyphenated names?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I do not know about hyphenated names. Maybe we should have included a hyphen in Bennett Springs; I do not know!

Mr T.G. Stephens: Western Australia!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It is quite interesting. As I said, they are moving away from two-word names; they do not like them. The community has an attachment to the Bennett Springs name. The shopping centre is called the Springs. Of course there are other people outside of Bennett Springs estate who are not keen on the Bennett Springs name but who know there needs to be one name for the area. The majority support the Bennett Springs name. We are working with that. Hopefully when the Minister for Regional Development; Lands returns, he will take this issue seriously and support the community in getting the name Bennett Springs for its suburb.

The other planning issue in front of us is the Whiteman Park cemetery proposal, which is currently out for consultation. I am meeting with the City of Swan in upcoming weeks. It is proposed to turn a portion of land north of Marshall Road into a cemetery. The process by which this has been put forward is not right. There has not been a lot of community consultation. The whole issue of consultation is quite interesting. The idea that an advertisement is placed in a paper somewhere and that is called community consultation is not enough, particularly for those residents who live next door to the proposed cemetery. We are going out to consult. I am still talking to the local community. It has been a mixed result. I will hear what the City of Swan has to say.

Another issue I want to highlight relates to water. I want to pay tribute to the former Minister for Water. I know that will make me unpopular on this side, but I believe when I took issues to him concerning my electorate he took them seriously and wanted to achieve results. I found that quite refreshing because, I have to say, it does not always happen. I disagreed with him on a number of things, but when we look at the performance of today's Minister for Water —

Mr D.A. Templeman: I almost got kicked out!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: When I approached the former Minister for Water on local issues, I found him very good to work with. From that perspective I am sad to see him go. I thought he endeavoured to help us as local members on particular issues. The water issue related to the aged-care facility and the reduction of the buffer. It has been an issue for the past six to eight months. I will raise it again with the new Minister for Water.

I refer to the Dungeon Youth Centre. It is a great youth club doing great things in the Ballajura and wider community. It will be moving premises in the next six to eight months. Its new premises have been funded by the federal government and the City of Swan. The centre needs more core funding to provide much-needed services. Moving to the new premises will probably mean the demand for services will increase. I signed a letter today, addressed to one of the ministers, to see whether the state government can provide an increase in base funding. The base funding allocated to the centre is about 50 per cent of that provided to other youth services around the metropolitan area. There is a lot of scope to increase that funding.

The Cambodian Welfare and Culture Association approached me about a year and a half ago seeking support to build a new hall to hold its cultural events. It is a great group and needs the support of its elected members. I was happy to host a meeting between councillors from the City of Swan and the administration about two or three weeks ago to try to ensure that elected members and the City of Swan understood what this group does and how important it is to the Cambodian community. It will be hard work to help them get this hall built, and there are other issues about the local community, but at the end of the day these people do great things for the community and incorporate their culture into the Australian community. We need to support them in advancing their cause.

There are a lot of issues in the West Swan electorate. The government can play politics on the big things but when local members come up with local issues, I seek from this government a commitment it will take the issues seriously and try to address them. West Swan is a growing community. We have a lot of transport and planning issues. With a bit of action and thought our ministers can help us sort through these problems. At the end of the

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day that is what we are here for. The government can play politics on the big things, but when we as local members ask the government to look seriously at transport and planning issues—particularly planning issues—it can work to achieve results for the community. Cost is always an issue, but planning issues are normally a no-cost issue.

I listened to the Premier's Statement yesterday and to our responses today. There are some projects going on in the community, but at what cost? There is the issue of household fees and charges. We hope the government does not slug householders with massive increases in water and electricity prices. Householders are hurting throughout the community. There is absolutely no need for massive price increases. I urge the government not to follow through with this path of full cost recovery in four years. It is not necessary. Families and pensioners do not deserve to turn off air conditioners on a 40-degree day just because they cannot afford it. That is what is happening. That happens in wintertime as well—people cannot afford to turn on the heating or have a hot shower because they cannot afford it. That is a serious issue. The big projects are great, but when families are not able to go about their business, are not able to catch public transport and are not able to turn on the heater or the air conditioner, what is the use? The government has to get the core things right before it proceeds with massive projects. This is where the government is failing. It is not getting those core things right. Massive increases in utility charges are an example of that.

MR F.A. ALBAN (Swan Hills) [5.17 pm]: I am enjoying my new position, as members can imagine! I take this opportunity, in considering the Premier's Statement, to deliver what I call a mid-term report on my electorate. I will start off with Ellenbrook. It is where the greater centre of population is in my electorate. It has the most magnificent landscaping—trees are all in the right places, the roads have all the right curves and the cottages are all in the right places. Indeed, Ellenbrook has won many awards. This is a great example of suburbia. Some would think it was utopia. It attracted many people. We are verging on a population of 20 000. But the area had a dark secret. Nothing was what it seemed, and the rhetoric did not match the reality. There was a sparkling new police station but it was not fully manned. Shoppers were sentenced to exile in Midland or Morley because of a commercial covenant controlling all new shops in Ellenbrook. There was another business precinct called Comserv Loop. Also because of the covenant, this was almost empty and a ghost town. Ellenbrook lacked basic services and amenities such as public transport, fire services, health services and road access, and schools were either inadequate or non-existent. It was not uncommon for some of our primary schools to put extra students into dongas, which should be a fair embarrassment to this state. There was also no secondary school in Ellenbrook. As I said, primary schools were accommodating their extra students in dongas.

One of the smaller issues that I know has support from the opposition is the supply of air conditioning to Ellen Stirling Primary School, a newer primary school in Ellenbrook. Some members have already spoken on this issue, but it does not take much to imagine what it would be like for a five-year-old or a six-year-old in a school in Ellenbrook where temperatures can be quite extreme—Ellenbrook comprises mostly concrete, tar and pavers—but I believe we are making a bit of groundwork on that.

Worst of all, there was no future for residents in Ellenbrook. There were no jobs, despite a promise by the initial developers that there would be employment for 75 per cent of the local people. Boulevards had been substituted for businesses. I have written so many notes that I am going to get caught up in them! Today, more than two years on, what a dramatic change! Stage 2 of the development with 60 new shops will be open in March or April this year due to the influence of the Liberal–National government. Formerly empty retail shops are now almost fully occupied and doing business on The Broadway and Comserv Loop, and I am happy to say that our police station is fully manned. A new state-of-the-art fire station was commissioned and opened in September last year. It is now operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week. With the topical story that we heard today of the fires in our district, what better timing?

Our public secondary school is operating to year 12. The good part about this is that it has had to compete with three top-class private secondary schools. I believe that our state schools should be the equivalent of our private schools. The government has undertaken to start two new primary schools.

Mr P. Papalia: The Labor government built the school to year 11 and 12 at Ellenbrook.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: What does the member for Warnbro have a problem with?

Mr P. Papalia: The Labor government built year 11 and 12 at Ellenbrook.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: We started construction of them. The Labor government might have talked about it. He does a lot of talking about things.

Mr P. Papalia: You idiot! I was there. It was at the same time as Comet Bay.

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Mr F.A. ALBAN: Ellen Stirling Primary School?

Mr J.R. Quigley: We know about the school. We want to know about the railway line and the station you are putting in.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: I am talking about Ellenbrook Secondary College. We are also commencing two new —

Mr J.R. Quigley: What about the promise you made to the people that you were going to take a train line out there?

Mr F.A. ALBAN: The member for Mindarie needs to have a shower, I think, and cool down. I am sorry, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: I call you formally for the first time, member for Swan Hills, and I call you also formally for the first time, member for Mindarie. Herein lies the problem of accepting interjections.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: Two new primary schools commenced this year, one in Aveley and one in Malvern Springs, to take up the surplus number of students. There is a good chance, of course, with good lobbying, that these schools will not be built as they were in the past without air conditioning. There is a new family centre on the horizon to cater for the increased needs of families, including two new babies a day that I believe are born in Ellenbrook and Aveley alone. We have very few health nurses catering for them. One by one—the member for West Swan has disappeared on me—our roads are being made safe. There are new lights at the intersection of Great Northern Highway and West Swan Road. Reid Highway in Middle Swan from West Swan Road to Great Northern Highway has been completed, as has the new bridge. The project at Bullsbrook District High School is underway, as promised, with more projects to be announced in the short term. The most recent upgrade, of course, and the one that I am most excited about, is the upgrade to the public transport system in Ellenbrook to replace the totally inadequate service that existed prior to my election.

Ms J.M. Freeman: So, is there a train? Is that what you are announcing today?

Mr F.A. ALBAN: What does that mean? It means that there is a bus every 10 minutes at peak times and a bus every 15 minutes at off-peak times to connect to the railway line in Bassendean. The bus service has been described as equivalent to the best in the metropolitan area. What is more, I am working on extending it to Aveley, which was not included in the first draft.

What of the future? This area has a bright future with the current government. There is still a lot more to do. I am hoping that a regional ambulance facility at St John of God Health Care is on its way. One by one the needs of the community will be addressed. I am working on a police and citizens youth centre for Ellenbrook. I am working on a suicide prevention office. Action rather than talk!

Mr A.J. Waddell interjected.

Mr F.A. ALBAN: In just two short years or slightly more, Ellenbrook is now seriously looking like a regional centre.

Ms J.M. Freeman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Nollamara!

Mr F.A. ALBAN: Four thousand new residents have shown their support by moving to Ellenbrook in the past two years. They must have heard there is a Liberal government there! It will not be long before the endless trek to Midland and Morley for essential goods and services will come to an end. I will also talk about a matter that has been discussed a lot today, so I will keep this speech fairly short.

On Saturday, 5 February my electorate was once again visited by fire—in Brigadoon, Baskerville, Millendon, Red Hill and Herne Hill. The good part about our fire—if there is a good part about a fire—is that it was not started by arson; it was started by limbs of trees falling over powerlines. I mention this because no home was lost. Containment of the fire was a great success by the Fire and Emergency Services Authority and our volunteer fire brigade. What is even more interesting is that a fire of almost the same size occurred 12 months ago with the same result: no loss of life and no loss of homes. However, I was interested to hear members on both sides of the chamber today discuss the inadequacy of some developments, with which I must agree. When I toured the site of the recent fire, it became very obvious that the fuel load and the lay of the land had a lot to do with property that could be saved and property that could not be saved. It became obvious that we need to learn a lesson on preparing firebreaks. We need to learn a lesson on adequate burning-off strategies. I understand that evaporative air conditioners are on their way out in these areas.

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Finally, I would like to add my condolences to all those who suffered and to all those who lost properties and lives in the recent floods and fires throughout Australia. I personally had an experience—nothing serious—in 1983 as a very young man with two small children. I was in the way of the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983. I was part of the terror that happens in a family when a fire is on its way. That was a huge disaster. The one thing I remember most, which seems to have been repeated, is that people said it would never happen again. I think members know what happened in Victoria recently. Although we talk in this place about taking action, let us make sure that we do take some action. We should stop squabbling and, on this issue of fires, have some bipartisan discussion. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MS J.M. FREEMAN (Nollamara) [5.27 pm]: I would like to follow on, in opening my speech in reply to the Premier's Statement, by also offering my condolences to the families of the people who lost their lives in the Queensland floods, to the people in the Victorian floods, to the people in the fires here in Western Australia, and also to the people in the floods in Carnarvon and in the various other difficulties that nature has sent people in recent times. Just as an aside, I was in Victoria at the time of the Victorian floods. I was on a train going through South Australia and Victoria and went across a bridge that was closed the following day when it was flooded. On that day the flood almost came up the sides of the train. I was a bit like a child seeing snow for the first time. I kept on saying to my partner, "Look at all of this water!" I do believe that we must take into account that, although we have had fires and floods, we also have one of the major droughts in Western Australia at this time and we must take into account the impact it is having on our rural communities and how tough they are doing it. My partner and I grow trees for a property in Corrigin that he grew up on and this year there has been no tree planting because there is simply no chance that any trees would survive. That is a double problem because of the impact of salt in those communities. There is no doubt that we need to take these things into account.

A Vietnamese gentleman saw me recently about a fundraiser that the Vietnamese community held for victims of the Queensland floods. I think they raised more than \$100 000. It could be even more and I apologise to the community if I am wrong. The community is very excited about how much money it managed to raise to support the Queensland flood victims. The Vietnamese gentleman, being a Buddhist, commented, "What sort of karma is happening to these Queenslanders?" I am not someone who believes in Buddhism or necessarily holds those sorts of faiths, but with my great belief in climate change I think we need to look at our human interactions with the environment in many ways—salt is one because we cleared lots of land—and ways that we can prevent these sorts of things.

Moving onto things that I would like to talk about in response to the Premier's statement and a statement made yesterday by the Minister for Transport, clearly the people of Mirrabooka and I welcome the Mirrabooka Avenue–Reid Highway overpass. We welcomed the Alexander Drive–Reid Highway overpass that the Labor government committed to and the Liberal government thankfully continued, with the federal government, to fund after the last state election. It is my understanding that it came in well under budget—it was budgeted at \$72 million, as the minister had previously stated—and on that basis and being able to use the Abigroup contractors and keep them on the same site, they were able to do the Mirrabooka Avenue overpass. I reflect on the fact that the minister took it as an opportunity to say that I had not campaigned for the overpass. Perhaps I had not campaigned in the way that he thought; I certainly called for it. However, I think the community was tired of hearing so many people call for it and having it not delivered. It is great that it has been delivered. In saying that, I congratulate Bob Kucera for the good work that he did. I also congratulate the community because it did the work to get the overpass. In a recent edition of the *Eastern Suburbs Reporter*, Alan Stafford, president of the Balga Action Group, put it very fittingly in a letter to the paper. He said —

While in recent years politicians of all persuasions have jumped on the Reid/Mirrabooka bandwagon, especially in the lead-up to an election, the real hard work has been done by those many local volunteers who walked door-to-door seeking signatures, as well as standing in shopping centre arcades and on street corners with banners and a lot of hope as they tried to get the powers-to-be to listen to their pleas for an overpass only, in the main, to have such pleas fall on deaf ears.

The community can be assured that its pleas did not fall on deaf ears and that Main Roads certainly heard them. When Main Roads had the opportunity, it ensured that the community got what it so justly deserved and had so justly worked for, and I congratulate the community on that. It seems to me that those same economies of scale used to do the Reid Highway–Alexander Drive overpass before moving on to the Mirrabooka Avenue overpass really need to be looked at for the Malaga Drive overpass as well. I say that because the same construction site could be used to do the Malaga overpass. That makes eminent sense if we are going to use resources and use them well and efficiently. This is something that would deliver a great benefit to many in the community.

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However, roads are not what we need to solve the transport problems in the area. I think late last year *The West Australian* ran a feature on how long it took to get into the city from different suburbs. One of the areas looked at was the Mirrabooka–Nollamara area. The article showed that by bike, unfortunately, was not a quick form of transport to the city. However, my partner rides in every day from Nollamara and he seems to think it is an active and possible way of transport. I have yet to ride to Parliament House, but my good friend the shadow Minister for Transport is on my case, as we speak, to get me on the bike and ride in. By car took it a good 20 to 25 minutes, but what was most concerning is that public transport—the bus—took the greatest length of time to get into the city. Nollamara, Mirrabooka, Koondoola and Alexander Heights are really only 15 minutes from the city. Mirrabooka is a town centre. It has employment agencies such as Centrelink, the Department for Child Protection, a large Homeswest office and a large group of people employed there who deliver services in the non-government sector. Mirrabooka needs a viable, good and rapid transport system. That needs to come in the form of some sort of rail, be it light or heavy. I am not someone who has expertise in this area, but it seems to me that with the Reid Highway–Mirrabooka Avenue overpass and the idea of the Alexander rapid transport route that was being considered prior to the last election, there is some space for a rapid transport system to come into the area and to feed in to the Mirrabooka town centre. Therefore, I urge the government to consider that when looking at the needs of that area.

I note the Premier’s apology to the community for increasing fees and charges and the opposition leader’s call for a freeze on those increases. I can tell the house that the increase is having a detrimental effect on people in the community in the Nollamara electorate including Mirrabooka, Nollamara, Koondoola and Alexander Heights. I noticed, as my colleagues would have, the article in yesterday’s *The West Australian* that stated people are doing it tough, and they were talking about foodstuffs and things like that. One of my greater concerns was about quite a small comment made about the reduction in the payment of voluntary school fees. If we think about some of the areas that I represent, those schools do it tough. Some of those schools have 72 different languages spoken and very high needs in literacy. If schools do not get additional moneys from school fees because people cannot afford it because their day-to-day costs of everyday living mean that those sorts of areas need to be cut, really the most disadvantaged are being disadvantaged even more. The path, as we all know, to success in our community is education. Education gives us the capacity to communicate well in our society, to present ourselves well in our society and to be employed in our society. These are all benefits of education. We need to look not only at some of the substantive equity issues that an increase in fees and charges has on everyday living and how we go about paying our rent and putting food on the table, but also the multiplier effect in our community of reducing services in so many other areas, such as children not participating in sports so they do not get the sort of exercise that they need. The areas I represent unfortunately have issues with health and welfare that need to be focused on. We need to consider all the things that go with learning—participation in team sports and being able to buy the uniforms for that, being able to afford for children to do extracurricular music courses, and various other things. Despite the fact that people belittle the call for freezing fees and charges, I think that we are a community that can afford to subsidise people most in need so that they do not need to bear the costs of huge electricity and gas charges.

I also welcome the housing that has been built, particularly with the national economic stimulus money but clearly carried out by the current government. I will bang on about it until something actually happens with the Mirrabooka land that now is going to be just below the Reid Highway–Mirrabooka Avenue overpass that has sat there since the 1950s and through successive members in the area, still sits there derelict. This land is owned by the Department of Housing and is perfectly placed to be subdivided and sold. It could be added to the stock of affordable land for young people and others in our community so that they can build on it. It is only 15 minutes out of the city and has public transport routes, a new station and, now, a great overpass. It seems almost criminal that we are sitting on this land during a time of great need for housing development. It does not matter how many times I write to the minister to ask what is going on, or meet with the department, I always get told that the matter has to do with the local government. I meet with the local government, which says that it has to do with the Department of Housing. I must say that this cannot go on for so long. I understand that there was an issue with the Department of Health wanting a piece of land to develop a health facility on. I understand that the issue has now been fixed, it has gone through whatever processes were needed and has been signed off. All I can ask is that the potential benefit of this land be given to the community and for it to stop sitting there derelict, pulling down the whole tenor of the area. It is scrub land; there is the problem of vagrants coming to the area and all those sorts of things. This is a perfect piece of land for release and development, and I call on the government to champion itself in the area of housing affordability and open that land up for sale.

I am also interested to know when the response to the housing report that was handed down, I think, early in 2010 called “More than a Roof and Four Walls” is going to be released. It is concerning for many in the community, and obviously for local members of Parliament, that the biggest issue, I think, that comes into my

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office is housing and the need for public housing, because of the cost of private rentals. There was an article in *The Australian Financial Review* recently about the possibility of vouchers for private rentals. I am not necessarily opposed to that; I have not heard the arguments for or against that. However, any sort of private rental subsidy needs to be meaningful to make private rental affordability comparable to that of public housing. However, that also does not provide a solution to the situation faced by many people who come into my office and cannot access private rental properties because they have large families or come from a cultural group that is actively discriminated against, despite the fact that we would like things in our community to be different. I have been able to work with some very good real estate agents to try to deal with those sorts of issues, and I thank those real estate agents who try their hardest to ensure that those in our community who find it difficult to access housing because they are different have viable housing options instead of homelessness.

I noted that the Premier talked about childhood education. One of the things of great concern in the community that I would like to raise with the government is that intensive language classes and centres are not provided in kindergarten and preschool. That makes it very difficult, especially for the children in Burmese and African communities, whose language and literacy skills are very low. Many children who are entering preschool and kindy are not getting that early start in language because the required resources are not funded. These children get support in language and intensive language centres once they reach primary school, and although that is a great service, people in the communities that I speak to, predominately from some of the Sudanese and other African communities, say that that service is not sufficient. In fact, just recently the Department of the Attorney General did a consultation with the African community on youth crime and justice issues. The issue of education was raised, as it has been raised in various other forums that I have been to. One of the difficulties that the community said it faced is that children from the community are put into classes based on their age rather than their competency. Therefore, the children become disillusioned with schooling; they get to a stage at which they do not feel included, and the community says that that leads to the children becoming truant and all the problems that go with that. This really is an issue that we need to address.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: The various communities are trying to address it themselves; in fact, many communities run schools on Saturdays and Sundays, often in their local church. The Iraqi community runs a very successful Al Hadi Arabic Community School at Mirrabooka Senior High School, and I thank the high school for always making its premises available to that community. The program is run on Saturday from 10.00 am until 4.00 pm; it is a very, very active community school. The school gets funded through the community languages program, but many communities find it very difficult to understand how to access that program. In fact, one of the criteria is that potential applicants must be members of the ethnic schools organisation. I had a slight chuckle about the fact that if we tried to insist that they had to be a member of a union, we would be howled down—not that I have a problem with them being members of that association! It is difficult to get into contact with that organisation; there are no contact details for that organisation available. The community language program has progressively lost funding over the last four or five years; it has stagnated around that \$1 million mark. The process is not transparent and is not easily accessible for these communities. Recently, two Sudanese groups, a Rumbeki Sudanese group and a Nuer Sudanese group, came to me and said that they had around 60 students who wanted to provide assistance with maths, English and cultural studies in our schools. That seems to me a really active way for communities to support themselves. Clearly, many communities have done that—the Italians and the Greeks—but we need to ensure that a really good community languages program is available for them, and that it is transparent and accessible and, perhaps, receives more funding.

I have come across an issue in education regarding parents and citizens organisations not having legal coverage. P&Cs are incorporated, and if there ends up being a blue in a P&C for whatever reason, it is good to be aware of this. There are some interesting people on P&Cs, we all know this, as we have probably all sat on P&Cs; I certainly have. We had an issue with one P&C in which one particular gentleman said that the P&C was not complying with the Associations Incorporation Act because it was not running meetings exactly according to the formula that is set out in the act. It was not putting notices of motion and it was not calling the meetings correctly. The gentleman wanted to get very, very formulaic and bogged down in procedures. Clearly, the other parents did not want to do that; they wanted to be part of the process of raising funds and supporting their school. This is quite a large, major and well-organised P&C. The gentleman then started to take legal action because he had the capacity to do that through his work. When the P&C president started to get letters from a lawyer, they went to the Department of Education and was told, “You are the P&C, you are incorporated. We do not cover you for any legal advice.” He went to the council that covers P&Cs and was told that legal cover was not part of their membership and therefore the council did not cover it. These poor P&C members were left by themselves with these letters, wondering how to deal with the situation. Thankfully, they were able to go to the Northern

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Suburbs Community Legal Centre and get a couple of free consultations, but really, that case was not in the expertise of those particular lawyers and, frankly, even though this is on transcript, one of the letters perhaps inflamed the issue slightly. Another letter came, and finally, there was another letter that said that this parent had been defamed. Imagine being in that position and not being able to get any legal advice or legal protection. Here they are, volunteering to do a community service and they do not get that protection. I have spoken to the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, the organisation that covers P&Cs, and have discussed with them the need to look into adding an extra membership component to cover that. I have approached the department. However, it is a real concern for me if WA is moving to independent public schools. I have my own view about independent public schools. If we place people at board level and that is incorporated or any of those sorts of things, we need to ensure they have the protection of legal coverage.

The Premier raised the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting as an opportunity to showcase our community. I hope that it does showcase our inclusive and diverse community, especially the community that I represent. I extend an invite to the Premier's office to discuss with my office and me the inclusion of the many and various communities that make up the seat of Nollamara: Vietnamese, Macedonian, African and Burmese to name a few; and the Buddhists, the Muslims, the Christians and others in the area. I would be glad to ensure that they feel included in the process so that they can showcase the wonderful diversity and harmony that they bring to the community that I represent.

Just before Christmas I was lucky enough to work with the Sudanese community on their referendum process. At first, WA did not get a referendum centre and the Sudanese community had a rally. I worked with them on a petition to the federal government. I rang and spoke to a lot of people, even making an overseas phone call as a member of Parliament to implore the authorities to allow the Western Australian Sudanese community to participate in that referendum. I thank the federal government, and particularly the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, for coming forward with funding for Sudan for the referendum, and also \$1 million was allocated to ensure that they had further centres, one of which was in Western Australia. It was a great success. The community was really pleased to be able to participate in the referendum. They felt very proud to be part of what was for them a momentous history-changing event. They had a cultural day before it started and one after it started, so it was a big week with lots of events going on as well as casting their votes. The referendum resulted in 99 per cent of southern Sudanese citizens voting for a separation from north Sudan.

I want to raise this issue, because members in this house need to be aware of a number of things. Southern Sudan is going to be a mining economy. A large group of people from southern Sudan live in our community and we need to know what is going on with them, because there are a number of challenges that the Western Australian Parliament needs to be involved in. Firstly, the conflict with the north has dominated south Sudan since 1956, so it is a long-fought and difficult issue. I am taking this from *The Economist*, so I suppose I am using the references of another authority on these things. The article refers to some of the challenges, and reads —

South Sudan occupies one of the least developed and most remote parts of Africa. Many of its 8m–14m inhabitants—nobody knows the exact number—live in unmapped lands. The whole region has perhaps 100km ... of paved roads,

That is something that would strike fear into the hearts of most transport ministers! Half of those roads are in the capital, Juba, which has grown enormously in the last two years. The other half are on Chinese-run oilfields.

The other challenge is that the violence in the community may not necessarily come from the north. It seems that the north has arrived at a resolution to the issue. This again is from *The Economist*, so it is one source and one opinion. It reads —

But the more likely source of violence now is an internal conflict in the south. Tribal loyalties are fierce, arms flow freely, army units are fractured and cattle-raiding is rampant.

Members have to note that cattle is one of the most important commodities in southern Sudan. The Dinka is the biggest tribe in the area, so there are cultural issues that will play out in countries that are challenged in re-establishing themselves and pushing forward to ensure that they have a democracy and an economy that supports their community. Why do I think we need to know about southern Sudan, and why should we care? The article explains —

South Sudan has minerals galore: gold, copper, iron ore and more, largely unexplored. The only natural resource tapped thus far is oil, of which the south has quite a bit (6.7 billion barrels in proven reserves, or a 40th of Saudi Arabia's pool).

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We have the expertise that they are going to need to tap the resource, but that resource needs to be tapped in a way that will benefit the whole community in southern Sudan. We have members of the Sudanese community in Western Australia who would want us to ensure that happens and to play a part in that. It is very important for us to keep that in our minds when we look at something that is so far away.

I also welcome the member for Morley's comments on the Karen community. Like many newly arrived communities, the Karen have issues with employment. I believe that should be available, given the economic prosperity and mining boom that we currently enjoy, especially to communities such as the Karen. I was really concerned at the figures, reported by the Leader of the Opposition, that show a marked reduction of over three and a half thousand apprentices since the Liberal Party came into government. I believe that the WA fabrication industry is at a critical point when major resources projects are sent overseas. We need to ensure that people are employed in this industry. I am concerned that they are sending most of their skilled work offshore and our local businesses are missing out. The government owes it to the people of WA to agree to introduce or to agree to legislation that will ensure our natural gas and iron ore reserves are not used to create skilled jobs and opportunities overseas but to create opportunities and skills for young people in Western Australia, especially our newly-arrived migrants from communities such as the Karen, the Sudanese, and various other communities that have come here to set up their lives and who are really keen to succeed in these areas. If the Premier of Newfoundland in Canada can have an agreement with Chevron that delivers work in his province, it is clearly practical for that to occur here. The government needs to ensure that that prosperity is shared widely. I call on the government to support the current campaign to ensure local content.

I would also like to ensure that prosperity is shared widely and ask that the government support the Every Australian Counts campaign for a national disability insurance scheme. That is very important for people in our community who are less well off. That is a federal issue that is before the Productivity Commission. I am not aware whether the government has made submissions to that.

In finishing, I am concerned about two reports that came out late last year—the GESB report and the Amendola review. I have more to say on those two things. I think both reports have had a marked impact on our public sector. Certainly, GESB members only having one-way choice will be to the absolute detriment to superannuation for public servants, and needs to be carefully considered before that recommendation is undertaken.

MRS C.A. MARTIN (Kimberley) [5.58 pm]: I would like to add my comments to the debate on the Premier's Statement. One of the key messages we need to get out is that our fabrication industry is in real trouble. I would like to reinforce some of the comments made by the member for Nollamara.

As a member I always acknowledge the 14 000 children in my electorate. The number keeps growing every year. I would like to see the opportunity for those kids to remain in Australia in broader terms, and in Western Australia—that would be great—but more importantly in the Kimberley. Some of the biggest projects in Western Australia are taking place in the Kimberley. There is another project, closer to the Speaker's electorate, and that is Oakajee. Of the three major projects in Western Australia, two are in my electorate. I really want to see the young people in my electorate have the opportunities that they need. To that end, I have a briefing note that I would like to place on the table for today for members opposite to read. It is a good briefing document. It goes to the heart of the issues. It is written in such a way that people can read and understand the implications of this, not only for the industry but for our children—our future. I would like to place that on the table.

[The paper was tabled for the information of members.]

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: The Browse Basin is a project that has been dear to my heart since I was in local government in the 1990s. Yes, I am talking to the member for Hillarys!

The SPEAKER: I admire the member for Kimberley's patience for waiting so long to be given the opportunity to speak to this motion. Unfortunately, the chair is going to be vacated until the ringing of the bells at seven o'clock.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Before the dinner break, I was talking about the Browse Basin and about how I have had a relationship with that issue since the early 1990s when I was a shire councillor in Derby. Of course even back then, that was one of those big projects that we were all hanging our hats on and hoping that it would materialise. Now, all these years later, we are getting some progress. The Browse Basin is still out there, but the development is becoming more and more refined. We are all happy about that, for a number of reasons; the most important of which is that we will have more opportunities for our kids, we hope, with training and employment.

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We also have the Ord irrigation scheme. The Ord irrigation scheme has been in the pipeline since 1964. Ever since the early days when people first moved to the Ord, people have been hoping that the Ord will progress as the food bowl for the nation. Of course that concept has changed as we have gone along. There is now a lot of sandalwood up there, and that has taken up a lot of that prime land. Sandalwood of course ties up the land for 15 years. But maybe in 15 years people will see the value of growing food crops on the Ord, and things will change. We have waited this long; I do not think another 15 years is going to matter that much.

One of the problems that we have up my way—I am sure other members have the same problem in their electorates—is land availability. I am concerned about the way in which LandCorp works. I was shocked to find that if Homeswest wants to develop low-income housing, it has to purchase the land from LandCorp, at a commercial rate. To me, that defeats the purpose. That system obviously does not work. I believe that LandCorp should be involved in other opportunities to purchase land, such as for the development of industry. Industrial land is what LandCorp should be involved in. Residential land should be different. Why should people have to pay \$300 000 to a quasi-government organisation just to purchase a block of land? Everyone should be given access to the great Australian dream, which is to own our own home. In certain places in Western Australia there is such a shortage of land that people have to pay \$1 million for a property that in any other market would be affordable. In Broome, it is just so hard. People have to pay \$300 000 for a residential housing lot, and they then have to pay another \$600 000 to get something built on that land. The way things are going in Broome, my kids will not be able to purchase a property there. I do not think that is going to happen for my kids. They are going to have to go to some place where land is affordable. Housing is a real problem. I do not think the government should be propping up a quasi-government organisation by allowing it to sell residential land.

I believe there are other ways in which we can deal with the problem of land availability. One of those ways is by using native title. The native title legislation has been in place since 1993. I believe that once native title has been found to exist, the traditional owners should be allowed to lease their land to other people for 70 years. The life of a building is only 50 years, so that will give us 20 years' leeway. That would make that land available, but it would not extinguish native title. It is not impossible. All it needs is some goodwill and people who want to make it work. I have done a bit of an investigation into the situation that exists in other places that have land on which native title has been found to exist. In Vanuatu, the traditional owners are allowed to lease their tribal land to other people for commercial purposes. However, because that does not extinguish native title, it means that those people can make an income from that land but they do not lose their cultural connection with their country. I am offended by the way in which native title works in this state. Once native title has been found, the only mining that people can do on that land is for flint. People can go and make a flint knife or something. That is really great. But if a mining company, or someone else, wants to use that land, a whole new process comes into being.

I am also very concerned about how the Department of Conservation and Land Management uses land. What happens is that it acquires the land compulsorily, and the land is then converted to freehold. The land is then vested in the Aboriginal Lands Trust, and the Aboriginal Lands Trust then leases that land back to the government at a peppercorn rate. That raises some real issues. Those issues have been going on for many, many years, and nobody really wants to question them. I want to use this opportunity to put these issues on the agenda.

I am also concerned about the Department of Indigenous Affairs. Within the Department of Indigenous Affairs there is an Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee. That committee comprises Aboriginal people. If there is concern about the cultural significance of a site, the matter is referred to this committee. The committee may decide that the complaint should be upheld. However, the matter then goes to the minister, and the minister may overturn that decision. Why should that sort of decision even be made by a government department? To me, that is an affront to common decency. It means that governments can do whatever they want and just walk all over the rights of Indigenous people. I want people to think about this, because if this was any other sector of our community it just would not happen. Indigenous people have had to go to court and prove their connection to their country. Some of these people have been in the courts for years. However, the only benefit they have been able to get has been from what is known as Aboriginal Lands Trust land. Again, this land is held in trust in a government department, with a board that has on it people who are Aboriginal, yet the real decisions are made by the minister. I have an issue with that, because, again, this land is leased by non-government organisations, at a peppercorn rental. That means that no money is going back into the trust. How can we trust people who do not actually provide a trust? Every time the Aboriginal Lands Trust makes these sorts of arrangements, it is a betrayal. If the Department of Indigenous Affairs did not exist, we would have to find a way to look after the estate that is held in trust for Aboriginal people. In my view, a real trust is one that ensures that the people who own the land get an income; or an outcome—something. Anything is better than what they are currently getting. I wanted to put that on the agenda. It is something important for us all to think about. As I said, I have made my own inquiries. There is bit more work to be done on that, but I fully intend to look at that.

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Another issue that I want to bring up is the Autumn Centre on Guildford Road. I am not sure whether members are aware of that place. It has been there for probably 40 years. The Autumn Centre is a place at which Aboriginal people from the Kimberley come and stay when they have medical problems, and then they are transported to Royal Perth Hospital, or wherever else. There are a lot of dialysis patients there at the moment from the Kimberley. One of my close friends from Nullagine was in there. I have known her for over 30 years. Our kids are the same age. I bumped into her at the shopping centre and she said she was on dialysis in that place. I was shocked. Like most people, I thought that would not happen to her. She told me that they go off, have their treatment and then come back home to the Autumn Centre. There is no air conditioning; they are just left in these little boxes. They have a room that they share but there is no air conditioning. They come back after these horrible procedures, which they have to have; I understand that. Should there not be some comfort for these people? There are not just one or two people; there are about 30. When people are ill, they need to be comfortable, especially when they have undergone dialysis treatment. They are in a room for hours in chilling conditions. They have to have a blanket because the room requires air conditioning. When they go home to the Autumn Centre, they are hot. It is not right. There is something wrong. We need to make sure that people who are ill, who are already put out because they are in a strange place, are looked after and cared for. I wanted to raise that because one size does not fit all when it comes to medical services. These people are brought down from places such as Derby. They are living amongst strangers and are subjected to all sorts of things.

It is nice to see the Acting Speaker (Mr P.B. Watson) in the chair, but I was going to thank the Speaker for letting us into his electorate at Cervantes. We were there last week. This fellow called Dale at the country club really looked after us. He was so nice.

Mr T.K. Waldron: He's very big in country football. He does a lot.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Yes. He kept saying something about West Perth. Cervantes is this amazing place on that road that Shane Hill started. It is a great road. It is full of twists and turns at this end but it gets better further north. What a great community. There are small communities along the way.

We were talking about the squatters' settlements on the way up. There are some real concerns about them. We were asked to raise them because there have been a number of reports about them. It seems that these reports get done and then disappear into some dark, deep place here or in ministers' offices. It would be really good for these people to know what is happening with that issue because they need to plan for the future. The Nationals are saying that they are going to have a super city up that way. We need to sort that out first. The people we met gave us a copy of an article that was in the paper put out by the Shire of Dandaragan. The Leader of the National Party wrote this article before he went overseas. He said that it was going to be one of the super towns. Actually, Wyndham would be a better place —

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Kununurra is at the other end of the state. It is the peak of the state. That is the town that should be a super town. Wyndham would be even better. Could members imagine Wyndham having all those shopping centres, apartment buildings and crocodiles in the main street? There would be plenty of tourist attractions. I am just putting in my bid for the record.

We have had a terrible time since December. We have had floods, cyclones, loss of life and fires. Two cyclones are active at the moment. One is over Darwin and the other one is hanging off the coast. It is building. We think we are going to get a flogging one way or another again. We can prepare for them but one day a big one is going to come along and kick us in the guts. Cyclone Rosita took part of our roof off in 2000. Trees were knocked down. Again, we were really lucky to have had no loss of life.

We have huge Aboriginal communities up north such as Bidyadanga. Bidyadanga needs a cyclone shelter. These things are really important. If there is no cyclone shelter, people are brought into Broome and put into unsuitable accommodation. If there is a lot of damage to the community, these people remain in that accommodation for a long time. During cyclone Rosita people were put in the high school. That caused a lot of disruption. It occurred in April, so kids were meant to go to school and that sort of thing. Cyclone shelters are really important. We have a cyclone alley, which is probably from Derby all the way down to Onslow. We accept that Onslow and the other towns have cyclone shelters and a lot of infrastructure. We have stood back and said that they should have their underground power supply sorted out and we can wait because we are not hit as often, but that has changed in the past three or four years. Now we need to look at underground power. We need to be put on that list to ensure that our communities are safe instead of having our power knocked out for 10 days, which is what happened to us in 2000. It is really important that we get these things done.

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I checked out my power bill because I like air conditioning where I live. In 2009 my bill was about 13c a unit and then it went up three times. It is just teetering at under 19c a unit. That increase is a lot of money. When we think about it, I am here for half the year but the bills have just increased.

[Member's time extended.]

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I can cope with the extra few cents—I am happy to cop it—but a lot of people cannot. One of my constituents is moving down to Albany. I am devastated because he is one of those people who comes into the office from time to time, though not just my office. He is friendly and he will have a cuppa with us. The heat has got to him. His doctor said to him that he will need to move to a colder climate. Albany is as close as one can get to the South Pole, I suppose.

Dr A.D. Buti: You might upset the Acting Speaker. Be careful.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: No; he will love my constituent. The problem is that this fellow has air conditioning but it cannot work because there is no insulation in his roof. I thought maybe the heat had got to him. I said to Charlie that I would go with him to check it out. It is true; there is no insulation in his roof. There is this silver buffer—I cannot remember what it is now—on the walls. It is in the roof as well but there is no insulation. When you walk into his house, the heat hits you. It is only a little place. There are no windows to let the air come through. The air conditioning does not work. It is costing him an arm and a leg and he is a pensioner. What does he have to do? He has to move to Albany.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson): I think that is a very good move.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Penguins love it! I like Albany. I went there once, or was it twice? I got sick both times. I got the flu. It is very cold in summer. He told me it was summer. I believed him, but it was freezing.

The ACTING SPEAKER: You are going very close.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I have built that bridge. I am over it.

People have to have air conditioning. The cost of air conditioning is astronomical and it is going up. It is okay for one of these quasi-government organisations to make a profit but it is more important for people who have already paid their dues—that is, pensioners—to have more breaks. We should give them a go. This fellow is moving to Albany. I think he will be a great contributor to that community but it is a great loss for our community as well. We really need to do something about electricity prices because it is kicking the average Australian in the guts and it is not the right thing to do. I do not think it has been the right thing to do for a long time.

The other issue I wish to raise relates to housing. Have members had a look at the designs of some of these houses that are being built? The Department of Housing provides housing for people on low incomes—I accept that; that is fair enough—but they should at least be appropriate for the area. We all know that it gets really hot so why are there not shutters to assist the occupant and make the house a bit darker? Those shutters could also be good for cyclones and for security. We could have all these things in state housing to make people's lives a lot easier, but for some reason none of it happens.

I turn now to Halls Creek. We are having heaps of problems trying to get maintenance work done up there. We have gone back to the old ways—boarding up windows! Why do we board up windows? It is because we cannot get a glazier. We cannot get tradesmen or women to go up there. One company with a huge contract employs all these subbies who now say that they will not work for that amount of money. It does not work so the work is not getting done again. Even our contracting is not working up there. We really, really need to take a look at where we are going in regards to these things.

Education is the leg-up that most kids need to make a really good life and to contribute as productive adults in our community, but we cannot find a place for them to attend where they can learn in some sort of environment that is okay and that is conducive to learning. Halls Creek has a great swimming pool, but it is not open because the shire cannot get the money for a lifeguard. Okay. I understand that the shire is working on it, but we have had this trouble since the pool first went in. But have a look around the school. Part of it is about 90 years old. It is really amazing. It is full of little pokey rooms. A lot of transportables that have been condemned are still on site. We need to get serious about this. That community has been identified as one that really, really does need a helping hand. If we do not provide the facilities and infrastructure to help provide a future for these kids, it will be a real issue.

And teachers—what sort of environment is it to work in for teachers? It is no wonder that it is hard to get public servants to go up there. The one good thing is that the housing for public servants has improved. They have built a number of houses up there and they look great. But education across the board is a real problem. We have a

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hostel in Broome filled to capacity. If members were to come up at the beginning of the school term, they would see all my kids getting on planes to fly to all points of Australia because there is nowhere for them to board. Some of them go to Geraldton, some to Esperance, and I think some to a place in Kalgoorlie. The rest go over east. Three of my friend's kids are in Geelong. Why? We need more boarding facilities for these kids. There is a beauty up in Kununurra; it is a really, really nice facility for boys and girls, but we need more of those facilities because the kids from remote communities do not have the same opportunities that are available to others. It is my view, and that of a lot of parents in my electorate, that these kids are better off remaining in our community, even if it is in another town—as long as they are in the region.

Mr T.K. Waldron: Can I make a constructive comment? A few years ago I was at Wiluna and the lady there was really keen to have something like a school boarding facility in the Fitzroy Valley. Is that feasible or is that a little bit too far fetched.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I think the minister must have been talking to Cedric's wife. Cedric has said the same thing about Jigalong. He believes that the amazing school at Jigalong is utilised for only part of the year. All education facilities are underutilised. That was his argument. He would ask, "Why not have a boarding facility here as well for the kids from the outstations and those sorts of places?" I think that they work. I think there has to be a standard such that if the minister was happy, or I was happy to have our kids there, it would be workable for the community. But that is the level that has to be set. If it is not good enough for our kids, why would we want someone else to put their kids there?

As I have said, when I travel back and forth at the beginning and the end of the school holidays, virtually the whole plane is full of kids either going away or coming home from boarding schools. It is amazing. What is that worth? What does that cost the government? We could be making an investment in these kids to have school hostels in their local towns; for example in the Kimberley.

Mr T.K. Waldron: Quite a few travel down to Esperance.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: That is what I was saying. Is there not a Christian Aboriginal parent-directed school or some such thing?

Mr T.K. Waldron: Yes; a CAP school—and there is one at Coolgardie as well.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Yes. My view is really simple: if education is that important to provide for these kids so that they become viable adults in our society, that is the investment that we need to make. It will be hostels that will allow those kids to access education facilities. For example, a few of the kids in Broome have taken off national awards. I am not talking about coming twenty-seventh in the state, but about the top three in the nation. Places like that can achieve those results. It means we need more kids in more facilities and more to help them get there. The hostel in Broome is a little different because kids from the Catholic school attend as well. The bishop made an agreement with the previous state government—and it works. Even though the state government runs that hostel, these kids are at the school and the Catholic school board has kicked in. There are ways to do it. We just have to find them.

MR A. KRSTICEVIC (Carine) [7.26 pm]: I, too, would like to say a few words about the Premier's Statement. First, I will say that I am glad to be back in Parliament. It is fantastic to be out and about, but it is good to be back to do the business of Parliament in making legislation that will make the lives of people out there much better.

Before I get too far into my comments, I express my condolences to the families of the 35 people who lost their lives in the Queensland floods and to the family of the teenage girl, Amber Finch, who lost her life in the thunderstorms in Geraldton when accidentally electrocuted.

As these disasters, including the ones in Victoria, Carnarvon, the Gascoyne region, the Wheatbelt and also cyclone Yasi were taking place, I could not help but feel extremely disturbed by what I was seeing on television. It is not something that we see very often in Australia and it is a real concern for me that all these things are coming in such a wave one after the other. Even now there are rains and cyclones up in Darwin and around parts of the country. Hopefully, we are over the worst of that weather, but I have no doubts that the environment will do what it will do and that we as Australians and Western Australians need to pull together as we have, support each other and work hard. I think that our emergency services personnel, our volunteers and the community in general have put their shoulders to the wheel to work together to get through this disaster as best we can. Obviously, the first of the fires that we had in Western Australia was down in Lake Clifton. I happened to be in Busselton and was on my way home on the Forrest Highway and the fire was burning all the way up to the Forrest Highway. As I was coming home, I saw the smoke and could not believe my eyes. I was surprised that I

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was able to keep driving straight through. I had thought that the road would be closed; however, it had not been closed at that stage and I went through the area.

Obviously, the Roleystone–Kelmescott area has suffered, with 72 homes destroyed and numerous other homes damaged. We are distressed at not only the loss of life, but also the loss of property, the loss of memories, the loss of history and the loss of community. A lot of that has happened in all these areas, and I think it is important for us to support the people who have suffered in these areas. I congratulate the Premier for being on the front foot when dealing with these disasters and for being available to not only declare these areas disaster areas, but to contribute financially to help these people in whatever way possible. At the time, I had some engagements with the Premier that were cancelled so that the Premier could deal with the issues on the ground. I think that very proper and I commend him for doing that and for acknowledging the extraordinary efforts of our firefighters and volunteers. I know that the member for Jandakot spent many hours fighting the fires around the Roleystone–Kelmescott area and that the members for Armadale and Darling Range and other members assisted in various ways. They all need to be commended for that.

As we know, the drought in Western Australia has had a massive impact. I know that the Minister for Agriculture and Food has been doing a lot of work in that area. He has been keeping us informed of progress, the packages available and the support being offered to people in rural communities. Australia is in a lot of pain at the moment, but we are very resilient, we are working well together and we will get out of this. Federal, state and local governments are working well together to try to develop policies and strategies to not only deal with the immediate disaster, but also develop long-term plans to get through the problems. That is commendable for everybody concerned. We need to be vigilant to ensure that we have all the right policies and processes in place so that we can deal with disasters in the future, if they occur. I have no doubt that some disasters will occur in the future. It is something that we need to be very conscious of.

I will now talk about an issue in my electorate. It is not a new issue; it is an issue that everyone in the house is aware of. It was brought to this Parliament on 12 March 2008 by the then member for Carine, Katie Hodson-Thomas, who instigated an inquiry by the Economics and Industry Standing Committee into the Karrinyup Lakes Lifestyle Village. The committee reported on 19 June 2008. In its report there were 67 findings and 34 recommendations. There are lots of issues. One of my concerns is that some 26 to 28 per cent of the population in Western Australia will be over the age of 65 by 2051 and up to 31 per cent will be over the age of 65 by 2101. There will be a huge shift in the demographics of the community. Retirement villages are very important for the future of this state, so it is very important that we get these things right.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I will not go through the entire committee report, but I would like to read one part of it. It refers to the owner, Mr Martin, and also Mr Leonard Whyman. It states —

... Mr. Martin displays as a person who has very limited understanding of even the basic principles of managing retirement villages. In fact, he admitted so in his evidence. Neither he nor his partner, Mr. Whyman seem to grasp the inherent conflicts in them being the owners, developers and managers of KLLV, and the special skills needed to manage those conflicts.

Indeed, Mr. Martin presents as a bully, ...

It is very disturbing to know that someone like that can manage a retirement village, or has been able to do so up to this point, and can prey on some of the most vulnerable people in society—retirees.

I will give members a bit of background to the state of affairs at the Karrinyup Lakes Lifestyle Village. When Hon Simon O’Brien became the new Minister for Finance; Commerce; and Small Business, he almost immediately phoned me and said, “Tony, I would like to organise a meeting with the residents of the Karrinyup Lakes Lifestyle Village.” I immediately organised a meeting with him. We met with the residents; about a dozen residents came to my office. They were very appreciative that the minister personally came to listen to their concerns. It was heartening to know that the minister has also had some difficulties in dealing with a particular retirement village; he had to deal with some issues when his mother passed away. Albeit he did not have an extreme understanding of the problems, he had a reasonable idea that there are issues and that things need to change.

We then went to the village itself, and we took the minister around the village. As the residents will say, the homes are very well built and are of a high quality. We then went to the clubhouse and the swimming pool. The minister was appalled by what he saw when he walked inside the clubhouse. There were empty rooms.

Mr A.P. O’Gorman interjected.

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Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The pool was a construction site, and the clubhouse is not much better. As we walked through the various rooms—for example, the so-called hairdressing room, which is empty and has one little basin in it—we saw that every basin was connected only to cold water. Apart from the kitchen, there was no hot water connection in any room. The cable for the hot water was just hanging off the wall. There is a shower rose just outside the sliding doors but it has only cold water. It is in full view of the people sitting inside the clubrooms—not that anybody sits in there because the furniture is from Ikea, which is totally inadequate for the requirements of people of that age. Of course, the swimming pool is a construction site; it is an absolute disaster. The minister walked away from the village much more informed. He was appalled by what he saw.

There are 27 occupied units in the village. There are 44 residents. There are 13 vacant units and 12 still to be built.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson): Members, can everyone keep quiet. There are four or five different conversations going on and there is a bit of a dull roar. I know that when everyone else is on their feet, they want to be heard. I want to hear what the member for Carine is saying.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I am also sad to report that six residents at the village have died without ever seeing the facilities or the clubrooms and without knowing that these issues will be resolved for themselves, their partners or their families.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah, you are on three strikes at the moment. I know you want to go home along the freeway, but I am not going to send you. Just be quiet, please.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Two residents have had to take out violence restraining orders against Eion Martin. That gives members a bit of a picture of the state of the village and where things are at.

One of the reasons the new minister got in touch with me is that he knows how much I badgered the previous minister, and the minister before him, about getting something done about this village. I go to the meetings that the residents have with the Department of Commerce, and I commend the Department of Commerce for the amazing job that it is doing in supporting the residents by putting all the resources of the department at their disposal and also for funding civil action on behalf of residents to deal with cases. I have spoken to residents, the department and the minister, and, apart from the new legislation that will be introduced, absolutely nothing else can be done to help the people at the Karrinyup Lakes Lifestyle Village.

Mr A.P. O’Gorman interjected.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I know that members are passionate about this issue. I have about half a dozen retirement villages in my electorate, and all the rest of them function well. No issues have been brought to my attention. I have visited every one of those villages and I have spoken to residents and there are no concerns. St Ives, Cedar Woods and LandCorp are proposing to build a very large retirement village on the Carine TAFE site, and that has gone out for community consultation. It has gone through the City of Stirling and has been approved. What is important for the people of Carine —

Mr A.P. O’Gorman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Joondalup!

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I have spoken to the new minister on numerous occasions, albeit he has been the minister for only a short time, and he is fully aware of my disgust at the situation at the Karrinyup Lakes Lifestyle Village. There is emotional stress on the residents and it is having an effect on not only the residents but also the community. All the people who live in that locality know what the residents are going through and how they are suffering. The community is outraged. The member is right; the legislation will be important. What is important is that the statutory review of the retirement villages legislation —

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I will get to that, to the extent that I can. People need to read the final report.

Mr D.A. Templeman: I bet we won’t see it before we rise in June. Do you want to take me up on that?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah!

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The minister is quietly confident that the legislation will come through in the first half of this year. It is important for all members of the executive to reinforce the message that this legislation is a priority because a large number of people are living in retirement villages. As much as all our other legislative agendas are important, this legislation is critical, and it is vital that it be implemented. I know that there is a

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commitment to get this legislation through as soon as possible. I would hope to see this legislation presented to Parliament in the first half of this year. On behalf of the most vulnerable people in our society, I will be putting as much pressure as I can on all the relevant ministers, as will my parliamentary colleagues. We will all be retirees one day and we may all be living in a retirement village. If members do not already have parents or grandparents who are living in a retirement village —

Mr A.P. O’Gorman: After what I have seen, I will never go near them!

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Funnily enough, not very long ago I was talking to my parents about them going to a retirement village, but I am not so sure any more.

It is important that the final report into the statutory review of retirement village legislation be implemented in its entirety. I understand that the member for Mandurah was talking about people in the industry lobbying people to get things watered down to make it easier for them. Having read this review and having looked at the issue of retirement villages at a global level, I cannot see anything in the proposed draft legislative framework that people in the industry need to be scared of if they are doing the right thing in running a business and also helping retirees. There is an opportunity for that to happen, and there are a lot of good things in this report. We talked about the housing information service for seniors. Apart from purchasing a first home, moving into a retirement village is probably the biggest decision a person will make, and it will have the greatest impact on the last 10 or so years of a person’s life. It is important that that information service is established and properly resourced so that quality information and advice can be provided to people who are looking to move into a retirement village. It also needs to have some teeth so it can inform people about those retirement villages that are not doing the right thing or that are under investigation so people know that they should not move into a particular retirement village. That is probably an issue for some retirement village owners because if people know that one retirement village is not as good as another, it is harder for the owner to sell it and get out of the business. However, the legislation should, in a short time, allow us to fix the problems in that type of retirement village and enable it to get back on track. The residents of the Karrinyup Lakes Lifestyle Village want everyone to know the problems they have and how bad that retirement village is because they do not want anyone else to suffer in the same way that they have suffered. There is a lot of merit in that.

I believe that non-performing retirement village managers need to be removed. The government must have the power to decide who will manage a village and how it will be run and, if necessary, it must have the power to appoint an administrator. The management of the Karrinyup Lakes Lifestyle Village should have been taken out of the hands of those individuals a long time ago. It is disappointing that the legislation does not allow us to do that at this point and that there is no other mechanism to do it. That is a very sad indictment.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: It is also important to have an extra cooling-off period. When we enter into contracts, we sometimes rush our decisions. Some lawyers know how to word things in certain ways and make them sound tricky. It is important, especially at that late stage of a person’s life, to have more time to consult one’s partner, family members or other residents and to seek and think through legal advice before making a final decision.

I believe that reserve funds are critical for two reasons. Firstly, a well-managed village will have funds in reserve so that maintenance issues can be dealt with as they crop up. Secondly, a healthy stock of reserve funds helps when selling a retirement village when the time is right. It goes without saying that auditing the accounts needs to be a mandatory requirement. I believe that audits need to be done by an accredited auditor. It is important that people understand what is going on and that the books have been checked very carefully, because many people do not know much about managing finances. At that age, people need someone to help them without having to worry about whether all the books are balanced. Sometimes the accounts can be quite complex. Operators can increase expenses unnecessarily beyond cost recovery or beyond a small profit margin. There needs to be a way to appeal that decision and not allow operators to get too greedy when managing a retirement village. When residents leave and move on, the ongoing charges that they must pay ought to be limited. It is great that this is in the legislation because it is very important.

Residents’ committees are probably one of the most important things that residents of retirement villages want. They want a residents’ committee which is listened to and which has the power and ability to deal with management and negotiate outcomes. I have spoken to the residents’ committee of the Karrinyup Lakes Lifestyle Village, and they do not mind that the operator is making a profit. The residents know that the operators are running a business and that there are costs involved when a resident leaves the village; they are happy to pay those costs. They are happy to stay in the village knowing their obligations and knowing that they will live a good quality of life in their last few years. Residents’ committees are very important for the harmony of a village and for making sure that the residents of a retirement village operated by a large corporation in particular can

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pass on their concerns. Residents' committees are important also to pass on to the residents the issues raised by the village operators.

It is important for the Commissioner for Consumer Protection to make enforceable undertakings and ensure that people like Eion Martin, who squirms, ducks, weaves and finds every legal loophole he can, are stopped. Sometimes I wonder about the laws in this country that allow people to do that. They ask for adjournments and drag on cases for years and years by making up excuses. Sometimes that is not warranted. I am not sure whether the judges really understand the true nature of the situation they are dealing with. In the case of the Karrinyup Lakes Lifestyle Village, albeit the judges understood the matters that were under consideration, I do not believe that they could really know what was going on unless they got out there and lived with those retirees for a couple of weeks. They do not really know how much the people are suffering and how much deferring a case by six months or a year impacts on an individual's quality of life.

It is very important for all members to read this document, to understand it and to raise any concerns or issues they have so that we can work together to make sure that when the legislation is introduced into the house, it is supported and can go through as quickly as possible. It is also important to ensure it has teeth. I do not want to see legislation come into this house that is unacceptable and does not give us the necessary mechanisms to deal with these issues. I hope that after the experiences and review of the Karrinyup Lakes Lifestyle Village, we have a very good understanding of the worst possible scenario that can exist. That is probably the worst retirement village in the whole of Australia. It is important to give this report the necessary time and commitment to make sure that we are protecting not only the current residents, but also the future residents. We must ensure that the appropriate legal processes are in place and the industry can grow with certainty so that people can decide to go into a retirement village knowing that they have protections and fully understand the issues. I just want to make sure that members really take that on board and take the time to read this. If members have any questions, they should come and see me; I am happy to share my knowledge and experience, and so is the minister for that matter. The minister is very open to that discussion. While the Premier is here, I implore him to give his full support to the minister to try to get this through as quickly as possible so that we can solve this problem. This is a real human tragedy.

I will not say any more than that, but I will reinforce the fact that every fortnight, for a number of years now, the department has given its full support to the residents and that everything that can be done is being done. I commend the department for that, but I realise that more needs to be done. There are things being done behind the scenes. I do not know the full details, because there are legal processes that need to be gone through, but I know that things are happening. I have the utmost confidence in the minister and in his word that he will make this his number one priority. I take him at his word on that, and we will see whether he delivers.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Do you want to take my bet? I'll bet you \$100 in scratchies, and it can go to the people of the Karrinyup Lakes Lifestyle Village!

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: From my perspective, it should have been before then.

Mr M.P. Whitely: Put your money where your mouth is! Come on!

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The money is not a problem; I do not like to encourage gambling, for a start! The member probably supports the federal government introducing pokies into Western Australia!

Several members interjected.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: That is good; I am glad to hear that!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson): Members! I just want to hear the member for Carine. Member for Carine, just remember: if you give it out, you will get it back, so just concentrate on what you are saying!

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I am just answering some intelligent questions that have been posed, Mr Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I just want to hear what you have to say, not what they have to say.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Thank you very much. I will move on.

Over the break, I visited most of the businesses and shops in my electorate and spoke to their proprietors about issues concerning their businesses, how they are operating and how tough times are. I can say that, on the whole, most of them did not have too many complaints. Some said that business was down 10 per cent to 15 per cent, for a range of reasons. One or two fish and chip shop operators said that electricity costs were making things hard for them. Obviously, businesses that have high electricity usage are feeling the pinch at the moment, but on the whole there was not too much negative feedback; they were generally supportive of the good work of the

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government. That was good feedback. I am also waiting for surveys to come in from all those businesses, and they have my contact details, so I will be interested to see what they come back with over the coming weeks. I think that is important.

The commercial tenancy legislation will no doubt be introduced some time later this year, and the office of the small business commissioner will be established. Those things will be very useful for small businesses and I think they will effect a very positive change.

Like all members, I have a lot of serious Homeswest issues in my electorate. Although there have been changes to the processes and systems for dealing with tenants who do not do the right thing, such as the three strikes policy, there are still problems with dealing with these issues. There are people in my electorate who have complained about having been threatened, and they are now scared to complain. There are still serious problems, and I think we need to do more. I have spoken to the minister and his department about that to say that we need to make some changes.

With regard to state issues, the waterfront development is absolutely stunning and amazing. It is not as futuristic as the last one I saw, which was a few years ago, but it is very practical in its design and appeal. It is great that, finally, after so many years, a real commitment has been made to progressing this project, and that funding has been allocated towards it. Some preliminary work has been done at the Swan River site, and I commend the Premier for making decisions and following them through, and making things happen that have been held back for so long.

Likewise, the Perth City Link is well and truly overdue. Combined with the waterfront development, it will change the face of the City of Perth. The City of Perth can do a lot more with Northbridge; Northbridge has been let go, and the City of Perth needs to do more on that front. I know a number of business owners there, and I go to Northbridge occasionally for a coffee on a Friday or Saturday night. I have witnessed robberies going on around me, and, occasionally, some of the things you see are frightening. The police obviously try to do the best they can, but there are drug problems and other issues that make the situation complex to deal with; more needs to be done on that front.

From an economic perspective, I am proud to say that the government has continued with its budget surplus. Sound economic management is important. Debt is good, as long as we are investing the debt wisely and getting a return back for the community and the state. The projects that the government has in train will really make a difference to the state—the hospitals, museums and theatres. The work that the Minister for Transport is doing with taxis is vitally important. People feel that it is difficult to get a taxi and they do not always feel safe. Sometimes I do not feel safe in some of the taxis I get in. It is probably worse in Sydney and Melbourne, but some good work is being done there and it is great that the minister has taken that on board.

The Pilbara Cities project is a fantastic initiative and spending \$1 billion on it over six years is a good decision. Building up the population in that region, and encouraging families to live and work up there will remove some of the pressure from Perth and will also allow Western Australia to expand and build those areas, where there is enormous potential in resources and other sectors.

MR J.C. KOBELKE (Balcatta) [7.57 pm]: We are extremely fortunate in Western Australia to have a state that offers so many wonderful opportunities to us: the resourcefulness, innovation and productivity of our people, and the wonderful mineral resources, oil and gas that we have, provide opportunities in Western Australia that are beyond those in most other places in the world. People expect that they will be able to gain some benefit from that, and many do. Many are in very well paid jobs and are able to enjoy the fruits of their labour due to our resources sector. However, there also many people who do not, and that is certainly the largest specific issue in my electorate. People are concerned about making ends meet and simply surviving with the increases in living costs. In an environment in which there is so much money flowing in, even a very average government can do a lot of good things. The concern that has been put to me by the people of the electorate of Balcatta is that we have a very uncaring government that is really not interested in the lives of ordinary people and the battles they have to feed their families, to make ends meet and to pay their bills. The government is not interested in making sure that the public interest is paramount in looking after the interests of the public generally.

We have a situation in which we are likely to find that we have two different groups of people: those who benefit fairly directly from the wonderful resources we have and the boom that we are experiencing; and people whose incomes are fixed—pensioners and people on lower incomes—who are being hit with increased living costs and are finding it very difficult to manage, especially with kids going back to school over the past week. They have to meet all the extra bills to obtain the uniforms, books, school fees and other requirements.

Many people in Balcatta are doing it tough. During a booming economy the government is putting greater burdens on people instead of lifting those burdens and helping them. The increase in living costs is driven by a

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range of things. The level of activity in the resources sector obviously creates a demand that fuels inflation, but also higher interest rates and housing costs mean that people buying houses are finding it tougher to meet mortgage repayments. Many of the people in my electorate who are on low incomes and who have to meet rent payments for the places they live in are doing it very, very tough. I find it impossible to know how I would survive on the low income of some people who are paying \$300 a week rent to put a roof over their heads and those of their family. We know some people cannot meet rent payments and we see more people becoming homeless.

The government can control, but has failed to, the huge increases in taxes and charges that it has levied on ordinary families: new taxes; the increase in the emergency services levy way beyond what is required; the increased tax on rubbish going to landfill, which comes straight back on to the taxes that people have to pay through local government; and the huge increases in water charges, electricity and gas. As mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition, many people in our electorates cannot turn on the air conditioning, and did not turn on their gas heaters last winter, because they are fearful that they cannot afford to pay the bills. In a state that has so much wealth and is doing so well, many people are not getting the benefits of the boom; they are suffering. How could any government that cared for its ordinary people increase its electricity charges by 46 per cent in just two years? That is almost a 50 per cent increase in the cost of the basic necessity of electricity in just two years. How could the government build into the forward estimates another 22.3 per cent increase in electricity from July this year? The Premier is saying that the increase will not be that big, but that is what is written in the budget books. That is the money the government expects to get from the profits made by the three electricity utilities. The government is hiking up the costs of electricity so that these companies, which are owned by the government, can make a bigger profit and that profit can come back to the government.

The government is ripping money out of the pockets of people who cannot afford it through electricity and water bills. Clearly, that is a hallmark of a government that does not care for ordinary people. The government is willing to hit ordinary people so it can have money to spend on other things that it sees as a higher priority. How does the government explain this? We see a government that is all about spin. For me, spin is really about being deceitful. The government is increasing the cost of water and electricity and then putting out false reasons about why it supposedly has to do it. The Barnett government has been responsible for the most savage increases in the costs of living that I have seen in my 22 years in this place. I have never before seen a government that directly impacts on the living standards of ordinary people by increasing the cost of electricity by 46 per cent and the cost of water in the order of 30 per cent in two years. The government has looked to tax ordinary people to meet its spending priorities. How does the government try to explain this? What is the spin or the basically untrue things the government says about why it is doing this? One of the government's arguments is the global financial crisis. Yesterday, when the member for Vasse explained why the government could not do anything, he said, "Well, it is the global financial crisis." If it is the global financial crisis, why did the government increase its expenditure in the general government sector by 26 per cent in its first two years? If there was a real concern about the global financial crisis impacting on the revenue of the state, why would the government go out and increase its expenditure by 26 per cent in two years? Clearly, the global financial crisis is a lame excuse. It did not affect the government's spending spree; it was simply a matter of the government having different priorities that it wanted to spend its money on. Ordinary families are not a priority for this government.

The second set of excuses that the government uses for these huge increases in electricity and water rates is to blame the previous Labor government. When we lost government—we have taken the message from the people; that was their vote—we had record surpluses year after year and record low net state debt. The government inherited a set of books that was unbelievably good. There is no way in which the government can blame the previous government for its decision to hit ordinary people to find the money to go on the spending splurge, which is its wont. Another part of the government's excuse, its spin, is to say that the disaggregation of Western Power meant it must suddenly put up the price of electricity by this ridiculous amount. That is a nonsense argument because, if that really was the case, why will the government not reverse the disaggregation? That was the government's policy at the election. The government will not do it because the disaggregation provides direct benefits to Western Australia and potentially lower electricity costs than if the government had not disaggregated Western Power. It opens up a marketplace in which private players come into the market and help create a market with the advantage of more benefits to the people of Western Australia. Therefore, the government will not undo it. Those are not the words the government is using or the story it is telling, but that is the truth. The disaggregation was clearly of benefit to Western Australia.

Further, if the electricity prices had to be increased because of disaggregation, what about the huge increases in the cost of water? There is no disaggregation there. It is simply that this government wants to hit ordinary people for its uncontrolled spending splurge. The fact is that the cost of electricity was held down artificially because that was a requirement of the Liberal Party in opposition. The Liberal Party required no increase as a basis for

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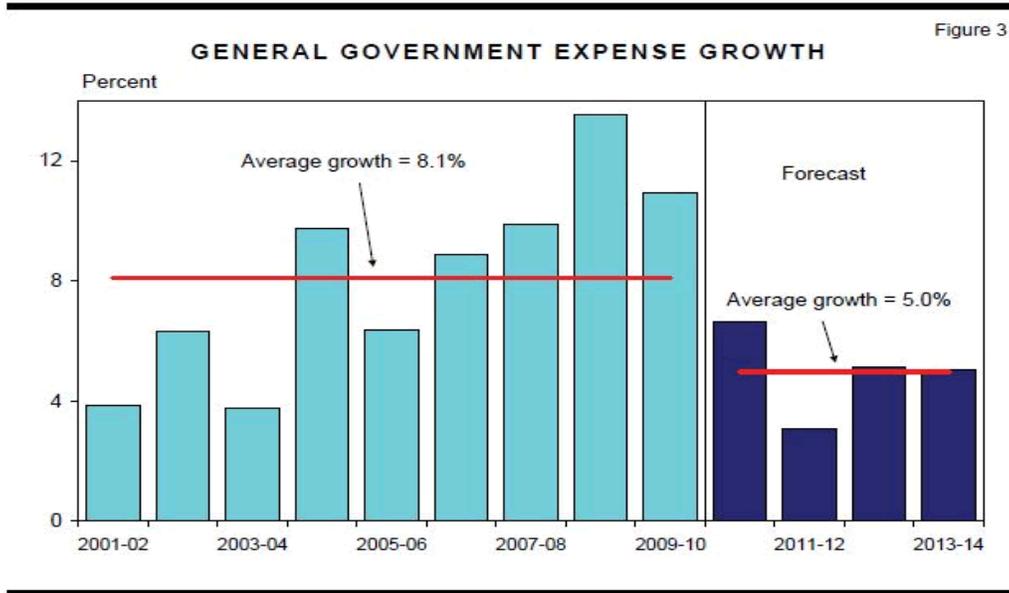
agreeing to the disaggregation of Western Power. The Labor Party recognised that in government and we put \$780 million into the budget so that there would be a direct subsidy to cushion the impact on ordinary families as those prices increased. But what did the Barnett government do when it came in? It had other priorities. This government wanted the \$780 million to spend on its priorities, and it takes the money out of the pockets and purses of mums and dads so that it can splurge on its particular priorities and, as I said, increase expenditure by a record 26 per cent in its first two years. The savage increases in bills imposed on ordinary families by the Barnett government are a result of the government having different priorities. Ordinary people are a very low priority for this government.

The 26 per cent increase in expenditure in the first two years is continuing to grow. In the *2010–11 Government Mid-year Financial Projections Statement* released in December 2010, we find that the government expects that by June this year—being its first three years—its expenditure will have increased by 34.3 per cent. In just three years the government will increase its general government expenditure by more than one-third. The spin that the Premier puts on that is that the government has slowed expenditure growth; he said that yesterday in his statement. The Premier talked about fiscal discipline. This is spin at the absolute level, because what the Premier is saying is totally contrary to the facts. We have seen a level of expenditure that is way beyond anything in my experience and a huge growth in what the government spends money on, yet the Premier talks about fiscal discipline and slowing expenditure growth. I would like to talk about a table on page 14 of the *2010–11 Government Mid-year Financial Projections Statement*.

I seek leave to have figure 3 incorporated into *Hansard* because I wish to talk about the figures.

Leave granted.

The following material was incorporated —



Mr J.C. KOBELKE: If we look at that those figures—I will also be drawing on some figures from an earlier page of the *2010–11 Government Mid-year Financial Projections Statement*—we find that the government is anticipating expenditure growth of 6.6 per cent. At the time of the budget, it said it would be 3.9 per cent only. Whether we end up with expenditure over three years of 34.3 per cent or something considerably more is going to depend on whether the government’s figures are accurate.

This government is about spin—not the facts and not truth—and I will use the example of the electricity charge increases. Electricity charges have increased by 46 per cent in two years, and built into this year, up to July 2011, is another increase of 22.3 per cent. By including that prospective increase of 22.3 per cent in the figures, considerably more revenue will come back to the government in the out years, but the Premier has repeatedly said that electricity prices will not go up by that amount. He cannot have it both ways. If electricity prices are not

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going to be put up by that amount, less revenue will be returned from the utilities next year and the year after because the prices have not been hiked as much. That will create a further financial problem in the next few years. The alternative is to increase electricity charges by 22.3 per cent, hitting ordinary mums and dads even more, to generate the revenue to pay for the high level of expenditure that this government seems to want to live on. It cannot have it both ways. The government can have no increase in electricity charges, which is what Labor thinks should happen; a very small increase, meaning less revenue will be obtained; or it can increase charges by 22.3 per cent, as projected by the government, to get the promised revenue to try to balance its books.

Expenditure is not under control, and the set of books the government presents are simply not honest or factual. If we look at the graph I have just asked to be incorporated into *Hansard*, we will see that in the past two years the growth in general government expenses is way above anything in the preceding years. It is way above what expenditure growth has been. I know the Premier has said on occasions in this place that there was high expenditure growth under Labor; however, the government's own figures on page 14 show that in the past two years, its expenditure growth is clearly above anything in the preceding Labor years. This government has been absolutely rolling money out the door on its priorities, and the Barnett government's priority is not ordinary families, not mums and dads and not pensioners. It has hit them to make the money to spend on its priorities.

The second point I make about that graph is that the government is showing for this year, and in the out years, an average expenditure growth of five per cent. That is just spin, and it is absolutely untrue. If the Premier is not going to increase electricity charges by 22.3 per cent and if he is going to spend money on other things, there will be a much higher growth in the out years. That has been done to try to create the impression that the government is controlling expenditure, but we have seen in the past two years, and we are seeing in this year, that it is not controlling expenditure.

Let us come to some of the actual figures; let us look at the Barnett government's track record over the past two years. In 2009–10, it predicted that budget expenditure growth would be 6.6 per cent; in the midyear review it was recalculated as nine per cent, and ended up being over 10 per cent. Between the budget and midyear review, it went from 6.6 per cent growth to nine per cent growth; that is, it went up 36 per cent. We are now in the financial year 2010–11. The budget stated that expenditure growth would be 3.9 per cent, which was an absolutely concocted figure with no substance at all. It was a nonsense, because this government cannot control expenditure. When we came to the time of the midyear review, the expenditure growth was calculated to be 6.6 per cent for the current year. Between the budget and now, it grew by nearly 70 per cent.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Where is the evidence that this government has control of expenditure? It clearly does not. We have uncontrolled expenditure, which means the government is hitting ordinary families and pensioners with increased taxes and charges to help cover it, and we have seen debt balloon from \$3.6 billion in the final year under Labor to a predicted \$14 billion by the end of this year. I repeat: in just three years, Western Australia has gone from \$3.6 billion net debt to \$14 billion net debt, and climbing.

My real fear about that is that this government actually has a plan to deal with its debts, but it will not state what it is. When it makes public comment, it states that there is no plan at all, but I think it does have a plan. Its plan is privatisation. It is going to let debts get out of control, and it will say that it has to sell off assets that belong to the people to pay for its profligate spending, because the debt is out of control. That, I suspect, is what it is really about: letting debt grow wild so that it can use that as another excuse for its privatisation agenda.

Can members remember what happened last time? When this Premier was Minister for Resources, he sold off the Dampier to Bunbury gas pipeline for, I think, \$2.8 billion—a huge amount of money—and what did we have? We had a bankrupt operator that could not expand the pipeline, and the south west was stymied in producing the energy necessary for our economic growth. The last Liberal government put the brakes on economic development in this state because it was interested only in putting money in the coffers. It wanted to make the books look good for itself, and it used privatisation to do it.

I now turn to the goods and services tax and the dud deal that Western Australia gets, and how we totally support this government in trying to get a better deal for WA. WA is losing out because of the way the GST pool is allocated to the states and territories. The midyear review figures indicate that in 2010–11 Western Australia will receive seven per cent of the GST pool. We comprise over 10 per cent of the population and we produce well over 10 per cent of Australia's wealth, yet we get seven per cent of the GST pool. It is projected that in 2011–12 we will get only 6.8 per cent of that pool, and in 2013–14 we will receive under five per cent of the GST pool. That is totally unfair to Western Australia. But, again, the Premier cannot just stick up for Western Australia; he has to put this dishonest spin on things. He has to talk about the federal Labor government fixing it. What he does not tell the people is that when the GST was brought in, Labor opposed it; it opposed it nationally and in

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[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 16 February 2011]

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this state. I was in this chamber during the debates when we put up motion after motion opposing the introduction of the GST, and the Court government—during which time the now Premier was the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party—actually voted against those motions and voted in support of the GST. In making my contribution to that debate, I said that one of the reasons we did not want the GST was that it passed to Canberra and the other states control over our finances, and that we would get dudded. But this Premier supported it, and he supported Richard Court doing the deal with John Howard to put in the GST that dudded WA. We said that back then. Unfortunately, now, we have to get agreement from not only the commonwealth but also the other states to reorganise the structure to get a better share for WA. The chances of doing that are very slim.

But that does not mean we should not fight for it; in fact, the now Leader of the Opposition, Hon Eric Ripper, when he was Treasurer, was fighting the then Howard government to get a better deal for WA. Where was the now Premier, Colin Barnett, back then? Was he lending his support to Labor against the Howard government? No; he had gone quiet. But now that he is Premier, he realises just how bad a deal it was; it was a deal which he helped put together and which sold WA down the drain. To me, that spin is less than honest. It is not actually presenting to people what the real picture is of how the GST is disadvantageous to WA; and it was the Liberal governments in WA and Canberra that stitched us up and stitched us up properly. We have to do all we can to get a better share of that GST for WA.

Another example, which I will go to very briefly, of how this government is being less than honest and open with the people of Western Australia, is a freedom of information application that I made to get a copy of the report of the independent review of options to reduce salinity in the upper Collie River basin. That review was an election promise made by this government. The government said that that review would cost \$250 000—or at least that was the amount of money that it allocated to that review. Just a few years before that review was done, when I was the Minister for Water, I had had a review done by Ross Kelly, and that review was made public. I was, therefore, very keen to get a copy of that independent review. However, because the government has not released that report, I had to put in an FOI request for that report. I have found that a very good example of how this government tries to hide information, does not want to tell the truth and does not want to reveal what is going on.

I made my FOI application at the start of July 2010. I was able to get out of the Department of Water, in dribs and drabs, various documents about how it had contracted out the work, and about the process for that contracting out. Part of the application was referred to the then Minister for Water, because clearly he had some of those documents. Therefore, although I did get some of the documents, they were incomplete. Also, the department did not provide me with a schedule of the documents. I was given multiple copies of the same documents, and, when I read those documents, I found that other documents were alluded to, but the department did not claim an exemption for those documents, did not tell me they existed, and did not provide them to me. Therefore, I did not know whether the department was just incompetent, or whether it was trying to hide some little mess that was going on in there—and I still do not know. I would have thought that a government department that followed the FOI requirements in a full and proper way would either make the documents available to me, or claim an exemption. But that is not what the department did. The referral to the office of the Minister for Water was made on 5 August 2010. From that time, until now, I have not received any documents, and neither has there been any claim for an exemption for any documents. I have no idea what is happening in the office of the Minister for Water with this report. The government paid over \$250 000 for this review report, but the report has just disappeared. This is hardly a government that is being open and honest in dealing with FOI applications.

The contract with the company that did this work was also quite mysterious. In the papers that I was able to get through my FOI request, there was an evaluation report. That report indicated that six companies had put in an expression of interest to do the work. However, the company that won the contract—a very reputable company—was not the lowest bidder. Therefore, why did that company get the work? The evaluation document says that the reason the company won the contract is that it “demonstrated a good understanding of the political and industry drivers”. In other words, the company that won the contract was not the lowest bidder, but it understood the politics.

One of the emails that I was able to get through my FOI application is very interesting. It said that the department requires a “sanitised version” of the report for public release. The documents that I received from the Department of Water did not provide me with the report. The department also made no claim for an exemption for the report. There was, however, a letter of transmittal. Therefore, the department does have the report, but it will not disclose it. This is hardly an honest application of the FOI legislation. The department either does have the report, but it does not want to disclose it, and it does not want to claim an exemption, or it does not have the report. If the department does not have the report, there should be some document to say what has happened to

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that report. Has the cleaning lady put it through the shredder, because the department does not want this report, which cost \$250 000, to see the light of day?

In the documents that I did receive, there was a summary report. This was the “sanitised version” of the report. Does the government expect that it will be able to hoodwink me into accepting the sanitised report as the report for which it has paid that \$250 000? I hope the department is not so devious as to think that it can trick me and pretend to pass off to me a report that is not the actual report. Today I actually received back an answer to a parliamentary question that indicates that the government paid nearly \$20 000 for that sanitised report. The company was paid \$250 000 to do the inquiry and write a report, and it did that within a few months, and it then charged the government another nearly \$20 000 to write a sanitised report, which is the only report that has been released.

Another problem with the information from the Department of Water is that it released a copy of the proposal by the successful company. However, as indicated in the assessment report, six companies made a proposal. What has happened to the other five proposals? Have they also gone through the shredder? Have they been hidden in a drawer somewhere so that people can say that they do not need to show those to anyone? This is an absolute joke. The government cannot say it is being honest and open when six companies tendered for this work, my FOI application released only one of those applications, and the other five are not even mentioned. We know from the evaluation report that the company that won the tender was not the lowest bidder. But those other documents are not there. That is clearly not honest and open government.

I then appealed to the Freedom of Information Commissioner and made a complaint. The letter that I got back from the commissioner basically said, well, tough bikkies. It said that 89 complaints are currently before the FOI commissioner; 41 of those matters have been assigned to complaints officers, and my complaint is one of the 48 that have yet to be assigned. It said also that, on average, it will be some eight months before the complaints officers will get around to those matters.

This is a government that does not want people to know what it is doing. But people do know what it is doing. This government is hitting people to meet its expenditure, which is out of control. The people of this state are paying the price for this government’s expenditure. They are suffering because this government is incompetent in managing its budget. This government is flush with money, but its expenditure is so great that it is shovelling money out the door. We heard today that the government will be going ahead with the foreshore development. That is not in the budget; therefore, the government’s expenditure will go up even higher. We hear time after time about how this government is spending money, often on good things. But that is building on an expenditure that is already out of control. The Premier talks about fiscal rectitude and getting expenditure under control. It is all spin. The substance of this government is very, very different. Unfortunately, the people of Western Australia are paying the price for a government that cannot control its expenditure.

MR M.W. SUTHERLAND (Mount Lawley — Deputy Speaker) [8.27 pm]: I want to touch on the current status of the Graffiti Taskforce, which is continuing in its efforts to reduce the incidence of graffiti throughout this state. It is pleasing to note that the Graffiti Taskforce is now chaired by the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Paul Zanetti. There are a number of senior police officers on the task force, including Assistant Commissioner Steven Brown.

Towards the end of last year, the Public Transport Authority put a number of “cleanskin” buses into service, with closed-circuit television cameras, and with police backup. That was known as Operation Cleanskin. Within a short period of time, some 17 culprits had been caught for vandalising public transport, either buses or trains. Thanks must go to *The West Australian* for publishing the photos of these miscreants on its front page, which caused many of them to be identified easily by family, friends and acquaintances. Some even turned themselves in. A few weeks ago, after Operation Cleanskin, Operation Eraser was commenced by the Public Transport Authority, and a further sting operation has been carried out.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Do you know what the biggest eyesore is at the moment, member for Mount Lawley? It is your sign everywhere!

Mr M.W. SUTHERLAND: Okay, member for Girrawheen. Thank you very much. I hope you do not put it in the boot of your car!

The West Australian did the public a favour by publishing the photos of these graffiti vandals on its front page. Again, 19 people were caught by CCTV.

Government utilities such as the Water Corporation and the Public Transport Authority are heartened by the commitment now given by the police to put resources into the fight against this social cancer. We all know that graffiti is estimated to cost approximately \$25 million in direct costs to local councils and utilities. The indirect

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costs to councils are many millions more. We all know that staff are tied up with meetings, initiatives, strategies et cetera, so the cost to the taxpayer is very great indeed. Of course this money is dead money. The public is sick and tired of this low-level antisocial behaviour, which gives an impression that the crime rate is higher than it is and causes a sense of insecurity in the community. Studies have also shown that tagging often leads to vandals carrying out more serious offences. They slink around in the middle of the night or early hours of the morning when nobody is out. Tagging can lead to burglary and other antisocial activities.

The police, as well as local governments and the utilities, would like to see stiffer penalties imposed. In *The West Australian* of 12 February, Detective Senior Sergeant Royce said it was time to test tougher penalties. The government has increased penalties to two years' jail or a fine of \$24 000. The disappointment is that the courts continue to give graffiti vandals a slap on the wrist. In December 2010, Brandon Lee Edgill, whose photo appeared in *The West Australian* in December, appeared before Chief Stipendiary Magistrate Steven Heath, who handed down a \$1 000 fine and a spent conviction. Perhaps the magistrate should get onto public transport and see first hand the damage that is caused to the windows, seats et cetera of public transport by these vandals. The damage to buses and trains is now estimated to be about \$2.8 million per year. In the case of buses, the scoring of windows is so bad that the PTA is installing wire mesh on the inside of the windows of buses. This is a poor state of affairs. The spent conviction was given to the vandal after he told the magistrate that he wanted to seek some work on the mines and that the conviction would prevent him from doing so. It is interesting that immediately after he left the court, he showed no remorse, showed the finger and said that he liked doing graffiti and that nobody would stop him doing graffiti. A very poor message was sent to the community by the magistrate. In fact, the magistrate let the community down. It makes it very difficult for us as members of Parliament to tell our constituents that things are getting better with graffiti when we see something like this happen. All they say is that we must be joking.

The police commissioner has supported tougher penalties for graffiti vandalism. He wrote an article in *The West Australian* shortly before the person that I mentioned earlier appeared before court. In that article he again called for stiffer penalties. The police commissioner has also supported parents paying for the damage caused by their children. This is catered for in section 58 of the Young Offenders Act but I do not believe that it is used extensively enough. It is interesting that if a person's dog attacks someone in the street and causes damage, that person is liable for the damage caused by the dog, but if that person's child goes out and causes damage, that person can walk away scot-free and take no responsibility.

The state government has extended the juvenile clean-up project. A total of 430 sites were cleaned up last year. Local governments and public utilities have been invited to join in the initiative. The graffiti vandals are ordered to do the clean-up by juvenile justice panels. I have advocated that juvenile cautioning should not be used in cases of property damage and that the perpetrators should go before a juvenile justice panel to at least face up to what they have done.

In short, things are not easy. The rate of graffiti continues. But with the resources that are being put in by the police department and the various utilities and local governments, hopefully there will be an improvement to the situation. As I said, it is now up to the courts to set an example, as the magistrate did in New South Wales when a graffiti vandal who was working over the trains was caught and the magistrate imposed a one-year jail sentence. As we all know, it is very, very difficult to catch these graffiti vandals. Invariably, when they are caught, they have committed a string of these offences.

Many members of Parliament come up to me from time to time and ask me what is happening on the graffiti front. We should all be aware that every police district has two dedicated graffiti officers. Those officers are there to specifically deal with the graffiti problems that local governments and the utilities are suffering from. If members are worried about who to go to, I suggest that they get hold of their local district office and find out who the officers are and set up a meeting between them and the local governments in order to try to move the matter forward.

Another matter that I would like to raise is the important matter of the road realignment of East Parade and Guildford Road. As we all know, these are very busy arterial roads. Guildford Road has almost become a highway. The time has come to do the roadworks that have been planned for many years to widen East Parade and Guildford Road to create turning lanes and make the traffic flow in a much more ordered and safe manner. Once the roads are realigned, there is a good piece of land that can be redeveloped for housing. It is right next door to the two railway stations of Mt Lawley and East Perth. Hopefully, once the roadworks get underway and finished, some decent housing can be built very close to the city.

The large developments in the city that we have heard about in the past few months—the sinking of the railway and the foreshore redevelopment—will be a great asset to the residents of areas such as Mt Lawley, Yokine,

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Dianella, Menora and Coolbinia. We look forward to seeing those projects get off the ground. They will be a definite winner for jobs and entertainment for those people who live in my area.

The schools in my area are also travelling very well. I was pleased to note that the department will be able to upgrade the administration block at Sutherland Dianella Primary School by knocking down the old administration block and building a new administration block and staff toilets using excess moneys that are available from the building project at Sutherland Dianella. A lot of the schools that were built in the 1960s are of a very poor standard and a lot of them need to be demolished and rebuilt. Unfortunately, many schools have been neglected by successive governments over the years. I am now pleased to say that this matter has been rectified.

Mount Lawley Senior High School is also travelling very well. I hope the member for Nollamara agrees with me. Too many students are applying to go to the school because of the specialist programs and the opportunity for students to be integrated into Edith Cowan University, language courses and the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. The school is now in need of further accommodation to accommodate those students. It is gratifying to know that Mount Lawley Senior High School is doing such a good job in the local area.

In closing, we look forward to these major developments that will come on-stream that will make life all that more pleasant for residents of the metropolitan area.

MR F.M. LOGAN (Cockburn) [8.39 pm]: I thank the member for Mount Lawley for being quick on his feet. He caught me on the hop. I was expecting him to go a bit longer. I will take my 20 allotted minutes and do my best to make sure I stay within them. It is a pity that the new Minister for Environment and Water has left the chamber because a number of the issues I wish to raise relate to his portfolio.

Mr D.A. Templeman: He's scared of you already.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I think he is out having a cup of coffee.

Ms M.M. Quirk: A cup of tea, a Bex and a lie down!

Mr F.M. LOGAN: And a lie down!

I want to talk about two issues tonight: first, a local issue that goes to the new minister's portfolio, and that it is an issue that I will continue to hammer until it is fixed; and, second, a water issue that is obviously in his remit as a minister. I highlight that these are the outstanding issues that the state government has to deal with and that the minister has to deal with during what is left of his term of office.

I will deal first with the local issue, Cockburn Cement, and I will be brief. Members will probably remember that last year I made a grievance to the Premier on the issue of dust and odour emitted by Cockburn Cement from the lime plant belonging to CCL Pty Ltd in Russell Road, Munster, in my electorate. I remind members that that plant is the biggest lime kiln on the planet. There is no bigger lime plant anywhere in the whole world. It is a massive operation. Its output is primarily for the alumina and gold industries' processing of minerals. The two major kiln stacks are kiln 6 and kiln 5, and kiln 6 can nearly be seen from here. In any of the buildings on the Terrace and certainly from the twenty-sixth floor—or is it the twentieth floor now?—where the cabinet room —

Mr R.F. Johnson: The twenty-fifth floor.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I could not remember whether it was the twenty-fifth or the twenty-sixth floor. It seems a long time ago, minister.

Mr R.F. Johnson: How quickly we forget.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I wondered why I was always late for cabinet; I got off at the wrong floor!

Mr D.A. Templeman: We thought you were the window cleaner.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: That is right; we were in cabinet one day when one of those machines came past doing the window cleaning.

Mr D.A. Templeman: The minister was in it!

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I thought I recognised him—mop in hand!

However, Cockburn Cement can be seen from the twenty-fifth floor; it is the big box on the horizon emitting smoke. When the Premier very generously gave up his time to speak to the residents out there, he clearly indicated that if the evidence from the Department of Health showed that it was Cockburn Cement dust that was causing an issue, we needed to act. The work that the Cockburn council has done with the Department of Health to collect samples that have been analysed by the Chemistry Centre clearly shows that it is not shell grit, as Cockburn Cement argues, but lime oxide; that is, particle residue of lime oxide, or burnt lime. It is not

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quicklime. If it were quicklime, it would go straight through and tear up the skin and the organs of those exposed, not just burn them. It is burnt lime—lime oxide—which can in itself still burn if it is inhaled or gets into people's eyes. It will do damage to the soft tissue parts of the body. We have scientifically proven, through the various collection points around the Munster plant, that it is Cockburn Cement dust. The response from the health department is that it is Cockburn Cement dust, that it can cause problems, that it is a nuisance, and that residents should stay indoors. Stay indoors! Go into any of the homes down there and wipe the dust off the tables indoors. It is fine dust that comes through every crack in the house. It is sucked in by the air-conditioning system. It is everywhere. It is pervasive. In response to the evidence presented, Cockburn Cement says, "It cannot be us! It must be somebody else." The biggest lime kiln on the planet is right in front of us, the sample collections contain lime oxide, and Cockburn Cement says, "No, it's not us; it must be coming from another source." The company is in absolute denial mode. It has agreed to build a baghouse filter—which is what we have called on it to do for years and years; as Alcoa did at Wagerup—for kiln 6, but when we asked it to put a baghouse filter on kiln 5, which will fix the problem, the company not only absolutely refused to do so, but got really angry about it. The people there really lost their temper. "Don't you tell us what to do. We're not spending that money on that. Why should you force us into doing it?" Well, we are going to force them to do it. We are going to continue the action against Cockburn Cement because it has 45 years' worth of shell sand from the Cockburn Sound area to operate with. The company will be there for a long time and the demand for its lime will be there for a long time. As a good corporate citizen working right next to an urban environment, the company should clean up its act. It can afford to clean up its act. It is on track this year to make another \$160 million or \$170 million absolute profit, as it did last year. The company can afford to fix this. We are going to keep going until it fixes it, and I hope the Premier comes on side and uses his weight and his influence, as Premier, to get the new Minister for Environment to direct the company to fix it. He has the power to do so.

Mr C.J. Barnett: I accept what you say about that.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Thank you, Premier.

That is the local issue. I will now run through a few things that I think are the major statewide issues the new minister has to tackle—issues that in my view were left abandoned by the previous water minister. Of course, there is the issue of declining water supply and availability. Although there has been a recent announcement on a new water source, we are yet to see a formal announcement, but I will come back to that later. The main issue is the source of the Perth water supply—the Gnangara mound. The Gnangara sustainability plan is still not complete some three years after it was started and a year and half after the draft report came out. The majority of water plans in this state remain incomplete, so there are no directions or guidelines on how to manage water use and water drawdown in particular districts.

I give members an example—namely, the Karara Mining Ltd request to take 5.3 gigalitres of water from the Parmelia aquifer. The residents in Mingenew are absolutely up in arms about this—and for good reason. They believe their water source will be completely sucked dry by the Karara mine. The real problem is that we do not know the scale of the Parmelia aquifer. We do not know the sustainable drawdown of the Parmelia aquifer, and we do not know how to share it out between Karara and the farmers and residents of the Mingenew and surrounding districts because no water management plan has been completed in that area. The water management plans were part of a Council of Australian Governments commitment to water reform across Australia in an agreement signed off by WA in 2006, and it is something that we as a state are still committed to. There may have been a change of government from Labor to Liberal–National, but the Liberal–National government is still bound to conform with that national COAG agreement. The reality is, despite the reports that the Department of Water continues to feed back to the national process, very little is being done to comply with that COAG reform agreement, because things have slowed down and because the water management plans have not been completed. Of course, that leads to uproar at local levels when people are seeking access to water supplies.

Water management plans have been done in the south west—for example, in the Pemberton region—but it has been a top-down approach by the Department of Water, which is really forcing change on local people. Growers in the Pemberton area, which is in the seat of Warren–Blackwood, certainly do not have a great deal of confidence in or nice things to say about the Minister for Agriculture and Food—in fact, they would like to hang him if he comes back down there—because they do not believe he is representing them. They have major issues with the Department of Water. They think they are getting absolutely shafted by DOW in its water management plans—that is, when they are put in place. They believe that their local member is not representing them or standing up for them, even though they are agriculturalists and he is the Minister for Agriculture and Food. When the government does take action by putting in place those water management plans, it still stuffs things up. Things get stuffed up when the government does not do anything Karara is an example in which nothing has

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been done; and, when the government does do something, it is done in such a ham-fisted way that it drives all its voters up the wall because it has not been done properly in a consultative process. These are some of the issues that the new Minister for Water will have to deal with. They are tricky issues and he will have to manage them.

Another issue that he will have to manage is water pricing. Earlier we heard the member for Nollamara castigate the government about its approach to utility pricing. Members will remember the time when I tried to get a commonsense response from the previous water minister both in the house and in estimates about the real cost of water and the end point of price increases. The then minister stood in this place and said that people are not paying the real cost of water and it is appropriate and right, for the conservation of water and the appropriate distribution of water, that people pay the real cost of water. He told the general public and this house that. I asked him to tell us how much the real cost of water is per kilolitre and what is the end point he was trying to achieve. He never gave an appropriate answer in this house. He had a guess at it, but it was a thought bubble, which did not coincide with the analysis done by the Economic Regulation Authority. It was nowhere near what the ERA proposed as the real cost of water. It was a stab in the dark by the previous water minister. If the ERA is right, and the new water minister takes up its recommendations, it will mean further significant increases in the cost of water for the people of Western Australia. That is what the real cost of water will be. It will cause another big hole in the pockets of ordinary families in Western Australia if the new water minister takes up the recommendations of the Economic Regulation Authority. These are some of the issues that I will raise with the minister during the year to see whether we can get clear communication on and evidence about the price of utility services, particularly water, that families will face in the future.

Some other issues are outstanding, including flood management and water supply in Carnarvon, and, again, the water minister will have to deal with them. Those issues still have not been resolved, particularly the flood management issue. As we have seen from the devastation in Carnarvon, significant expenditure is needed in that area. I am doubtful that that will be forthcoming from the current minister. Although the plans are in place for the expanded water supply and some work has been done, it still has not been completed. The cost of that new water supply has not been finalised, and neither has the control and distribution of that water. That is an outstanding issue. It is still a bitter issue for growers in Carnarvon that the minister will have to resolve.

I want to highlight another matter on which the government does take action. The government points out that people might say that all these things need to be done, but then it asks, "What about the things we have done? What about the money we have expended?" The water minister congratulated himself the other day for the \$370 million desalination plant for Karratha. If that is the choice that the government has made, that is fine. There is no problem. If the government wants to supply water to the West Pilbara by way of a desalination plant, so be it. I think it is fine that the government has made a decision to resolve the water crisis, because there is a water crisis there. I am very pleased that the government has made a decision to resolve that crisis for the people of the West Pilbara and that there will be a continuous water supply in the West Pilbara, regardless of the weather. But the problem is: at what cost? The member for North West jumps up and down about me criticising the government. I am not criticising the decision to fix the problem; what I am asking is: why this particular option? It is a very expensive option. In fact, it will be the most expensive water in Australia—\$370 million in construction costs, plus \$15 million in operating costs, for a plant that will produce six gigalitres of water per annum. That is very expensive. The second desalination plant, the southern seawater desalination plant in Binningup, produces nearly 50 gigalitres of water, not six, for \$1 billion.

Mr V.A. Catania: I agree with what you're saying to a point. The reason it has cost so much and the reason that this government was put in a position in which it had no choice is the inaction, unfortunately, of dealing with the water problem in Karratha; and I was part of that previous government. It should have been dealt with five years ago.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I do not necessarily share that view. This issue has come on relatively quickly over the past two to three years because of declining rainfall. Other options were available; it is not just the Rio Tinto option. It is a very expensive decision that has to be justified. Fine; the government is going to fix the problem up there, but the cost needs to be justified to all taxpayers in Western Australia, because, ultimately, the cost of that will flow to our water bills. It needs to be justified, and I will continue to go after the water minister until he justifies it. It is my job, as the shadow Minister for Water and as an opposition member, to do that.

Another example is the southern seawater desalination plant. It appears that the government is going to make a decision to double the size of the plant. It appears to be cheap at just over \$300 million, but when the cost of the pipeline is added in, it takes it up to another \$1 billion. We could build an entire new desalination plant for \$1 billion. That decision has not been formalised yet. There is no clarity about the expenditure on the expansion; maybe we will get that clarity in the budget. I will make sure that the water minister clarifies it for the people of Western Australia.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 16 February 2011]

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Martin; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Mr John Kobelke; Mr Michael Sutherland; Mr Fran Logan

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr R.F. Johnson (Leader of the House)**.

House adjourned at 8.59 pm
